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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative and quantitative study of impoliteness and power discourse strategies used during the weekly conversation between the UK Prime Minister and Parliament, known as Prime Minister's Question Time or Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). The study compares the strategies used by the only two female Prime Ministers so far: the first ever female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and the current one, Theresa May (2016-).

The aim was to collect and classify all FTAs from a comparable number of PMQs sessions from both Prime Ministers studied, and then compare their impoliteness and power discourse strategies. The analysis was based on 75 sessions from Thatcher's time as Prime Minister as well as the first 30 sessions from May's time as Prime Minister. In the first instance, 60 and 30 sessions respectively were included, representing the same amount of time: when Thatcher was Prime Minister there were two 15-minute sessions each week, while today there is a single weekly 30-minute session. However, additional material was then added to permit a comparison between Margaret Thatcher's sessions before and after the introduction of televising: the study therefore includes the final 15 sessions before the first televising of PMQs in 1989 in addition to the first 60 sessions after this. A very brief comparison with two male Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and David Cameron, was also made.

To point out what is bad about the Opposition was important to both Prime Ministers, and the majority of their responses were statements of fact. It is also clear that both Prime Ministers use their positions to remain in control during the sessions and they both speak very highly about their own policies as well as completely rejecting the policies of the Opposition. In the age of extreme media coverage, May knows how to appeal to the audience and to capture their interest; her responses could be seen as intentionally more entertaining than Thatcher's. As Thatcher was the Prime Minister in the first ever televised sessions of PMQs she was there from the beginning, before the Question Time had fully developed into the media event that it is now. This clearly had an influence on her responses: while they seem to have changed with televising, the great changes have taken place during the 29 years since the first televising.

Table of contents

In my years in the House, I have long heard the Labour Party asking what the Conservative Party does for women. Well—it just keeps making us Prime Minister. Theresa May - 20/07/2016 - Column 817[1]

1 Introduction

This thesis will be a qualitative and quantitative study of impoliteness and power discourse strategies used during the weekly conversation between the UK Prime Minister and Parliament, known as Prime Minister's Question Time or Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). The study compares the strategies used by the only two female Prime Ministers so far: the first ever female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and the current one, Theresa May (2016-). While several studies have dealt with the pragmatics of debates at PMQs, few have actually dealt with insults; it is also of interest to compare the only two female Prime Ministers of the UK so far and find out how their appearances in PMQs differ.

The discussions during PMQs are known for their adversarial and impolite nature, and Harris (2001: 453) finds that PMQs provides a 'very fruitful and interesting context for exploring notions of polite and impolite behaviour'. The impolite behaviour is what often becomes the focus of a session of PMQs rather than the politics themselves, at least in relation to the audience. In 2014, the Hansard Society conducted a study where public attitudes to PMQs were analysed. It turned out that PMQs was the aspect of the Parliament of which the public was most aware, and many had negative attitudes towards the event. Indeed, the Hansard Society found that 'PMQs so dominates public awareness of Parliament that it gives viewers the impression that this is the only format in which Parliament operates' (Hansard Society 2014: 62).

PMQs takes place around lunchtime but there have been discussions of moving the event to the evening to get more viewers. During a session of PMQs the audience can interact through social media channels like Twitter and Facebook and make their own voice heard. All the biggest newspapers and news channels in the UK cover PMQs and the sessions get much attention in the media.

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[1] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-07-20/debates/92F38A16-5F4E-4596-A65B-51EB15A49EFD/OralAnswersToQuestions>

The awareness of and interest in PMQs is largely a consequence of the impolite behaviour it contains: people watch or listen to PMQs because of the impoliteness, and it might be described as impoliteness as political entertainment. Culpeper (2011: 234) has pointed out that television today, in the UK as well as other countries, 'is replete with programmes full of verbal violence'. The entertaining value of PMQs has also been explained by Harris (2001: 468): 'The overhearing audience is unlikely to empathise to any great degree with the Prime Minister and much more likely to find his/her discomfiture entertaining, just as the media find it newsworthy'.

In the present study, Brown & Levinson's (1987) concept of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) is used as the basic framework of analysis. Examples of what FTAs include are insults, disagreements, accusations and criticisms. Brown & Levinson do not include context in their classification of FTAs, while Culpeper (2011) pays more attention to the context in which the discourse takes place - which is also important in relation to this particular study. According to Kadar & Haugh (2013: 37) - 'when politeness in longer stretches of interaction is considered in the wider context in which they arise - seemingly clear usages of politeness turn out to be rather complex' (2013: 37).

Kadar & Haugh (2013: 36) have noted a 'discursive turn' in the field of politeness: 'a far-reaching methodological shift towards examining politeness situated in discourse and interaction' (2013: 36). In particular, they refer to the concept of 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998) which allows the researcher to 'analyse politeness in a relatively contextualised way' (Kadar & Haugh 47: 2013). Harris (2001) analysed PMQs as a community of practice and Mills (2005) also made use of the concept in her work on 'Gender and Impoliteness'. A 'community of practice' was defined by Kadar & Haugh (2013: 263) as:

> A group of people that develops its own set of norms and practices through joint engagement in an activity or task. It is regarded as a key unit of analysis in discursive politeness research.

The concept of communities of practice helps make sense of the linguistic behaviour of the participants at PMQs. As they may be considered a community of practice with its own set of norms and practices, the utterances produced by them can be related directly to these norms

and practices rather than to those of society at large. Studying PMQs as a community with its own linguistic practices makes it possible, in particular, to make sense of its politeness norms, which might be considered extremely divergent from those of most social contexts, combining highly regulated forms of address ('the right honourable gentleman') with insults of variable directness.

These divergent norms pose a challenge to existing models of classifying utterances within politeness studies. While the present study takes as its starting point the classic politeness theory of Brown & Levinson (1987), using specifically the concept of FTAs as the basis of analysis, it has ended up developing its own system of classifying the collected utterances. The FTAs are categorised using simple content and form categories based on a preliminary study of the data. The frequency and use of the different categories by the two Prime Ministers are then compared, and a comparison is also made between Margaret Thatcher's utterances before and after televising was introduced.

The aim has been to collect and classify all FTAs from a comparable number of PMQs sessions from both Prime Ministers studied, and then compare their impoliteness and power discourse strategies. The analysis is based on 75 sessions from Thatcher's time as Prime Minister as well as the first 30 sessions from May's time as Prime Minister. In the first instance, 60 and 30 sessions respectively were included, representing the same amount of time: when Thatcher was Prime Minister there were two 15-minute sessions each week, while today there is a single weekly 30-minute session. However, additional material was then added to permit a comparison between Margaret Thatcher's sessions before and after the introduction of televising: the study therefore includes the final 15 sessions before the first televising of PMQs in 1989 in addition to the first 60 sessions after this.

A transcript of every PMQs session is available from Hansard; in addition, transcriptions of Thatcher's sessions are available from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation archive. All of May's sessions are also available as podcasts on iTunes or videos on YouTube, while some of Thatcher's sessions are available as videos. As all sessions of PMQs are recorded in detail and transcripts are readily available, they provide excellent material for the study of impoliteness and power discourse strategies in political dialogue.

While the main aim of the study is to compare the two female Prime Ministers, the question of the effect of televising is also of considerable interest. Bates, Kerr, Byrne and

Stanley (2012: 253) found that their 'data appeared to confirm that PMQs had become both rowdier and increasingly dominated by the main party leaders' as well as that 'despite instances of praise for PMQs as a forum for serious, relevant debate and accountability, there appears to be a general opinion that PMQs has turned from a relatively "civilised" parliamentary session into something of a rowdy, mud-slinging spectacle' (2012: 254). The event has also been compared to a football match: 'PMQs is increasingly like an unpleasant football match, in which the game played publicly is accompanied by all sorts of secret grudge matches, settlement of scores and covert fouls committed when the players hope the ref is not looking' (Hoggart 2011 in 2012: 253-254).

This study will contribute a comparison of impoliteness and power discourse strategies used by the UK's two female Prime Ministers in the context of PMQs - in relation to FTAs. The following research questions will be addressed: How do Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May compare with regard to their use of impoliteness and power discourse strategies in this highly public forum? What kinds of FTAs do they use during PMQs, and how often? How do their strategies compare to those of recent male Prime Ministers of the UK? And finally, did Margaret Thatcher change her strategies in the televised sessions of PMQs?

2 The context

2.1 Prime Minister's Question Time

PMQs is a parliamentary event which takes place in the House of Commons of the UK. The Prime Minister answers questions from Members of Parliament (MPs) and from the Leader of Opposition, and the proceedings are controlled by the Speaker. The Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition are the main rivals and centres of attention, each having their own backbenchers or 'followers'. Kelly (2015: 4) describes PMQs as the 'best known aspect of Parliament's work' and what the 'public are most aware of'. The event is known for its 'combative and adversarial atmosphere' and is famous worldwide.

The parliamentary convention PMQs was first introduced in 1961 to 'formalise the process of members asking questions to the Prime Minister' (Bevan & John 2015: 61). Questions to the Prime Minister had of course been going on before 1961 but in different formats. Until the 1880s, 'questions were asked of ministers without notice on days which ministers were present, in whatever order Members rose to ask them' (Kelly 2015: 7). Changes were made to PMQs during the 1900s: 40 minutes was allowed for questions in 1902 and increased to 55 minutes in 1906. From 1961, two fifteen-minute slots each week were allocated for PMQs, and finally a single weekly session of thirty minutes, held on Wednesdays, was introduced in 1997. Over the last decades, PMQs has developed into a 'high-profile event in British political life as well as an increasingly public one through radio and television broadcasts' (2015: 61).

The event is described as follows on the official UK Parliament website[2]:

The Prime Minister answers questions from MPs in the Commons every sitting Wednesday from 12pm to 12.30pm. The session normally starts with a routine question from an MP about the Prime Minister's engagements. This is known as an 'open question' and means that the MP can then ask a supplementary question on any subject. Following the answer, the MP then raises a particular issue, often one of current political significance. The Leader of the Opposition then follows up on this or another topic, being permitted to ask a total of six questions. The Leader of the Opposition is the only MP who is allowed to come back with further questions. Most MPs will table the same question about engagements and if they do, only their names will appear on the question book. After the first engagements question has been asked, any other MPs who have tabled the same question are simply called to ask an untabled, supplementary question. This means, in theory, that the Prime Minister will not know what questions will be asked of them. However, the Prime Minister will be extensively briefed by government departments in anticipation of likely subjects they could be asked about.

[2] UK Parliament <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/business/questions/> - 29/01/2018 - 16:40

MPs expect 'well-briefed answers' to their questions (Bevan & John 2015: 2), however, this is not always what they get. Coe and Kelly (2009 in 2015: 5) explain that 'the questions are chosen by a process called "the Shuffle": a random draw from all submitted questions'. The Prime Minister is 'well briefed on all likely questions partially evidenced by the stacks of files [he or she] often consults during PMQs' (Bevan & John 2015: 5). Such preparations for the sessions during Thatcher's time as Prime Minister have been described by Alderman (1992: 70) as follows: 'drafting questions as well as producing statistics and other information on the policy area concerned, the better to equip Thatcher to challenge the answers she received'.

The Prime Minister answers questions both from his/her own backbenchers as well as from opposition backbenchers - the latter being, naturally, more critical towards the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister's own backbenchers try to support him/her through asking questions that could put the Government in a positive light, or cheering after the Prime Minister has answered a question.

PMQs can be looked at as political entertainment but according to Bevan & John (2015: 2) 'the practice can still ensure the government addresses concerns that it might not otherwise wish to talk about'. There are differences in how opposition front- and backbenchers use their questions, according to Bevan and John (2015: 26-27): 'The opposition frontbenchers use their control over the content of the questions for their own tactical ends often focusing on the same salient issues' while the 'backbenchers tend to use the questions for other matters that worry them or their constituents - often mentioned in the content of their questions' (2015: 27).

Before the change to single sessions, Alderman (1992: 66) described the two 15-minute sessions as the 'highlights of the week' in the House of Commons. He noted that the main purpose of the sessions was not to seek information but that they were used as 'an occasion for political propaganda and point-scoring, not infrequently of the crudest kind - often noisy, sometimes erupting into an uproar' (1992: 66). This characterisation might be equally appropriate to describe the sessions of today. Bates, Kerr, Byrne and Stanley (2012: 253) cite John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons, complaining about the 'character, conduct, content and culture of the shop window of the House of Commons' (2012: 253):

Bercow argued that PMQs was dominated by questions from the Leader of Opposition to the exclusion of backbench questions, that MPs treat the Prime Minister as though he or she were a President in sole control of the entire British Government, and that MPs yell and heckle in a thoroughly unbecoming manner providing scrutiny by screech.

(Bercow 2010 in Bates, Kerr, Byrne, Stanley 2012: 253).

This statement shows that the 'main interactants' in a session of PMQs are the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition.

Bevan & John (2015: 1) analysed all the PMQs sessions from 1997 to 2008, suggesting that 'PMQs are an outlet for the opposition and backbench MPs' (King 1976 in Bevan & John 2015: 3) and that it allows them to 'put pressure on the government to respond to issues they would rather avoid' (Bevan & John 2015: 3).

PMQs is potentially one of the most important means for the opposition to challenge the government on the major issues of the day and as it currently stands it is widely believed to show off the rhetorical skills of the leaders of the main political parties attracting the attention of the media rather than to hold the government of the day to account.

(Bevan & John 2015: 2)

The Prime Minister is the centre of attention during the sessions, and the most heated discussions during the sessions usually occur between him/her and the Leader of Opposition. As the situation is highly competitive, it is important for both to tell their own voters about what the opposing party have not been able to achieve, as well as highlighting what their own parties have been able to achieve. Alderman (1992: 66) argued that 'the Leaders of Opposition attach great importance to PMQs and much may depend upon their performance'. That the Leader of Opposition is entitled to ask a total of six questions during a session 'allows him/her to challenge obvious equivocation by the Prime Minister, to follow up particular issues, and to press home a particular point' (Bull & Wells 2012: 46). It is

10

important for the Leader of Opposition to challenge the Prime Minister and 'PMQs constitutes one of the very few opportunities for Leaders of Opposition to be seen in direct confrontation with Prime Ministers on apparently equal terms' (Alderman 1992: 67). At the same time, Alderman points out that 'the extent to which the advantage lies with the Prime Minister makes it a frustrating task—especially when confronted by one like Margaret Thatcher' (Alderman 1992: 75). He quotes Thatcher's long-time supporter within the Conservative Party, Norman Tebbit:

> Success is vital to a Prime Minister and even more so to a Leader of Opposition. The ranks of MPs are there to cheer on their champions. To be tripped or wrong-footed, to let down one's supporters in those battles of wits can be the beginning of the end— especially for a new Leader of Opposition lacking the trappings of office which lend authority to the Prime Minister.
> (Cited in Alderman 1992: 68)

PMQs was first televised in 1989, during the office of Thatcher. Alderman (1992: 66) found that the two 15-minute sessions each week were 'the focus of considerable media attention - especially since parliamentary proceedings had been televised'. The coverage of PMQs increased during 'the first few months of televised sessions and it was the single most frequently covered form of Commons event on the ITN News at Ten (38%), BBC Newsnight (25%) and Channel 4 News (23%)' (Alderman 1992: 67).

Today, the event is televised on the BBC - 24 Hour News and Daily Politics. Every session is available as a podcast provided by the UK Parliament, as well as being available as a video on YouTube. The sessions are updated live on social media channels like Twitter and Facebook, and British newspapers such as the Guardian provide live updates on their official websites. It is also possible to listen to the sessions live on BBC Radio 4 live. Transcripts from every session are published at hansard.parliament.uk.

Accordingly, PMQs gets a very broad media coverage. The audience can interact through posting their own opinions on social media channels; it is also still possible to witness the event live in the House of Commons. In a study called 'Tuned in or Turned off', conducted by Hansard Society (2014), a reform of PMQs was discussed: It was argued that

the event 'should be moved to a Tuesday or Wednesday evening because at Wednesday lunchtime only those aged 55+ would be able to watch it in full (2014: 7). It is of course possible to watch the filmed version of the session on YouTube or listen to the podcast; however, moving the sessions to the evening could attract more viewers to the live screening of the event.

2.2   The Prime Ministers

This study focuses on the only two women ever to have been Prime Ministers of the UK: Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) and Theresa May (2016–), both representing the Conservative Party. Unsurprisingly, a larger amount of material on Thatcher's political career is available compared to May's, as the latter has been Prime Minister for a much shorter period of time.

2.2.1   Margaret Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the UK 1979-1990, and as Prime Minister appeared in 698 sessions of PMQs (Aitken 2013: 647). She has been described as 'a pioneer in European and British politics - the first female leader of a major political party, and the first to hold the highest political office' (Ponton 2010: 198). More has been written about Thatcher than of any other British politician since Churchill and studies range from research in political science and economics to discourse studies (Ponton 2010: 197). In this thesis, Thatcher's discourse will be researched in relation to impoliteness and power discourse strategies.

Thatcher was selected as Conservative Party Leader in 1975. The press conference after she was selected as Leader of Opposition sparked 'intense media speculation' (Ponton 2010: 195): as the election meant that she could become the first ever female Prime Minister of the UK, it was 'as if the press were trying to pinpoint more precisely the *kind of* woman who might one day hold this crucial office' (Ponton 2010: 195). The Guardian's headline on

the fifth of May 1979 when Thatcher became Prime Minister, was 'The lady and the people' - and they reported the following:

> Thatcher evokes powerful devotion and and equally powerful antipathy. But her place in history is booked already. By luck—but also by the spunk to stand—she came to the head of a traumatised, humiliated party. Putting that party together again was no mean achievement: moulding it to her own image over four years in the wilderness showed grit and fire and the feat—luck or no—of becoming Britain's first woman Prime Minister is one, whatever the sisters may say, that can only change perceptions of what women can aspire to throughout the democratic West. Whatever else she is, Thatcher is not the Statutory Woman.[3]

A timeline of how the Guardian and the Observer reported on Thatcher before she became Prime Minister has also been made, and in 1977 the reporter Peter Jenkins noted a subtle transformation taking place, as people began to perceive Margaret Thatcher as not just a Leader of Opposition but a prospective Prime Minister.[4]

When Thatcher was Leader of Opposition in the 1970s, her preparations for PMQs 'were major operations' (Alderman 1992: 70). She had her own briefing team helping her to prepare for the twice-weekly sessions, for which she was provided with very detailed briefing material, allowing her to deflect potentially difficult questions by simply reeling of lists of statistics (Alderman 1992: 69). Aitken (2013: 4) notes that she came across as a 'strong and attractive leader' to the Conservative Party despite struggling 'at the gladiatorial battles of PMQs (which she usually lost)'.

Lord Prior, cited in Alderman (1992: 68), has suggested that, as Leader of Opposition, Thatcher 'used her interventions to help her impose her policy preferences on reluctant colleagues'. Making use of the opportunity for the Leader of Opposition to influence or control the situation during a sessions of PMQs, Thatcher 'tended to make policy of the more extreme kind at PMQs because she did not find it easy to get her own way around the

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[3]<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/from-the-archive-blog/2011/jun/02/guardian190-thatcher-is-pm-1979>. Accessed on 02/05/2018 - 11:30

[4]<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/guardian-observer-margaret-thatcher-archive> Accessed on 02/05/2018 - 11:35

Shadow Cabinet table' (Alderman 1992: 68). On the official website of the UK Parliament, the Shadow Cabinet is described as 'the team of senior spokespeople chosen by the Leader of the Opposition to mirror the Cabinet in Government. In this way the Official Opposition seeks to present itself as an alternative government in-waiting'.[5] The point that Thatcher's policies were generally controversial within her own party as well has also been made by King (1985: 97) who described Thatcher as an unusual Prime Minister: 'always in a minority inside her own party and her own government - especially because of strong views on economic policy' (1985: 97). A person 'who arouses strong feelings, within her own party and in other parties, among the general public, not least among her cabinet colleagues' (1985: 97).

Thatcher's first decade as Leader of the Conservative Party saw a 'large-scale privatisation of nationalised industries, miner's and civil servants' strikes, union law reform, sale of council houses and uproar over poll tax (Ponton 2010: 214). The Conservatives won the general election of 1979, and the first PMQs she took part in as Prime Minister was on May 22nd 1979.

For most of her period as Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and main rival of Thatcher in the Chamber was Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party 1983-1992. According to Alderman (1992: 67), PMQs was one of the few opportunities Kinnock had to challenge the Prime Minister. Alderman (1992: 67) also explains that Thatcher was 'exceptionally reluctant to participate in parliamentary debates'. The reason for this was that Thatcher had been 'far and away the least active Prime Minister in the House of Commons in over a century' (1992: 67). That she had been the least active Prime Minister meant that she had not been much present at House of Commons sessions - not the least active in relation to taking part in discussions. When in Opposition - Thatcher had to 'contend with then Prime Minister - James Callaghan - who also displayed a reluctance to participate in debates' (1992: 67). If the Prime Minister is not present in the House of Commons it is difficult for the Leader of Opposition to challenge him/her on current political issues.

Much of the research on Thatcher has focussed on her gender identity as the first European female national leader. Webster (1990, cited in Shaw 2002: 41) suggests that,

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[5] UK Parliament <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/shadow-cabinet/> Accessed 04.02.2018 - 14:30

despite being 'an extremely successful politician', she did not do much to change the culture of politics for female MPs, as she 'promoted and strengthened negative stereotypes of women as wives and mothers' (1990 in 2002: 41). Wilson and Boxer (2015: 38) suggest that Thatcher chose to 'construct herself as "woman" and as "Prime Minister" separately and strove to 'excel as a woman in her private life, make sure the media knew about it, and prove that being a woman would not impinge on her being an excellent politician in the Chamber and the public sphere'. Her image building was highly conscious; as Atkinson (1984: 113) points out, she also 'took elocution lessons in order to lower the pitch of her voice, to remove the shrill, screechy tones associated with petulant females'.

Ponton (2010: 197) points out that Thatcher's emergent identity was not simply determined by herself, but also influenced by the media 'searching for an identity to sell to the public'. The media created an identity for Thatcher based on ideas such as 'it is unusual for a female to run a political party', 'women are fond of flowers', and 'that women are extremely attached to their homes' (Ponton 2010: 210). Ponton (2010: 215) suggests that, as a result, Thatcher was 'leaning more to the housewife stereotype than to that of the radical feminist' and 'came to embody her own political doctrines, which saw the individual household as a convenient metaphor for the nation as a whole' (2010: 215).

Ponton (2010: 197) relates the duality of Thatcher's public and private personas to her nicknames. Thatcher was christened 'the iron lady' by the Russian Press, while to her husband she was a 'sweetie-pie' (Campbell 2004: 732 cited in Ponton 2010: 197). The first nickname, which originally appeared in the Russian newspaper in January 1976, and was intended as an insult, was quickly seized upon Thatcher herself in a speech on 31 January:

> Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you tonight in my green chiffon evening gown, my face softly made up, my hair gently waved…the Iron Lady of the Western World. (Charteris-Black 2005: 87 cited in Ponton 2010: 197)

The nickname 'iron lady' came to be a powerful part of her political identity, used extensively by the media, 'while "sweetie-pie" remained a private affair' (Ponton 2010: 197). How Thatcher embraced her identity as a politician while still being a wife and mother has been explained by Atkinson (1984: 116 in Ponton 2010: 198):

> Given that successful women face the dilemma of being damned if they behave like
> men, and damned if they don't, one solution is to behave in as efficient, tough and
> decisive a manner as possible, while at the same time making no concessions
> whatsoever in maintaining the external trappings of femininity.

Thatcher was, according to Fairclough (2013: 151) a victim of this dilemma 'in a particularly acute form' - the reason being that the 'radical right politics' she committed herself to 'puts particular emphasis on the need for tough, resolute, uncompromising and aggressive political leadership'. Fairclough suggests that an important part of her successful image was that she managed to 'structure for herself a subject position' as a female leader politician, allowing her to be 'quite widely perceived as having all these qualities without being feminine'.

2.2.2   Theresa May

Theresa May became an MP for Maidenhead in 1997, at a time when there were 120 female MPs in the House of Commons (Prince 2017: 174). From 1999 until 2010, May was a member of the Shadow Cabinet, and she was the first female Chairman of the Conservative Party from 2002 until 2003. May was appointed Home Secretary in 2010 and became the longest-serving Conservative Home Secretary for more than a century, before becoming the Prime Minister of the UK in 2016 as a result of being elected as Leader of the Conservative Party.[6]

In June 2016 the British people voted to leave the European Union - known as Brexit. May did not originally want to leave the European Union, although she was skeptical about the EU. When David Cameron announced his resignation as Prime Minister - May was announced as a candidate for the position and on the 11th of July she became the Prime Minister of the UK. It was also decided that the UK would see Brexit through.

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[66] 'Theresa May: Member of Parliament for Maidenhead. tmay.co.uk <http://www.tmay.co.uk/about> Accessed 16.02.2018 - 10:05

Prince (2017: 527-528) argues that May was 'well-used to the Commons Chamber' ahead of her first PMQs as Prime Minister, which took place on July 20th 2016. May performed solidly against Jeremy Corbyn and her performance was described as 'brutally brilliant' (Hazarika 2016 cited in Prince 2017: 528). Jeremy Corbyn is the Leader of Opposition and main rival of May in the Chamber.

Baxter (2018: 23) has argued that a message of women being unsuitable for leadership is dominant across many British newspapers. Her study is based on the reporting in the Daily Mail, the Sunday Times and the Guardian on May's first day in office as Prime Minister. The Daily Mail's headline from the day included: 'Bloodbath as May axes Cameron loyalists' (Baxter 2018: 38). Here, May is characterised as a 'decisive and aggressive leader, which is set in contrast to her position as a woman and promoter of women' (Baxter 2018: 38). The headlines from the Sunday Times included 'The Steel Lady Strikes' (2018: 41), and May was also compared to Thatcher: 'Theresa May is commendably ruthless. The right will see her as another Maggie' (Baxter 2018: 42). Baxter (2018: 42) suggests that 'the word "steel" indicates that May is even tougher than Thatcher, famously known as "the iron lady"'. The Guardian's headline was more down-to-earth: 'Theresa May's first pledge as Prime Minister was for a "one-nation Britain". Can she deliver?' (Baxter 2018: 44).

Baxter (2018: 48) concludes that May was not 'necessarily depicted as *unsuitable* for leadership' but that she was 'constructed as a *monstrous* version of what a leader is expected to be'. She also suggests that May's decisive actions would be viewed as 'surprising and unexpected if conducted by a male Prime Minister' but that they are seen as 'excessive, unnatural and frightening when conducted by a female Prime Minister' (Baxter 2018: 48).

As Thatcher and May are the only ever female Prime Ministers of the UK, it is not surprising that they have been presented differently in the media from the way male Prime Ministers are presented. Insenga (2014: 188) suggests that the way the press constructed May's identity was 'almost entirely reflective of her exceptional status' and she would be seen as problematic because of her 'agentic "leader-like" behaviours usually not associated with feminine characteristics'. Insenga (2014: 188) notes that the press had to write articles about May's shoes, outfits and make-up to give her an identity which would be easier to sell to the public; such tendencies might be compared to the earlier press construction of Thatcher's 'housewife' image (Ponton 2010: 210).

Direct comparisons of Thatcher and May have been made in the British media. Already after May's first PMQs session, the Independent's headline was: 'Theresa May evokes Margaret Thatcher with jibe at Jeremy Corbyn in first PMQs' (Cockburn 2016). John Pienaar, deputy political correspondent for the BBC, also noted the similarity of the two Prime Ministers: 'There were one or two notes that echoed of Margaret Thatcher back in the day - she was much more fluent than Margaret Thatcher was at the beginning of her premiership'. [7]

3   Theoretical framework

3.1   Politeness theories

The linguistic politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) has been the most influential of all theories of politeness advanced so far, and Leech (2014: 81) argues that 'in spite of heavy criticism' it is still the 'most commonly discussed account of language and politeness' (2014: 81). Kadar & Haugh (2013: 15) have described the aims of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in the following way: 'It aims to model politeness as implicated through forms of linguistic behaviour that flout the conversational maxims in order to avoid conflict' (2013: 15). It is interesting to see this definition in relation to PMQs, where avoiding conflict is not the most important thing. Rather, in the context of PMQs, impoliteness is expected, making it a very different context from that of British society at large.

Face and facework are important aspects in relation to politeness theories. Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define face as 'the public self image that every member of a society wants to claim for himself', and explain the concepts of 'positive' and 'negative' face as follows:

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[7] <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36844335>. Accessed 02/05/2018 - 14:35

Communicative actions such as commands or complaints may be performed in such a way as to minimise the threat to positive and negative face, where positive face is defined as the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others, and negative face is defined as the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others.

(Brown and Levinson 1987: 62)

A Face Threatening Act, or FTA, is then defined as a speech act that poses a threat to the positive or negative face of another person. FTAs can be both verbal or non-verbal: a verbal act involves use of spoken language - while a non-verbal act could be for example a gesture. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 68), a rational person would try to avoid an FTA in the context of 'mutual vulnerability of face': in other words, avoid being impolite or try to minimise the threat'. The 'relative weighting of at least three wants' (1987: 68) would have to be considered in a kind of context where there is a 'mutual vulnerability of face':

1) The want to communicate the content of the FTA

2) The want to be efficient or urgent

3) The want to maintain the face of the addressee to any degree

Unless the want to be efficient or urgent is greater than the want to maintain the face of the addressee to any degree, the person doing the FTA would want to 'minimise the threat' (1987: 68) of the act.

Brown and Levinson also distinguish between negative and positive FTAs: the negative obstruct the speaker's or hearer's freedom of action and freedom from imposition, while the positive inflict damage to one's face by signalising the conversational partner's lack of appreciation or approval for one's feelings (Kedveš 2013: 435). Nijakowska (2014: 142) summarises Brown and Levinson's classification of FTAs as follows:

FTAs to positive face include expressions of disapproval, accusations, criticism, disagreements, insults and complaints, while advice, orders, requests, suggestions, warnings and offers constitute FTAs to negative face.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 67), FTAs can threaten positive and negative face at the same time, for example in the form of complaints, interruptions, threats, strong expressions of emotion or requests for personal information'. Brown and Levinson (1987: 59-60) have also looked at face and FTAs in relation to speakers and addressees, including MPs. They argue that all MPs have a positive and a negative face and that they are rational agents, who choose means that will satisfy their ends. It might, however, be argued that in the specific context of PMQs, the expectation of being rational agents and choosing means that will satisfy their ends is not necessarily a valid norm of linguistic behaviour.

Brown and Levinson's approach has been criticised by Culpeper (2011: 6) who claims that it embraces just the face-saving aspect rather than the whole notion of facework. According to him, Brown and Levinson (1987) focused on 'harmonious interactions and the avoidance of impoliteness and face threats, rather than how they come about' (Culpeper 2011: 6). the main concern is with the avoidance or mitigation of FTAs.

In contrast, Bull and Wells (2012: 30) show that 'face aggravation in PMQs is not just an acceptable form of parliamentary discourse, it is both sanctioned and rewarded, a means whereby MPs may enhance their own status through aggressive facework'. The role of MPs in the House of Commons, especially those in opposition, is 'generally to oppose at all costs' (Bayley 2004: 5) and FTAs are often performed.

Leech (2014: 4) has identified eight characteristics of politeness, the first characteristic of which is that 'politeness is not obligatory'. It is possible to be either impolite or 'nonpolite'. If a person is nonpolite, he or she does not have a reason to be polite and then does not see why they should be, while if a person is impolite he/she could be perceived as rude. Leech uses an example of a person who during a concert is 'booing, hissing or sat in stoney silence when the time for applause arrives' (2014: 4), something that would be considered rude or impolite.

The second characteristic has to do with different degrees of politeness. Using clapping and cheering as an example, Leech (2014: 5) suggests that 'the louder and the more prolonged the clapping is, the greater the appreciation signalled and the more polite the response'. The third point has to do with 'particular occasions' where members of the society would consider it 'normal' and appropriate to be polite (2014: 5). If a violinist is playing to an audience, it would be polite to applaud when he or she is done with the concert. If the audience keep cheering and applauding even after the violinist has left the stage then that

could be considered as 'a case of over-politeness' (Leech 2014: 5) - as being too polite. A loud clapping could be a good thing but could also be considered as being over-polite.

Different kinds of events also involve different kinds of politeness. Leech compares the violinist in the concert hall with a footballer celebrating a goal on the pitch - two different kinds of situations where the audience would react differently. Football supporters celebrating a goal would probably not act as politely as an audience applauding a violinist after a concert. Culpeper (2011: 211-212) has discussed how football supporters are behaving themselves in the stands during matches. The impoliteness taking place in the stands was identified as 'ritualised insults' and is dominated by men. That the insults are ritualised means that these insults are something the supporters usually perform the games and belong to a specific context where they are expected rather than disruptive.

The concepts of 'positive politeness' and 'negative politeness', as defined by Brown and Levinson, are adapted by Leech (2014: 11) as 'pos-politeness' and 'neg-politeness'. Leech considers 'neg-politeness' as the more important of the two: he suggests that its function is 'mitigation - to reduce or lessen possible causes of offence' and that it 'typically involves directness, hedging and understatement' (2014: 11). 'Pos-politeness' has been defined as to give or assign positive value to an addressee (2014: 12) and 'offers, invitations, compliments, thank-yous and apologies' (2014: 12) have been included as examples of pos-politeness. Leech has also defined the difference between negative and positive politeness as follows: 'In the case of neg-politeness, to increase the degree of politeness, we *diminish* or *soften* the expression of (negative) value in the transaction. But in the case of pos-politeness we *magnify* or *strengthen* the expression of (positive) value' (2014: 12). The difference is, accordingly, that in negative politeness the important thing is to avoid the addressee losing face, while positive politeness could be defined as being as positive as possible.

3.2   Impoliteness

Culpeper (2011: 3) argues that impoliteness is a multidisciplinary field of study, which can be approached from within for example sociology (especially verbal abuse) and media studies (especially exploitative TV and entertainment). It is a relatively new field of study and there

is no definite definition of it; Culpeper has provided thirteen definitions, something which underlines the complexity of impoliteness. He distinguishes between 'conventionalised formulaic impoliteness' and 'non-conventionalised impoliteness or implicational impoliteness'. 'Implicational impoliteness' is categorised further as 'form-driven', 'convention-driven' and 'context-driven' impoliteness. The functions of impoliteness have also been researched and been categorised as 'affective impoliteness', 'coercive impoliteness', 'entertaining impoliteness' and 'institutional impoliteness'.

When it comes to 'affective impoliteness' Culpeper (2011: 223) uses an example of an answerphone message where one of the phrases used was 'you are a rude thoughtless little pig' (2011: 223). In relation to PMQs a phrase like that would not be accepted and people would not be addressed as 'you'. Moods, feelings and attitudes could describe this kind of impoliteness. 'Coercive impoliteness' is relevant when it comes to power relations and could be described as using force or threats to make someone do something. Culpeper (2011: 228) has included 'exploitative TV shows' as an example of where this kind of impoliteness could occur and it could also be relevant for PMQs. The following definition could be an example of the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition, though probably not to such an extent: 'A powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite, because he or she can (a) reduce the ability of the less powerful participant to retaliate with impoliteness (e.g. through denial of speaking rights), and (b) threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite in return' (Culpeper 2011: 228). The entertaining value of PMQs was pointed out earlier in this study and it 'involves exploitative entertainment - entertainment at the expense of the target of the impoliteness (Culpeper 2011: 233). Television in the UK has been included as an example (2011: 234) and PMQs could definitely be seen as an impolite and entertaining TV-programme. In the case of 'institutional impoliteness' an example of the courtroom has been used and Culpeper (2011: 245) explains that 'judges are supported by the social structure behind them and could be impolite without the target having the ability to counter'. The categories that would be most relevant for an event as PMQs would be coercive and entertaining impoliteness as the event can be entertaining to the audience and there are power relations between the two sides - the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition in particular.

Following Brown and Levinson, impoliteness is generally defined in terms of face:

> Impoliteness is necessarily an attack on the 'face' of the interlocutor/s, and certain "impolite" speech acts, such as reproaching, threatening and insulting are performed by speakers with the intrinsic purpose of attacking or undermining the hearer's face. (Haverkate 1988: 394 in Mills 2005: 265)

Culpeper (2011: 47) notes that, while politeness theory 'emphasises rationality and self-interest', impoliteness 'has high costs' and people would in general like to avoid being impolite; however, this depends on the context and culture where the impoliteness takes place. This aspect is included in Locher and Bousfield's (2008: 3) definition of impoliteness:

> Impoliteness is behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context.

PMQs is an example of a context where 'face-aggravating behaviour' occurs, but is also expected - both by the adversaries and the audience.

Mills (2005: 266) does not consider politeness and impoliteness 'polar opposites', nor does she see impoliteness as something that must be avoided at all times. Impoliteness should not be seen as an 'abnormal and irrational counterpart of politeness' (Kienpointner 1997: 280, cited in Mills 2005: 266). An utterance seen as polite in one kind of society or context could be seen as impolite in a different society or context, and accordingly impoliteness must be seen 'as an assessment of someone's behaviour rather than a quality intrinsic to an utterance' (Mills 2005: 265). Whether an utterance is considered as polite or impolite should be determined by the behaviour of the person uttering it and by the context in which it takes place. For example, an utterance considered impolite in a specific context could be seen as 'camaraderie' or 'masculine language' in another one (Mills 2005: 265).

Conversely, a seemingly polite utterance could be interpreted as impolite in the case of 'pushy politeness' (Beebe 1995, cited in Mills 2005: 266). The words uttered could be considered polite in themselves; however, the utterance could be thought of as pushy in a context where the addressee is asked to do something he or she would not like to.

Kienpointner (1997 in 2005: 267) has categorised impoliteness as 'motivated' and 'unmotivated' impoliteness. The difference is that when it comes to 'motivated' impoliteness the speaker's intention is to be rude while 'unmotivated' impoliteness is a 'result of insufficient knowledge of some kind' (2005: 267).

Finally, Culpeper (1996: 356) has identified five categories of impoliteness strategies:

- Bald on record impoliteness: the 'strategy of choice for situations in which face threat is minimal' (Culpeper 2011: 184).
- Positive impoliteness: the use of strategies to damage the addressee's positive face wants
- Negative impoliteness: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants
- Sarcasm or mock politeness: an FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere
- Withhold politeness: lack of expected positive politeness

An example of 'withhold politeness' would be a case where a person who could not swim was rescued and did not thank the person who rescued him/her - 'a case of underpoliteness' (Culpeper 1996: 356).

Most people generally try to be polite and impoliteness is usually not expected. In the view of Leech (2014: 220), when impoliteness becomes a 'common phenomenon in everyday society, it is reflected in widespread concern and indignation in the community as amplified in the media', something he suggests is the case with 'the large number of cases of aggressive and violent behaviour - including verbal behaviour' - in the UK.

According to Leech (2014: 219) the reason why impoliteness has 'received considerable attention as a topic of investigation recently' (2014: 219) is because of the 'fact that it tends to be salient when it occurs' (2014: 219). When Leech (2014: 5) identified types of activities where 'impoliteness dominates over politeness' and that 'encourage discourtesy', PMQs - and in particular the Leader of Opposition questioning the Prime Minister was included as an example of activity where 'rudeness is generally more salient than politeness' (2014: 5).

Leech (2014: 220) described PMQs in the following way:

It is also noticeable that the favoured TV news extracts showing the House of Commons (the UK's main legislative chamber) in action are of the weekly sessions of Prime Minister's Question Time, when the Leader of Opposition and the Prime Minister trade insults, in the guise of questions and answers, with one another.

(2014: 219)

Leech (2014: 220) here notes the entertaining value impoliteness can have: 'The spectators are able to "enjoy" the excitement of impoliteness because their own face and public standing are not in any degree threatened by it'.

3.3 Impoliteness in political discourse

Within linguistics, political discourse has been thoroughly researched (e.g. Harris 2001; Ilie 2004; Bates, Kerr, Byrne and Stanley 2012; Murphy 2014). It has, in general, focused on 'what constitutes successful oratory' (Atkinson 1984) an approach that is possibly more relevant in relation to political speeches than to adversarial events like PMQs. However, impoliteness and insults have also been studied - Harris (2001) studied parliamentary insults in the context of PMQs and Ilie (2004) compared insulting practices in the British and Swedish Parliaments.

A specific characteristic of political discourse is that it is often heavily regulated by the context and may follow very different rules from those of everyday speech. For PMQs, for example, parliamentary rules require that questions are addressed to the Speaker of the House of Commons, even though they obviously target the Prime Minister or other MPs. The Leader of Opposition usually starts his/her questions by addressing the Speaker but often looks at the Prime Minister while asking the question.

The UK Parliament's website states that: 'unparliamentary language breaks the rules of politeness in the House of Commons Chamber' and 'the Speaker will direct an MP who has used unparliamentary language to withdraw it'. Examples of words considered unparliamentary are for example 'blackguard, coward, git, guttersnipe, hooligan, rat, swine, stoolpigeon and traitor'. [8] Accordingly, while insults as such are expected at PMQs, the precise linguistic form they may take is restricted by specific rules.

Ilie (2004) compared insulting practices in the British and Swedish Parliaments and focused on different kinds of insults and the responses to those. She argued that 'the performance-orientation of British parliamentary and unparliamentary discourse is enhanced

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[8] <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/unparliamentary-language/>

by a particular audience expectation, namely to see MPs call into question other MPS and thus engage in a real battle of wits' (Ilie 2004: 80). Ilie (2004: 80) suggests that the reason why parliamentary insults are so frequent and succeed in having an impact is that 'they call into question MPs' very prerequisites for participating successfully in the debates' (2004: 80). She concludes that in the House of Commons 'it is essential to outsmart political adversaries by giving quick and witty replies and by displaying a sense of humour' (2004: 81).

Ilie (2004: 82) identifies three 'mitigation strategies' which help MPs 'avoid being accused and institutionally sanctioned for using explicit unparliamentary language'. The first such strategy is the juxtaposition of elements signalling contempt and respect. For example, as Bayley (2004: 353) notes, 'MPs may address other MPs of the same party as "my honourable friend" even when in other social situations they may be sworn enemies'. This usage could be seen as a kind of convention or ritual rather than a real expression of politeness, and politicians frequently combine this with performing an FTA. Ilie (2004: 82) explains that 'this strategy enables the simultaneous performance of both self-face saving acts and other-face saving acts, helping to strike a balance between other-face threatening acts and other face-saving acts' (2004: 82). In the present material, utterances containing such juxtapositions abound; an example is Margaret Thatcher's comment:

(1)   I quite understand that the right hon. Gentleman is once again going on about personalities because he is not capable of asking a question on policy. [9]

The second strategy is the formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements, as exemplified by a response by David Cameron in 2014:

(2)   So let me ask the right hon. Gentleman again: Why is he so chicken when it comes to the greens?[10]

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[9] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-25/Orals-2.html>

[10]<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150114/debtext/150114-0001.htm#15011440000231>

Responding with a question is rare at PMQs, as the format presupposes the Prime Minister to answer rather than pose questions. This strategy could be carried out with our without mitigation; Ilie (2004: 82) argues that, when used without mitigation 'direct and/or strong negative attributions are harmful in that they tend to become exclusively depreciative accounts and blaming descriptions of political adversaries, bearing little relation to their actual policies and actions'.

The final strategy defined by Ilie is the attribution transfer movement. She defines it as 'the speaker's use of indirect negative attribution in order to avoid taking direct responsibility for using derogatory qualifiers to refer to other MPs' (2004: 82-83). When using this kind of insult, the Prime Minister would focus more on the targeted person's acts or statements rather than the person him/herself. This strategy is also common in the present material and the following example is one of Thatcher's responses to a question from Neil Kinnock:

(3)   Nonsense. The right hon. Gentleman was never very much in favour of NATO because he could not underwrite its nuclear deterrent, which is an essential force.[11]

Such mitigation strategies form an important part of the kind of discourse that is found in PMQs, which has to combine the requirements of politeness and insult. Harris (2001: 463) has described the usage as follows:

> Negative politeness features, i.e. those which attempt to avoid impoliteness, appear to coexist with the performance of deliberate threats to the hearer's positive face, i.e. acts which are clearly intended to be impolite.

Murphy (2014) compared Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's speech styles and analysed FTAs performed by both the Prime Ministers and the Leaders of Opposition. He found that there was a difference in how the two Prime Ministers responded to their own backbenchers, but it made little difference for the MPs whether they asked their questions to Tony Blair or Gordon Brown. The Prime Ministers usually did not perform FTAs on their own backbenchers,

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[11]<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-05/Orals-2.html>

except in cases where the MPs misunderstood them (2014: 98). He concludes that mitigation strategies are an important part of how Prime Ministers respond to questions and that they are being used to minimise threats. He also found that in general the Prime Minister will only be impolite when responding to impolite questions (102: 2014). Ilie (2004: 83) similarly notes that 'British parliamentary insults are more often followed by counter-insults'.

A comparative study of PMQs opening sessions, comparing five Prime Ministers from Thatcher to Cameron, was conducted by Bates, Kerr, Byrne and Stanley (2012). The aim of this study was to 'test a general perception that PMQs has become increasingly a focal point for shallow political point scoring rather than serious prime ministerial scrutiny (Bates et al. 2012: 253). The Prime Ministers were ranked according to the quality of their answers. This study was not about occurrences of FTAs in particular but rather how the Prime Ministers responded to questions in general and the 'fullness of their answers' (2012: 253). Their findings suggested that, in the beginning of their periods as Prime Ministers, 'Thatcher and Brown appeared the most accomplished in terms of the fullness of their answers, and Blair and Cameron the least accomplished' (2012: 253).

Shaw (2002) carried out a survey of the number of adversarial responses Tony Blair gave to questions, finding '62 adversarial responses to 100 questions' (2002: 201). The fact that more than 50 per cent of his responses were adversarial clearly indicates the competitive and impolite nature of PMQs. She also found that male MPs asked more adversarial questions than female MPs (2002: 203).

Harris (2001) extended politeness theory to adversarial political discourse and argues that parliamentary insults are offensive rhetorical acts performed in a highly competitive institutional setting. She describes the discourse of PMQs as follows:

> Much of the discourse of PMQs is composed of intentional and explicitly face-threatening (or face-enhancing) acts and these can be analysed both in terms of the propositional (e.g. hostile/supportive propositions/pre-suppositions which preface or are built into questions and responses to questions) and the interactional (e.g. modes of address, turn-taking 'rules', non-verbal and paralinguistic behaviour) levels.
> (Harris 2001: 456)

Bull and Wells (2012: 40) define five tactics of response, which may also be combined:

- 'Talk up positive face': If the Prime Minister responds to a question in this way he/ she tries to put her own party in a positive lights and talk about something that they have achieved.
- 'Rebut': To claim or prove that evidence or an accusation is false' (Oxford Dictionary for Students).
- Attack: If the Prime Minister responds with an attack it would most likely be by personally insulting the Leader of Opposition.
- Ignore: When responding by ignoring a question the Prime Minister could try to shift focus to a different political topic or for example tell the MP that he/she has been asking that same question many times before.
- Self-justify: Bull and Wells (2012: 42) have defined this kind of response in the following way: The Prime Minister offers reason, explanations or excuses for the actions he/she has taken.

Culpeper (2011: 176-177) has compared the discourse of the House of Commons to that of the courtroom , in particular when it comes to the use of phrases such as 'the right honourable gentleman' or 'with respect' followed by an offensive or impolite utterance (2011: 177). Harris (2001: 464) has also identified examples of combinations of polite and impolite utterances where the polite or respectful part could be 'the right honourable gentleman' combined with, for example:

- An accusation: To claim that the Leader of Opposition has done something illegal or wrong
- Contempt: To disrespect the Leader of Opposition
- Criticism: To criticise the Leader of Opposition's actions or statements
- Ridicule: To make fun of the Leader of Opposition
- Challenge: Make it difficult for the Leader of Opposition to ask his/her next question

Mohammed (2009: 7) has analysed 'accusations of inconsistency as a response to criticism' and argues that this is a 'common argumentative practice in PMQs'. If the Prime Minister has been asked a question that criticises the policies or plans of the government the Prime Minister could, respond by accusing his/her 'opponents of being inconsistent' (2009: 7). The Prime Minister would not agree with the criticism and may wish to avoid discussing it (2009: 7). In relation to the tactics of response identified by Bull and Wells (2012: 40) this could be considered an 'attack'.

The responses identified by Bull and Wells (2012: 40) will also be used as a tool to analyse the data collected for this study.

3.4   Gender and impoliteness

In the article 'Gender and Impoliteness' (2005) Mills discusses 'the complex relationship between gender and impoliteness' and argues that 'rather than assuming that gender and impoliteness are concrete entities which can be traced in conversation they are elements which are worked out within the course of interaction' (2005: 263). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 305) have defined gender as follows:

> Gender is not a part of one's essence, what one is, but an achievement, what one does. Gender is a set of practices through which people construct and claim identities; not simply a system of categorising people. And gender practices are not only about establishing identities but also about managing social relations.

Mills (2005: 273) discusses in particular Margaret Thatcher's use of language in a public context, and cites Webster (1990) who described it in the following way: 'Even women such as Margaret Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister, did not use masculine language as many of her predecessors had done, but instead combined masculine and feminine elements in her speech' (cited in Mills 2005: 273). Mills (2005: 273) argues that Thatcher would choose to 'adopt a range of different positions' in her speech in relation to what would be considered effective to achieve her ends. Walsh (2000: 274) described the shift between masculine and feminine in women's language as 'a way of managing these socially ascribed expectations

that pull in opposite directions rather than being conscious attempts to disrupt the symbolic meanings attached to the normative gender ideologies that circulate in the public domain'. Women's representation in the media has also been described as a way of 'changing the masculinist culture of the House of Commons' (Walsh 2001: 101).

The notion of women being 'nicer' than men in interaction is challenged by Mills (2005: 263) and she argues that 'current research seems to highlight women's interactional competitiveness'. Both Thatcher and May are highly competitive when it comes to their interactions during PMQs. This is different from the women that Mills (2005: 273) has described as 'conservative interactants' where a stereotype woman would be 'generally more sympathetic and caring, and would see it as their role within a Community of Practice to be co-operative rather than competitive' (2005: 273). A 'conservative interactant' could be defined as a person who is opposed to change and who holds traditional values (Oxford Dictionary).

Mills (2005: 276) concludes that:

It is essential not to see impoliteness as inherent in certain speech acts but rather as a series of judgments made by interactants on the appropriateness of others' actions and these judgments themselves are influenced by stereotypes of, among other things, what is perceived to be gender-appropriate behaviour.

Stereotypes of how men and women should behave may play a considerable role in perceptions of politeness: behaviour that would be considered impolite in one kind of context could also be considered polite in a different context. Politeness is dependent on the situation and on the type of people who interact with each other; the important thing is how the interactants judge the behaviour, rather than the speech acts themselves.

A comparison of the Scottish Parliament and the House of Commons was made by Shaw (2002: 289) who found that the Scottish Parliament appears to be 'more egalitarian and less gendered than the House of Commons' (2002: 289). Shaw suggests that women may not be as free to break rules as men are. For example, when girls shout in the classroom or women intervene illegally in the House of Commons they could be subject to negative sanctions - like being suspended from the House - because this is not what is generally expected of women (Shaw 2002: 289). That men are breaking rules in the Chamber could in

the view of Shaw give them more power and she argues that men achieve dominance and power by recognising how these speech events - like PMQs - are played.

According to Mills (2005: 273) 'linguistic features stereotypically positively associated with masculinity and hence power' are:

> The use of direct assertions rather than indirectness; swearing; unmitigated statements and expressions of negative opinion; FTAs in general; verbal wit and humour, non-emotional language.

In relation to PMQs, where the FTAs have a high degree of indirectness, and where the politicians use mitigation strategies to avoid being too impolite, linguistic features such as swearing and direct assertions could see the interactants sanctioned or suspended from the House. In the UK in general, women might be criticised for being 'over-aggressive or unfeminine' (Mills 2005: 273) if they use 'assertive masculine norms' (2005: 273). Mills (2005: 273) suggests that it may be strategic for women to 'adopt a range of different positions in their speech in relation to what they consider will most effectively achieve their ends' - for example 'seemingly stereotypically feminine speech forms such as indirectness in requests', which in some cases could be considered more polite and appropriate. In other cases, a more stereotypically masculine language could be the more appropriate choice, and Mills points out that negotiating the appropriate style is an 'ongoing process whereby women respond to what they perceive others' reactions to be'.

3.5   Power in political discourse

Wodak (2001: 11) defines power in relation to language in the following way:

> Language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is a contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in

power in social hierarchical structures…Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text. It is often exactly within the genres associated with given social occasions that power is exercised or challenged.

An event like PMQs could be viewed as a 'given occasion' where 'power is exercised or challenged'. The Leader of Opposition challenges the power of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister exercises his/her position of power through discourse. However, Wodak (2001: 10) also points out that 'language on its own is not powerful - it gains power by the use powerful people make of it'. Fairclough (2001: 75) describes politics as 'a struggle between discourse types':

In politics, each opposing party or political force tries to win the general acceptance for its own discourse type as the preferred and ultimately the 'natural' one for talking and writing about the state, government, forms of political action, and all aspects of politics - as well as for demarcating *politics* itself from other domains.
(2001: 75)

Locher (2004: 1) has identified power and politeness as 'important in face-to-face interaction' and argues that 'in a disagreement these two key concepts are likely to be observed together'. She also argues that 'both disagreement and the exercise of power entail a conflict' and that 'conflict will often be softened by the display of politeness' (2004: 1). This is interesting in relation to PMQs where the politicians often use 'mitigation strategies' (Ilie 2004: 82) to avoid being sanctioned following use of unparliamentary language.

Rudvin (2005: 161) defines power as follows:

A relationship of power between A and B, where A and B might be individuals or groups, is any asymmetry (both arbitrary and non-arbitrary) that allows party A to take decisions concerning B that B might not agree with, that B is not aware of, that is damaging to B, or that is advantageous to B but which B him/herself is not in a position to implement.

This definition is particularly relevant in relation to an event like PMQs where politicians from different parties exercise power and often disagree with each other.

More simply, power in relation to language has been conceptualised as 'asymmetries between participants in discourse events' (Fairclough 1995: 1). PMQs may be classed as a 'discourse event' and the asymmetry between a Prime Minister and a Leader of Opposition are built into the situation. Wirth-Koliba (2016) has studied the 'us and them' opposition in political discourse and found that it is inherent in all power relationships:

> The 'us' and 'them' opposition is indispensable for the concept of power and dominance to exist: one having power entails another person's lack of it. Someone's superiority and dominance over others implies the latter's inferiority, thus the 'us' and 'them' polarisation is clearly visible.
> (Wirth-Koliba 2016: 23)

Wirth-Koliba (2016: 35) concludes that 'the "us" and «them" relationship is constantly present in politics'; an example of this is the relationship between the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in the UK. There is a balance of power. Harris (2001: 468-469) has suggested that the reversal of this relationship is what makes PMQs of such interest: 'The power relationship is reversed, with the less powerful participant being the challenger in the House of Commons…hence, the sanctioned impoliteness of FTAs addressed to, arguably, the most powerful person in the country becomes, conversely, an occasion of interest and enjoyment'.

There are numerous definitions of power in relation to politics, some of which are more relevant in relation to particular political systems: some of the definitions would not be useful in relation to a democratic Parliamentary event as PMQs but more relevant for contexts such as a courtroom where the judge is superior. The Prime Minister is not superior to a Leader of Opposition in the same way, because the Leader of Opposition is allowed to challenge the Prime Minister. Power-relations in a courtroom work very differently: 'courtroom interactions are highly regulated, which means that the powerless cannot directly oppose the powerful' (Kadar & Haugh 2013: 54).

According to Newman (2004: 139) the concept of power has generally been thought of in terms of 'relationships' since Foucault reformulated the concept, even though the focus of his own work is on 'the place of power'. In relation to PMQs, it is natural to think of power in terms of relationships, because of the relationships between political parties and especially between the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition, who represent the party in power and the challengers respectively. According to Kadar & Haugh (2013: 54) 'skilful usage of politeness, as well as covert impoliteness, can become a key means to challenge the powerful and redistribute power'.

Fairclough (1989: 1) underlines the importance of language in relation to power, in particular the 'significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power'. Language is the most important tool for a politician and it is especially important during a session of PMQs. Here it is also important to note that language can contribute to 'the domination of some people by others' (Fairclough 1989: 1). This domination can appear in different ways. Rudvin (2005: 159) uses Fairclough's distinction of 'power behind discourse' and 'power in discourse'. 'Power behind discourse' could be defined as 'the issue of power as a hidden ideological force governing discourse in the public domain' and 'power in discourse' as 'the way in which these power factors are played out and enacted in discourse' (Rudvin 2005: 163). 'Power in discourse' would be especially relevant in relation to PMQs because examples of utterances where power is enacted in discourse often occur during these sessions. According to Rudvin (2005: 173) power is enacted through discourse when 'the interpreter takes control of the situation' and suggest that 'power relationships are marked in discourse primarily through extensive floor management but also factors such as social deictic, body language, tone of voice and formality of register'.

Power in relation fo facework is also discussed by Rudvin (2005: 165). During the event of PMQs 'stakes are high' and it is 'intensely governed by face co-ordination'. According to Rudvin 'both politeness and aggression can be used as power-generating distancing techniques' and 'politeness and distancing are perhaps even more effective than aggression as they prevent the interlocutor from engaging in open battle' (Rudvin 2005: 165). During a session of PMQs, too much aggression would probably not be effective as this could give the opposition an advantage and the Speaker of the House would probably not allow it.

It could rather be helpful for the Prime Minister to try to distance him/herself from the Leader of Opposition and show who holds power.

Mohammed (2009: 11) argues that the discourse taking place during a session of PMQs is closely related to argumentation: 'Argumentation can be seen as a dialogic exchange of speech acts between a party that defends a standpoint and a party that doubts it'. Most of the utterances collected for this thesis could be seen as parts of argumentation, and a large part of the interaction between the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition consists of the Prime Minister arguing for his/her party's standpoints and the Leader of Opposition challenging those. Harris (2001: 468) notes that the Prime Minister is 'very unlikely to lose control when challenged by the Leader of Opposition - however aggressively'. It is important for the politicians not to lose face and to look confident.

Three purposes of using 'rudeness to get power have been identified by Beebe (1995, cited in Culpeper 2011: 227):

(1)   'To appear superior. Includes 'insults' and 'putdowns'.

(2)   'To get power over actions (to get someone else to do something or avoid doing something yourself). Includes 'sarcasm' and 'pushy politeness' used to get people to do something, as well as attempts to get people to 'go away or leave us alone or finish their business more quickly'.

(3)   'To get power in conversation (i.e. to do conversational management) (to make the interlocutor talk or stop talking, shape what they tell you, or to get the floor). Includes saying 'shush!' and rude interruptions'.

These kinds of discourses 'interact closely with power behind discourses' according to Culpeper (2011: 227). He argues that 'the unequal distribution of conversation could reflect an unequal distribution of power behind the conversation' and that 'social structures and associated ideologies shape and are shaped by discourses' (Culpeper 2011: 227). This could be relevant in relation to PMQs for example when it comes to the relationship between a Prime Minister and a Leader of Opposition. As the Prime Minister is the one with power and

the Leader of Opposition is in a challenging position the Prime Minister could try to appear superior or 'better than the opposition' and distribute more power in his/her utterances than the opposition probably would. 'Power in discourse' could be defined as 'exercise of power in the language' (Culpeper 2011: 225); this often occurs during a session of PMQs especially in relation to the language of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would already have 'power behind discourse' through the position of being a Prime Minister as 'power behind discourse concerns the constitution of social institutions and societies through power relations' (Culpeper 2011: 225).

Kadar & Haugh (2013: 15) provide an example of 'traditional British indirectness' in relation to the power differences between 'a high-ranking guest and a maid' where the guest has forgot her 'cigar-stump' in the ladies' room and the maid asks politely in an indirect way if the guest would like to have it back. To ask about this indirectly is seen as more polite than asking in a very direct way. Indirectness in power relationships is also highly relevant to the language of PMQs, even though here impoliteness is expected while it would not be expected in the case of the maid and the high-ranking guest. As with politeness in general, power-related language is, consequently, determined by the context in which it occurs.

4   Materials and methodology

4.1   Data collection and analysis

The sessions included in this study were Thatcher's final 15 sessions before the first televising of PMQs, her first 60 sessions from the first televising onwards and May's first 30 sessions as Prime Minister. The sessions were shorter during Thatcher's time as Prime Minister but as there were two 15-minute sessions each week and there is a single weekly 30-minute session today, they represent the same amount of time.

All the examples of FTAs were collected from 'Hansard Online'[12] and the 'Hansard Archive'[13]. The Margaret Thatcher Foundation archive[14] was used to get an overview of all the sessions Thatcher took part in and to make sure all the sessions were read through. To get an overview of all the dates of May's sessions, the UK Parliament's official PMQs podcast[15] was consulted. Every session was read through and the examples were collected in an Excel document in the order that they appeared in the sessions. Altogether 410 FTAs were collected from the material.

Each FTA was provided with several categories of contextual information. These include a link to the source, the session, the date, the addressee and the theme. The themes of the questions vary immensely, generally reflecting day-to-day politics, and turned out to be extremely difficult to generalise; no attempt has therefore been made to identify overarching thematic categories.

The original plan was to classify the FTAs in terms of existing impoliteness categories based on Brown and Levinson's categorisation. Two systems based on their framework, those by Culpeper (1996: 356) and Nijakowska (2014: 142) were tried out. However, both systems proved highly problematic in relation to the utterances collected from the sessions of PMQs. Because of the high degree of indirectness in the utterances, categories such as 'accusations', 'criticism' and 'disapproval' were extremely difficult to distinguish: the amount of interpretation required meant that the resulting classification was felt to be both subjective and imprecise. Instead, it was decided to base the analysis on very basic semantic categories derived from a preliminary study of the data themselves. It was found that, irrespective of the theme discussed, the utterances could be related to a limited number of basic meanings. To identify these basic meanings seemed to make better sense than attempting to apply a ready

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[12] Hansard Online - <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons>

[13]Hansard Archive <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons/by-date/#session=27&year=2016&month=2&day=24>

[14] Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/search?dt=4&w=house%20of%20commons%20pqs&searchtype=and&t=0&doctype%5B0%5D=4&doctype%5B1%5D=6&page=57&starty=&startm=&startd=&endy=&endm=&endd=&onedayy=&onedaym=&onedayd=>

[15] PMQs podcast <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/official-prime-ministers-questions-pmqs-podcast/id444786081?mt=2>

framework based on the study of very different kinds of interaction. In terms of basic meaning, the utterances were categorised into the following eleven categories:

1. What you say is wrong

2. You are saying stupid things/acting stupidly

3. You do not know the facts

4. You are ignoring the facts

5. Your ideas are bad/what you believe in does not work

6. Your party/the opposition is party is wrong/inefficient/bad

7. We are better than you

8. Nobody believes in you/what you say

9. You are stupid or bad

10. You are ridiculous

11. You should shut up

The first two categories represent the third type of mitigation strategy defined by Ilie (2004: 82-83), the attribution transfer movement' (see p. 25). Rather than attacking the targeted person, his/her words or actions are attacked. The person's words may be claimed to be factually wrong; alternatively, they may be criticised as being untimely or unsuitable. An example of the 'what you say is wrong' category from the present data is:

I do not accept the early part of the hon. Gentleman's comments. [16]

This could be a response to an accusation of having said or done something, whether this actually took place or not. If the accusation was correct, the Prime Minister could try to influence the audience by telling them that what the opposition are saying is not true.

The Prime Minister may also attack the words or actions of the questioner on other grounds; a very common strategy is to criticise the questioner for repetition, thus transferring the attention away from the actual content:

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[16] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-11/Orals-2.html>

The right hon. Gentleman comes out with that question almost every time like a cracked gramophone record. [17]

Instead of attacking the wording of the question, the questioner's underlying knowledge or use of facts may also be attacked: here the questioner may be accused either of not knowing the facts (3) or of ignoring them (4):

The hon. Gentleman does not have his facts quite right. I live over the shop, as I have done for years. [18]

The right hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to the paragraph of m right hon. Friend the Chancellor's speech that I read out. [19]

At a somewhat personal level, the Prime Minister may attack the ideas or beliefs of the questioner, or, more commonly, of the opposition party as a whole (5). This kind of response places the focus on the policies or ideas of the opposition, and indirectly allows the Prime Minister to enhance his/her own party's ideas through dismissing or criticising the ideas of the opposition:

Labour's proposals are the worst of all, and people would welcome the community charge in comparison. [20]

The opposition party may also be attacked in more general terms (6). While effective as political statements, such utterances may be seen as relatively low-level insults, as they spread the insult over the entire party rather than targeting individuals or specific ideas:

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[17] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-05/Orals-2.html>

[18] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-09/Orals-2.html>

[19] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-06-28/Debate-1.html>

[20] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-01/Orals-2.html>

The lesson is that it always costs more to live in a Labour authority. [21]

Both types (5) and (6) provide an opportunity for the Prime Minister to include a comparison (7), 'talking up' the positive face of their own party (Bulls and Wells 2012: 40-42, see also p. 27):

Labour-controlled councils cost you more and Conservative-controlled councils cost you less—and give a better service. [22]

Ilie (2004: 79) has described this type of response as 'ethos-oriented insults - intended to enhance the speaker's trustworthiness, while challenging or undermining the trustworthiness of the targeted interlocutor'.

A less common strategy is to call in doubt the credibility or support of the questioner, indicating that their views may have no following (8):

He is isolated if he thinks that this House would accept stage 2 or 3 of the Delors report, because he has clearly indicated that it would not. [23]

If the Prime Minister responds like this, he or she may be try to weaken the potential support for the questioner by denying its existence; this could also enhance the policies of the Prime Minister's own party.

Types (9) and (10) target another person - usually the questioner - directly, and therefore represent unmitigated rudeness. Type (9) induces utterances that suggest negative qualities or shortcomings that are personal rather than related to statements or actions:

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman could do better than that. I am surprised that the Liberal-whatever-it's-called party is not grateful for that. [24]

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[21] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-20/Orals-2.html>

[22] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-05-03/Orals-2.html>

[23] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-05/Orals-2.html>

[24] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-22/Orals-2.html>

Type (10), which is extremely rare in the present material, includes an element of ridiculing another person, and might in most contexts be considered the most insulting type of all:

> At least my former Chief Whip has a job. [25]

Finally, the Prime Minister may simply react to the question by silencing the questioner through an utterance equivalent to the meaning 'you should shut up' (11):

> The hon. Gentleman had better wait and see in the light of the facts rather than pontificate. [26]

While all the other types of FTAs here classified most commonly target the positive face of the addressee, this type is always a threat to their negative face and an imposition. As the categories are based on meaning rather than form, they may not in themselves indicate whether positive or negative face may be involved; each category may also be represented by a range of power-related discourse strategies. Because of this, it was felt that a second categorisation, by form, would be useful. The utterances were therefore also classified into the following formal categories:

1. Statement of fact
2. Personal statement
3. Qualified statement
4. Judgment
5. Request
6. Command
7. Question

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[25] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-02/debates/F726F939-39F0-498F-89E5-78DEA27B682A/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[26] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-11-28/Orals-2.html>

A large part of the discourse which takes place in the Chamber during PMQs is related to facts. The Leader of Opposition may mention figures which the Prime Minister disagrees with; the latter may then provide the correct figures or, as Thatcher frequently did, dismiss the facts by responding with the word 'nonsense':

The right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. [27]

The fact-based character of the discourse is one reason why simple statements of fact are by far the most common utterance type in the material; however, it may also be noted that the unmodified statement is the utterance type that allows for least doubt and is therefore associated with power.

Statements are, however, at times modified. A personal statement usually starts with a personal pronoun and indicates the thoughts and feelings of the Prime Minister:

I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman understood what I said to him last time. [28]

Personal statements are generally made of points that cannot be presented as hard facts; often these are statements relating to the addressee. Such statements may also be qualified without bringing in a personal viewpoint, instead introducing a hedge of some kind:

The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to quite understand what the vote on 23 June was about. [29]

FTAs in the form of statements generally have to do with threats to positive face. Much less commonly, the Prime Ministers phrase their responses as requests, commands or questions, posing a degree of threat to the addressee's negative face. Requests are generally made up of

[27] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-02-08/Orals-2.html>

[28] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-05-08/Orals-2.html>

[29] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-07/debates/80AE1384-278F-4E2F-82CB-C88846372061/OralAnswersToQuestions>

what are formally qualified or incomplete statements; however, they follow conventional forms that mark them as requests:

> If the right hon. Gentleman would calm down a little. [30]

> Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would stop interjecting. [31]

Direct commands are extremely rare, and startling when they occur:

> Calm down, Mr Speaker. [32]

Formulating insults as questions rather than statements is the second mitigating strategy defined by Ilie (2004: 82). Mishler (1975: 106, cited in Fetzer, Weizman and Berlin 2015: 206) suggests that 'to ask a question in response to a question is an act of counter-control and may require either that there be a 'true' differential in social power where the respondent has more real authority, or at a minimum, that there be equality between the speakers.'

The Prime Minister rarely responds with a question, as the format of PMQs presupposes that the Prime Minister answers questions rather than asking them. The material does, however, contain several examples of questions:

> How many years were Labour in government and did nothing about it? [33]

Formulating insults as questions rather than statements is the second mitigation strategy defined by Ilie (2004: 82). Mishler (1975: 106, cited in Fetzer, Weizman and Berlin 2015: 206) suggests that 'to ask a question in response to a question is an act of counter-control and

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[30] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-19/Orals-2.html>

[31] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-06-12/Debate-1.html>

[32] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-10-19/debates/E9BF9757-6908-4523-A27F-A9810A32D717/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[33] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-01/debates/F11237E0-E558-48C2-B944-951ECE390FF7/OralAnswersToQuestions>

may require either that there be a 'true' differential in social power where the respondent has more real authority, or at a minimum, that there be equality between the speakers.'

All utterances collected were categorised both with regard to meaning and form. Some of the utterances were longer answers that contained more than one FTA; these were divided as far as possible into their constituent elements. In some cases, however, a single formulation represented more than one of the meaning categories - for example 'bad ideas' and 'bad party'. A category named 'supplementary meaning' was added as a consequence of this. In sum, the following categories were included in the Excel document: 'Text' (containing the exact wording of an utterance), 'reference', 'date', 'addressee', 'theme', 'sessions', 'column', 'basic meaning', 'supplementary meaning' and 'form'. This information was collected for each the three subcorpora: Thatcher (pre-tv), Thatcher (post-tv) and May. The findings are presented and compared in the following chapter.

5 Findings

5.1 Overall presentation of findings

A total of 410 utterances that could be classified as FTAs were collected from the material. 260 of these were collected from the sessions with Margaret Thatcher and 150 from the sessions with Theresa May (see Table 1). The highest frequency of FTAs (14 FTAs per hour) occurred in Thatcher's televised sessions, and there was also a higher frequency in her pre-tv sessions than in May's sessions.

	Thatcher (pre-tv)	Thatcher (post-tv)	May	Total
Number of sessions	15	60	30	105
Total number of hours	3.75	15	15	33.75
Number of FTAs collected	50	210	150	410

			FTAs per hour	13.3	14	10	12.1

Table 1: An overview of the collected FTAs

	MT (pre-TV)		MT (post-TV)		TM		TOTAL	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
Bad party	15	30	44	21	43	28.7	102	24.9
Bad ideas	6	12	36	17.1	22	14.7	64	15.6
Act stupid	6	12	29	13.8	17	11.3	52	12.7
We are better than you	7	14	12	5.7	30	20	49	12
You are stupid	7	14	17	8.1	25	16.7	49	12
Ignore facts	2	4	30	14.3	4	2.7	36	8.8
Say wrong	5	10	27	12.9	1	0.6	33	8
Shut up	1	2	8	3.8	1	0.6	10	2.4
Nobody believes	1	2	4	1.9	4	2.7	9	2.2
No facts	-	-	3	1.4	-	-	3	0.7
Ridicule	-	-	-	-	3	2	3	0.7
TOTAL	50	100	210	100	150	100	410	100

Table 2: Breakdown of meaning-based categories of FTAs in the three subcorpora

Table 2 shows the breakdown of the basic meaning categories in the material. The most frequent category in all three subcorpora is 'bad party' with a total percentage of 24.9. It is clearly important to the Prime Ministers to point out what is bad about the opposition party. Most of these statements are criticising the policies of the Opposition, often by referring to statistics or records of perceived failure in relation to different political topics. These kinds of FTAs could also criticise the oppositions' ideologies, and Thatcher did on several occasions

criticise the socialist ideology. The frequency of this type of FTA throughout the material shows clearly the adversarial nature of PMQs.

The second most frequent kind of FTA overall was 'bad ideas' with a percentage of 15.6. This kind of FTA is closely linked to the category of 'bad party' but has more to do with the actions of the opposition rather than the policies or the party themselves. For Thatcher, it was the third most frequent FTA in the pre-tv period; however, in five of the six cases the categorisation represents the 'supplementary meaning', while the basic meaning was 'bad party'. After the start of televising, however, this became the second most frequent type. When it comes to May it was the fourth most frequent kind of FTA. Both 'bad party' and 'bad ideas' would mostly be uttered as statements of fact.

Overall, 'act stupid' is the third most frequent kind of FTA with a percentage of 12.7; it was also the third most frequent kind of FTA (6) used by Thatcher pre-tv. In the televised sessions it was the fourth most frequent and for May it was the fifth most frequent strategy. When comparing the use of this strategy pre-tv and in the televised sessions the finding is that the majority of Thatcher's utterances pre-tv (four out of six) were personal statements, while the proportion of personal statements was considerably lower (five out of 29, or 17%) after the first televising. This could imply that Thatcher changed in the televised sessions and became less personal, with more of a focus on the Opposition party. When it comes to May the way she uses this kind of FTA is varied. Three of the statements were commands, two judgments, two personal statements, one qualified statement, two requests and six were statements of fact.

The fourth most common kinds of FTAs overall are 'we are better than you' and 'you are stupid', both with a percentage of 12 % of the total. In Thatcher's pre-tv sessions, 'we are better than you' and 'you are stupid' were the second most common types, both with 7 utterances in total. In the televised sessions, however, both types are much less frequent: 'you are stupid' (17 utterances) was the sixth most common FTA while 'we are better than you' (12 utterances) was the seventh most common. That Thatcher used the FTA of the type 'you are stupid' less in the televised sessions is also a sign of her being less personal and less rude to the questioner. Thatcher also seems to have been less concerned with enhancing the policies of her own party in the televised sessions and more concerned with the policies of the Opposition. For May, 'we are better than you' was the second most common FTA (30

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utterances) and 'you are stupid' the third most common one (25 utterances). It is clearly important for May to highlight the policies of her own party as well as criticising those of the Opposition at the same time. May also uses personal insults relatively often, her percentage of 'you are stupid' being higher than Thatcher's, considerably so in comparison with the televised material.

'Ignore facts' was the fifth most common kind of FTA. This kind of FTA implies that the questioner probably knows the true facts but that he/she ignores them. This kind of FTA could enhance the policy of the PM's party because the Prime Minister could highlight bad results for the Opposition when using this strategy. It was also the fifth most common category pre-tv (2 utterances) and the third most common after the first televising. Thatcher used this strategy much more often in the televised sessions and probably found it an effective strategy to use. In the case of May this strategy was the sixth most common strategy, accounting for less than 3% of her total.

The sixth most common kind of FTA overall was the category 'say wrong'. This category is similar to the category 'ignore facts' but does not carry any necessary suggestion of expected knowledge of facts: it simply indicates that what the opposition claims or suggests is not in accordance with the facts. 'Say wrong' was the fourth most common FTA pre-tv (5 utterances) and the fifth most common in Thatcher's televised sessions (27 utterances). For May it was the least common strategy (1 utterance) and it seems the Prime Minister did not find this kind of strategy effective.

The final four categories are only used occasionally, accounting for less than 2.5% overall. The strategy named as 'shut up' was the least common strategy pre-tv with only 1 utterance; however, Thatcher used the strategy more often in her televised sessions where it was the eighth most common kind of FTA (8 utterances). It was also the least frequent FTA preferred by May.

The category of 'nobody believes' was the least common kind of FTA used by both Prime Ministers. It was the least frequent FTA pre-tv and the ninth most common after the first televising. May also made use of this strategy and it was the sixth most common one in her sessions.

The final two kinds of FTAs are 'no facts' and 'ridicule'. The strategy of 'no facts' (3 utterances) was used only by Thatcher in the televised sessions while the strategy of 'ridicule'

(3 utterances) was only used by May. The strategy of 'no facts' is similar to the categories of 'say wrong' and 'ignore facts'; however, it basically states that the Opposition is wrong because it has not got access to the facts. This strategy is potentially dangerous as it may suggest that the Prime Minister's party might be withholding information, and therefore appears only rarely. Similarly, the Prime Ministers are careful with ridiculing, a strategy that might place them in an unfavourable light: this strategy is never used by Thatcher in the collected material.

	MT (pre-TV)		MT (post-TV)		TM		Total	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
Statement of fact	17	41.5	124	60.7	61	49.2	202	54.7
Personal statement	20	48.8	48	23.5	36	29	104	28.2
Question	3	7.3	12	5.9	8	6.5	23	6.2
Qualified statement	1	2.4	6	2.9	5	4	12	3.3
Judgment	-	-	5	2.5	6	4.9	11	3
Request	-	-	8	3.9	3	2.4	11	3
Command	-	-	1	0.5	5	4	6	1.6
TOTAL	41	100	204	100	124	100	369	100

Table 3: Breakdown of formal categories of FTAs in the three subcorpora

Table 3 shows the breakdown of the formal categories in the material. Much of the discourse that takes place in sessions of PMQs are concerned with facts; however, the Prime Ministers use different strategies to utter these facts. Here, the statement of fact was the most common type overall (54.7%) and, with a large margin, both in Thatcher's post-tv sessions (60.7%) and in May's sessions (49.2%). Thatcher's pre-tv sessions stand out, however, as her most common formal type here is the personal statement. The difference between the pre- and

post-tv sessions is dramatic here, and might suggest a conscious aim to appear more assured and objective in the televised sessions.

The personal statement is the second most common type of utterance overall, at 28% considerably less common than the statement of fact but much more frequent than any of the other types. This may also be an effective kind of statement, and was Thatcher's preferred type of statement pre-tv; it was probably easier to be more personal when there were no cameras in the Chamber.

All the other formal categories are considerably less frequent. The question is the third most common type of statement overall (6.2%) with a relatively stable distribution in all three subcorpora. After the question, the most common statement type was the qualified statement (3.3%). Only one utterance was categorised as a qualified statement in Thatcher's pre-tv sessions: this is not, however, surprising in view of the large number of personal statements, which largely have the same function, that is, to qualify a statement so as to express an opinion or belief rather than a fact.

None of the final three types of statement - judgment, request and command - were used during pre-tv sessions included here. However, as these types are overall rare, and the pre-tv sessions provide a much shorter sample than the later periods, they might well have turned up in a larger sample. These categories are rarely used by both Thatcher and May: in the televised sessions Thatcher used requests more often than judgments (3.9 and 2.5% respectively), while May used judgments more than requests (4.9 and 2.4% respectively). The command was the least used formal type overall. This type of response occurred six times in total - five times used by May and once used by Thatcher - after the first televising.

On the whole, the overview of categories shows considerable differences both in meaning and form: most notably, May seems to use particular meaning categories much more than Thatcher, while the pre-tv sessions of Thatcher stand out in their frequent use of personal statements. In order to make sense of these differences, however, a more detailed look at the actual utterances used will be necessary.

5.2. Margaret Thatcher in the pre-television and televised sessions

The pre-television sessions collected here took place in the period 22.06.1989 - 14.11.1989, immediately before the televising of PMQs started. By this time, Margaret Thatcher had been the leader of the Conservative Party since 1975 and Prime Minister since May 1979; she had attended four years as Leader of Opposition in sessions of PMQs and ten years as Prime Minister. The FTAs collected from these sessions relate to discussions on the following topics:

Railways (7), inflation (6), cabinet (5), community charge (3), Thatcher's chancellor (2), economic policy (2), teachers (2), advisers and ministers (1), Cambodia (1), China (1), doctors (1), Europe (1), fundamental policies of the Conservatives (1), future of Britain (1), interest and mortgage rates (1), Labour party policy in general (1), NATO (1), NHS (1), privatisation of nuclear energy (1), Sir Edward du Cann (1) and Soviet Parliament (1).

Of the 50 FTAs collected from these sessions, 21 are directed to the Leader of Opposition, Neil Kinnock, while three are directed to the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown. Three FTAs were also directed to the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Roy Hattersley. As noted in the previous section, Thatcher's most favoured formal category here was the personal statement, which completely dominates together with the also frequent statement of fact. The meaning categories, however, show much more spread, and it will make sense to discuss Thatcher's strategies with these categories as a starting point.

The most common meaning category in the pre-tv sessions, as with all the periods studies, is 'bad party'. Thatcher's responses also include personal insults, criticism of the Opposition's ideas and comparisons of the two parties.

The televised sessions collected took place in the period 28.11.1989-15.11.1990, starting with the first ever televised session of PMQs. Thatcher took part in only two more sessions as Prime Minister after the final session included in this material. The FTAs collected from these sessions relate to discussions on the following topics:

Community charge (15), taxes (11), inflation (9), poll tax (8), Strasbourg (6), spending (6), health (5), Nelson Mandela (5), British Leyland-Rover (4), businesses

(4), emergency services (4), NATO (4), injured policemen (4), PowerGen (4), socialism (4), education (4), incomes policy (3), inspector's report (3), homelessness (3), ambulance dispute (2), banks (2), British Aerospace (2), budget (2), civil servants (2), chancellor (2), deputy Prime Minister (2), Germany (2), global warming (2), interest rates (2), prosecution (2), resignation letters (2), schools (2), Secretary of State (2), Sir Alan Walters (2), Taylor report (2), transport (2), Vietnamese boat people (2), West Oxfordshire (2), West Yorkshire (2), airport (1), armed coup (1), Beverly (1), Cambodia (1), child abuse (1), child benefit (1), community care (1), Delors (1), Downing Street (1), East Germany (1), Eastern Europe (1), economic policies (1), economy polls (1), electricity (1), engagements (1), environmental improvement (1), export (1), family support (1), financial report (1), football identity cards (1), Hong Kong (1), hospitals (1), humanitarian efforts (1), mad cow disease (1), manifesto (1), ministerial reshuffles (1), hon. member said 'he has a peanut brain' (1), Mr. Haynes used the term 'duckie' (1), Thatcher's resignation (1), Nicaragua (1), Northern Ireland (1), Oxfordshire (1), pay review bodies (1), rail link (1), retail prices index (1), Russia (1), security services (1), social services (1), student loan scheme (1), support benefits (1), teachers (1), too much noise in the Chamber (1), trading (1), travel time to work (1) and Unit labour costs (1).

It should be noted that the range of topics discussed is extremely broad: 85 topics have been defined here. In the televised sessions Thatcher continues to point out what is bad about the Opposition, but there are also changes in her use of strategies. The most striking change is that she seems to become much less personal: her use of personal statements is markedly reduced, as is her use of statements comparing her own party with the opposition. Instead, she seems to focus more on pointing out errors and negative aspects of the opposition, with a marked rise in her use of the strategies 'ignore facts', 'say wrong' and 'bad ideas'. The following discussion will compare the strategies used in the two subcorpora as well as identifying particular patterns in Thatcher's responses.

The most frequent meaning category, 'bad party', is used 15 times in the material collected from the pre-tv sessions. Seven responses are directed to the Leader of Opposition, including five statements of fact, one question and one qualified statement. Four of these

responses relate to discussions on inflation; in all of these Thatcher is criticising Labour's 'record' for inflation:

> 29/06/1989: Column 1106
>
> Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that Labour holds the record for inflation this century? Under Labour, it reached 27 per cent.—more than one quarter of the value of the pound—in one year. That was Labour's record when the right hon. Gentleman was a Member of this House. [34]

This response was separated into three FTAs in the analysis: one question and two statements of fact. A similarity between the question and the first statement of fact is that Thatcher reinforces her response by using specific measures of time: referring to the record for 'this century', and the inflation reaching 27 per cent in 'only' one year. She clearly attacks the Leader of Opposition with these responses, pointing out Kinnock's responsibility as being a Member of the House at that point. Throughout the utterance, Thatcher tries to point out that the Labour Party are worse than her own Government; however, she does not make the comparison explicit.

In another exchange relating to inflation during the same session, Thatcher responded to criticism in the following way:

> 29/06/1989: Column 1106
>
> Neil Kinnock
>
> Will the Prime Minister explain why Britain's inflation rate is nearly twice the European average?
>
> Margaret Thatcher
>
> It is at about the same level to which the last Labour Government would have loved to keep it down. [35]

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[34] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-06-29/Orals-2.html>

[35] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-06-29/Orals-2.html>

Instead of trying to explain, Thatcher responds with an attack, again shifting the focus to the Labour Party instead of admitting that what Kinnock said to her was correct. Doing this, she draws attention away from her own party, this time, however, with a direct comparison.

In the following response, she highlights the differences between the two sides:

29/06/1989: Column 1105

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, under this Government the basic pension has been inflation-proof, whereas the Labour Government were unable to stick to their promise. [36]

Again, there is no sense of doubt in her argument: using keywords such as 'inflation-proof' and 'unable to stick to their promise', Thatcher tries to describe her own Government in the best possible way and the Opposition in the worst way possible. Here, the concept of 'us and them' is clearly visible. Another response from a pre-tv session is similar to the previous two responses in its main message that the Labour Party could not be trusted:

04/07/1989: Column 149

Clearly, Labour does not believe in keeping its agreements. [37]

To point out that the Opposition cannot keep their promises shifts the focus away from her own Party, and in a position of power as Prime Minister it is easy to do that instead of trying to defend the actions of her own Government.

The following response could be considered one of the rudest ones, pre-television, in relation to FTAs categorised as 'bad party':

25/07/1989: Column 849

His side, the Labour Opposition, is constantly changing its policies, which is not surprising considering that they have had, and still have, such a rotten set. [38]

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[36] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-06-29/Orals-2.html>

[37] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-04/Orals-2.html>

[38] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-25/Orals-2.html>

The word 'rotten' is what makes this response particularly rude. The use of strong expressions such as 'constantly changing' and 'not surprising', as well as the parallel verb phrases in 'have had, and still have' clearly reinforces her argument. Later in the same session, Thatcher again used the word 'rotten' to describe the Labour Party's policy:

25/07/1989: Column 852

I note that the Labour Party has abandoned its latest policy because it is absolutely rotten.

In the televised sessions, 'bad party' is again the most frequent type of FTA (44), and the basic meaning of 39 responses. Most of the responses are categorised as statements of fact and 23 responses are directed to the Leader of Opposition.

The use of words such as 'always' and 'never' to reinforce arguments is a pattern found in both subcorpora and might be characterised as a regular rhetorical feature with which Thatcher makes her responses more powerful. The following responses are examples from both pre-tv and televised sessions (emphasis added):

14/11/1989: Column 179

One could **never** rely on the Labour Party to support NATO. [39]

19/06/1990: Column 799

Improving the health service in a way that the Labour party could **never** have done. [40]

18/07/1989: Column 218

As **always**, Labour Members are in hock to the unions. [41]

13/03/1990: Column 151

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[39] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-11-14/Orals-3.html>

[40] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-06-19/Orals-2.html>

[41] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-18/Orals-2.html>

It is quite clear that it **always** costs more under Labour. [42]

20/03/1990: Column 1008

The lesson is that it **always** costs more to live in a Labour authority. [43]

In the first example, Thatcher includes more people than just herself in the argument by using the word 'one', while in the second she makes a comparison, trying to show how her own Government achieved great results, while pointing out that the Opposition 'never' could have done such a thing. In both these cases, the use of 'never' introduces a definiteness removing all sense of doubt.

The last three responses all concern the economic policies of the Labour Party. Indirectly, Thatcher is saying in all these responses that this is not the case when it comes to her own Government. As with 'never' in the preceding responses, the use of 'always' here reinforces the message of unconditionality, leaving no doubt.

In her response categorised as 'bad party' in the televised sessions, Thatcher frequently criticised the Labour Party's spending, something that had not been a major theme in the pre-tv sessions. Several times, she described Labour authorities as 'extravagant' (emphasis added):

18/01/1990: Column 405

Perhaps they should reserve their firepower for **extravagant** Labour local authorities. [44]

18/01/1990: Column 405

…and will demonstrate which are the **extravagant** authorities and which are the careful spenders. It is because Labour authorities are **extravagant** that Labour Members oppose the Community Charge. [45]

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[42] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-13/Orals-2.html>

[43] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-20/Orals-2.html>

[44] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-18/Orals-2.html>

[45] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-18/Orals-2.html>

20/02/1990: Column Column 774

Far more Labour than Conservative local authorities are **extravagant**, with the highest community charges. [46]

In the two latter responses, Thatcher compares her own Government to the Opposition, flagging the difference between the two sides by repeatedly associating Labour with the term 'extravagant'; which in the second example is juxtaposed with the term 'careful', clearly referring to the Conservative Party. The following response also criticises the spending of the Labour Party, here drawing attention specifically to the Leader of Opposition:

14/06/1990: Column 464

That is another quick £2 billion, just like that. Yet, the right hon. Gentleman claims to be responsible. It is absolute nonsense. [47]

The criticism is combined with the word 'nonsense', a word very frequently used by Thatcher. The use of 'nonsense' is mostly related to the FTAs categorised as 'say wrong', and was used by Thatcher both pre-tv and in the televised sessions. In the pre-tv sessions, Thatcher made five responses categorised as 'say wrong' and responded with the word 'nonsense' in four of those - twice during the same session. She started one of her responses by simply saying 'nonsense' [48] and also responded by saying 'that is nonsense' [49] and 'that is absolute nonsense' [50] when she used the word twice in the same session. In the final session before the first televising, she responded in the following way to a question from Paddy Ashdown where he accused Thatcher of seeking to lead Britain into increasing isolation:

14/11/1989. Column 180

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[46] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-02-20/Orals-2.html>

[47] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-06-14/Orals-2.html>

[48] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-10-31/Orals-2.html>

[49] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-27/Orals-2.html>

[50] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-27/Orals-2.html>

The right hon. Gentleman speaks absolute nonsense. [51]

Thatcher responded with the word 'nonsense' frequently in the televised sessions as well, and the word was used in 11 out of 27 responses categorised as 'say wrong'. This is clearly a strategy that Thatcher found effective for the televised sessions, as well as before there were cameras in the Chamber. She started five of her responses simply by saying 'nonsense', and in one of her responses she used the word two times - probably because of too much noise in the Chamber. As in the pre-tv sessions, she used phrases such as 'that is absolutely nonsense' [52] and 'the right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense' [53]. The following example is a response to a question asked by the Leader of Opposition, in relation to Vietnamese boat people:

12/12/1989: Column 841

The right hon. Gentleman's remarks are feeble and nonsense. [54]

In this response, Thatcher described Kinnock's remarks as both 'feeble and nonsense'. This is also a good example of a mitigation strategy, as Thatcher addresses Kinnock as 'the right hon. Gentleman' before she utters the impolite words 'feeble and nonsense'.

The use of 'nonsense' as a reply to questions might be described as a fairly insulting rebuttal, as it effectively cuts off discussion and completely denies the validity of the questions. As such, it is clearly a response that underlines very strongly the powerful position of the respondent. Thatcher did, however, also use other formulations to communicate the message 'you are wrong', including 'I do not accept the right hon. Gentleman's interpretation of letters' [55] or 'what the hon. Gentleman says is not correct.' [56]

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[51] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-11-14/Orals-3.html>

[52] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-05/Orals-2.html>

[53] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-02-08/Orals-2.html>

[54] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-12/Orals-2.html>

[55] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-07/Orals-2.html>

[56] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-30/Orals-2.html>

The category 'we are better than you' was proportionally much more common in Thatcher's pre-television sessions than in the televised ones. The following response from the pre-television sessions is an example of a personal statement, directed to Roy Hattersley:

27/07/1989: Column 1168

I shall have to disappoint the right hon. Gentleman by telling him that we had an excellent Cabinet meeting this morning. I remind him that in 10 years this Government have transformed Britain from the Shambles that he and his Government left. [57]

What makes this statement particularly rude is that Thatcher describes the previous Labour Government as 'a shambles', claiming that her own Government have 'transformed' Britain. Thatcher again uses expressions which reinforces the differences between the two sides. This type of statement, which is personal both in its form ('I shall have to disappoint', 'I remind') and content (we had an excellent Cabinet meeting) is much more typical of the pre-television sessions than of the later ones, where impersonal statements completely dominate.

The televised sessions also seem to show an increased carefulness. Most notably, Thatcher uses direct personal insults in the televised sessions much less commonly compared to the pre-television sessions and also to those of Theresa May: the category 'you are stupid' does appear, but is proportionally much less frequent.

In the category 'you are stupid', the recipient of the insult was generally the Leader of the Opposition, Neil Kinnock. Three responses from the pre-tv sessions show a similar pattern: Thatcher accused Kinnock of 'not being capable of asking a question' [58], that he 'resorts to personal abuse because he cannot do anything else [59] and that he had 'neither the intellect nor the guts to ask a real question about the community charge'. [60] These are all personal insults, reflecting a heated argument about the community charge, a highly unpopular policy, and following a clearly arrogant question from Kinnock.

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[57] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-27/Orals-2.html>

[58] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-25/Orals-2.html>

[59] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-20/Orals-2.html>

[60] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-20/Orals-2.html>

A similarity between the pre-tv and televised sessions is that Thatcher criticised the questioners of not listening to her answers. FTAs categorised as 'ignore facts' were much more frequent in the televised sessions, but a similar strategy was used pre-tv as well. The following examples are from both pre-tv and televised sessions:

25/07/1989: Column 849

As usual, the right hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to previous answers before he came up with his prepared question. [61]

19/04/1990: Column 1548

I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman ever listens to replies. [62]

As was the case with the use of the word 'nonsense', Thatcher found this strategy effective pre-tv as well as for the televised sessions. She does not use any rude expressions here, but reinforces the meaning by using the adverbials 'as usual' and 'ever', in a similar way to the earlier noted use of 'always' and 'never'. These strong expressions make the responses more powerful, as well as more impolite.

It may be concluded Thatcher used very powerful expressions in her responses both pre-tv and in the televised sessions; however, her expressions might be characterised as curt but not particularly rude. She often appeared superior, both using dismissive expressions such as 'nonsense' and, especially in the televised sessions, criticising the questioners for not listening or for not having done their homework. After televising, her expression becomes less personal and more careful, but her stylistic characteristics remain the same, combining brevity with strong expressions that underline her position of power.

5.3 Theresa May

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[61] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-25/Orals-2.html>

[62]

The sessions discussed here took place in the time period 20.07.2016-11.10.2017. The sessions were May's first thirty sessions as Prime Minister, and her first task as Prime Minister was to deal with Brexit. The FTAs collected from these sessions relate to the following topics:

Election (11), NHS (11), other (9), Brexit (8), Labour party policy in general (8), social care (7), economy (7), schools (6), Britain (3), budget (3), European Union (3), A&E (2), employment (2), home office (2), housing (2), Scotland (2), Mental health and physical conditions (2), big companies (1), black people treated harshly in criminal justice system (1), bosses (1), child poverty (1), defence (1), foreign workers (1), former Chief Whip (1), health (1), hospital beds (1), increase (1), jobs (1), Lib-Dem party (1), living standards (1), Donald Trump (1), Surrey (1), Twitter questions (1), United States (1) and welfare system (1).

It may be noted that, even with nine utterances classified as 'other', being difficult to define, the range of topics dealt with during May's sessions is considerably shorter than those dealt with during the same length of time in Thatcher's sessions: only 35 topics are listed, compared to Thatcher's 85. This difference reflects partly the specific political circumstances at the start of May's office, at which point a small number of controversial issues, such as Brexit, dominated; it also reflects the much longer replies given by May, leaving room for fewer questions.

Of the 150 FTAs collected from these sessions, 92 are directed to the Leader of Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn. May's most favoured formal category is the statement of fact which, as was the case with Thatcher, completely dominates together with the personal statement. The meaning category, 'bad party' is also the most frequent type of FTA for May, and the strategies 'we are better than you' and 'you are stupid' are also used frequently.

One of the most recurring themes in relation to the category 'bad party' is May's criticism of the Labour Party's spending. She frequently used the word 'bankrupt' to describe their spending (emphasis added):

22/02/2017: Column 1014

What it does not need is a **bankrupt** economy; which is exactly what Labour would

give it. [63]

01/03/2017: Column not included in transcript

And the one thing we know about Labour is that they would **bankrupt** Britain. [64]

15/03/2017: Column 386

If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about balancing the books, why is it

Labour Party policy to borrow half a trillion pounds and **bankrupt** Britain? [65]

All these responses criticise the Labour Party's spending, using the word 'bankrupt' to describe it. May is here to large extent addressing the audience, especially when she starts her response with 'and the one thing we know'. 'We' could refer to the MPs of the Conservative Party, but could also include voters and others in the audience. She here uses repetition of the same keyword, 'bankrupt' in consecutive sessions, to make the message effective, in much the same way as Thatcher was repeating the term 'extravagant'. The points she makes are clearly overstated, but they are calculated to have an entertaining value in relation to the audience.

Another frequent kind of response involves the comparison of May herself and her Government to the Leader of Opposition and the Labour Party. In the following response, May highlights the differences between herself and Corbyn as well as the differences between the two parties:

22/03/2017: Column 857

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[63] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-22/debates/F1374DF8-D48B-464D-B41B-A475A7BFAC14/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[64] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-01/debates/F11237E0-E558-48C2-B944-951ECE390FF7/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[65] >https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-15/debates/7CA65085-5163-4327-96DB-31530471AC5F/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Earlier this week, he recorded a video calling for unity. He called for Labour to 'think of our people first. Think of our movements first. Think of the party first'. That is the difference between him and me; Labour puts the party first, we put the country first.[66]

With this response, May again clearly tries to appeal to the audience by saying that they 'put the country first' and tries to present herself as better than Corbyn. May made a similar response in relation to Brexit:

25/01/2017: Column 289

He talks about standing up for Britain; they cannot speak for themselves and will never speak for Britain. [67]

What makes this response powerful is that May uses the word 'never' and the dismissive phrase 'cannot speak for themselves'; both strategies similar to those used by Thatcher. It is a straightforward and clear response, underlining May's power as Prime Minister. However, other responses by May differ considerably from the typical responses of Thatcher:

07/09/2016: Column 325

Everything that the right hon. Gentleman says tells us all that we need to know about modern Labour: the train has left the station, the seats are all empty, and the leader is on the floor. Even on rolling stock, Labour is a laughing stock. [68]

This response is a personal insult directed at Corbyn. May reinforces her argument by saying that 'everything' Corbyn says makes Labour a 'laughing stock'. The train metaphor, including the image of the leader on the floor, are vivid and memorable rather than factual.

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[66] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-22/debates/EB241B6C-30E8-4093-8904-1BCB774AA191/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[67] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-01-25/debates/BFF963EC-E924-40CF-A22C-9B7DBCB7CE97/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[68] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-07/debates/80AE1384-278F-4E2F-82CB-C88846372061/OralAnswersToQuestions>

In her responses relating to 'bad party', May criticised the Labour Party's spending, highlighted differences between herself and the Leader of Opposition as well as between the two parties and generally tried to appear superior to the Leader of Opposition in a large number of her responses. She did not use many particularly rude words, but described Labour's approach as 'reckless' [69] in a response categorised as 'bad ideas'. A large number of the responses categorised as 'bad ideas' are quite long, and May builds up her arguments before insulting the Opposition, usually at the end of her argument. The following response is a typical example:

08/03/2017: Column 801

On this budget day, we see that we are securing the economy; Labour wants to weaken it. We are working for a fairer society; Labour opposes every single reform. We are fighting for the best deal for Britain; Labour Members are fighting among themselves. That is Labour: weak, divided and unfit to govern this great country. [70]

May starts by highlighting differences between the two sides before ending the response with an insult about the Labour Party. What makes the differences between the two sides so clear is the way in which May presents them. She says that Labour 'wants' to weaken the economy and that they oppose 'every single' reform, again using very powerful words such as 'every'. The final insult lists negative keywords: 'weak, 'divided' and 'unfit'. Again, the intention is to insult and to appear superior. That was also the intention when she responded by saying to Corbyn that 'he can lead a protest; I am leading a country.' [71]

FTAs categorised as 'we are better than you' frequently occurred during these sessions (30), although only 11 responses were categorised with it as the basic meaning. Both Prime Ministers frequently say indirectly that their parties are better than the Opposition; however, May much more frequently makes this point explicit. In her first session as Prime

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[69] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-09-06/debates/EEEE7766-2B15-4F55-B334-DF9DF6EE4910/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[70] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-08/debates/A6DAFF45-E831-4F9C-BB20-454C628B2B3C/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[71] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-01/debates/F40E9D17-79F3-43E8-9689-099CDBB066EC/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Minister, May responded to a question in relation to her being the second ever female Prime Minister of the UK, with a personal statement:

20/07/2016: Column 817

He referred to me as the second woman Prime Minister. In my years in the House, I have long heard the Labour Party asking what the Conservative Party does for women. Well—it just keeps making us Prime Minister. [72]

With this response, May is in fact saying that the Conservative Party is better than the Labour Party when it comes to what it does for women.

In a large number of her responses, no matter which category of FTA, May highlights differences between the two sides and often says that her party is leading Britain forward while the Labour party does 'nothing'. The election was one of the topics discussed in these sessions, and it was clearly important to May to appear superior and to describe the Opposition's achievements in the worst possible way.

May also uses personal insults to a much higher degree than Thatcher, and 25 of her responses were categorised as 'you are stupid'. The following responses were directed to the Leader of Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn:

07/09/2016: Column 325

…Does she know that in a recent poll on who would make a better Prime Minister, 'Don't know' scored higher than Jeremy Corbyn? What we do know is that, whoever wins the Labour party leadership, we are not going to let them anywhere near power again. [73]

16/11/2016: Column 231

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[72] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-07-20/debates/92F38A16-5F4E-4596-A65B-51EB15A49EFD/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[73] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-07/debates/80AE1384-278F-4E2F-82CB-C88846372061/OralAnswersToQuestions>

And what we certainly have got is a Leader of the Opposition who is incapable of leading. [74]

In the response about the Twitter poll, May uses humour when she notes that 'don't know' scored higher than Corbyn. It is quite an entertaining response, and the Twitter poll does of course relate directly to the audience. Again she uses the pronoun 'we', which potentially includes the voters, both in the phrase 'what we do know' and in the promise that 'they' are not going to let them 'anywhere near power again'. These responses, both in their use of humour and their use of inclusive 'we', very clearly reflect a change in relation to Thatcher's strategies, being to a much higher extent directed at the general audience.

6   Discussion

6.1   Using insults as attention-getters: pre and post-television

Ilie (2004: 79) has explained how insults usually occur during sessions of PMQs

> Insults are basically logos-oriented because they are intended to focus attention on, or distract attention from, a particular topic or act by extremely powerful verbalisation. Speakers use insults as attention-getters in order to capture the audience's interest and, hopefully, adherence to challenging views, or, as ways to drift away from the main issue, normally by denying responsibility.

All of the points that Ilie makes are relevant for both Prime Ministers. That insults are used as attention-getters in order to capture the audience's interest might, however, be assumed to be more relevant for May, as PMQs gets more attention in social media and news channels today than it did when Thatcher was Prime Minister.

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[74] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-16/debates/A9D4C09E-BC91-4012-BD58-5377572F6A21/OralAnswersToQuestions>

The effect of televising on PMQs is difficult to gauge on the basis on the basis of small-scale studies, but the material does suggest some indications. The most dramatic change in the material concerns the preferred strategies of Thatcher pre- and post-televising: her utterances become markedly less personal after the onset of televising, both formally (avoiding personal statements) and in terms of meaning. This could imply that Thatcher changed her strategies after the sessions were televised and that she became more concerned with criticising the policies of the Opposition rather than highlighting differences or insulting the Leader of Opposition through personal statements categorised as 'you are stupid'.

Before televising, Thatcher made more personal statements (20) than statements of fact (17) whereas in the televised sessions she made 100 more statements of fact than (148) personal statements (48). May also made more statements of fact (61) than personal statements (38). Personal statement was the second most frequent type of statement for both Prime Ministers and it is clear that both Prime Ministers were personal in quite a few of their responses; however, the distribution suggests that this type of statement might have been more frequent before the introduction of televising.

When looking at responses categorised as 'you are stupid' Thatcher became more polite during the televised sessions. Pre-tv she accused questioners of 'not being capable', of being 'utterly naive' and she told the Leader of Opposition that he had 'neither the guts nor the intellect to ask a real question'. To tell someone that they do not understand could be considered a more polite response. The following responses are from pre- and post-tv sessions:

20/07/1989: Column 516

I note once again that the right hon. Gentleman resorts to personal criticism because he has neither the intellect nor the guts to ask a real question about the community charge. [75]

03/07/1990: Column 855

Once again, the right hon. Gentleman does not understand. [76]

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[75] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-20/Orals-2.html>

[76] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-07-03/Orals-2.html>

Thatcher did not change in terms of pointing out what is bad about the Opposition; however, after the sessions started being televised it clearly became more important to remind the Opposition of the correct facts and to tell them that what they said was wrong. The most important change in terms of meaning categories, when comparing Thatcher pre-tv and in the televised sessions, is that responses categorised as 'ignore facts' and 'say wrong' became much more frequent during the televised sessions. Instead of trying to highlight differences between the two sides Thatcher was clearly more concerned with pointing out that the facts were wrong. On the whole, the changes to her strategies might be seen as indicating a general trend to shift attention away from herself and to the negative aspects of the Opposition party. Accordingly, her insults seem to work less as attention-getters after televising, and more as means of focussing (negative) attention on the other.

May's insults seem to work more as attention-getters than Thatcher's did in the televised sessions. May frequently uses the phrase 'what we know' and in one response she referred to a Twitter poll which of course relates directly to the audience. She is clearly aware of the audience and tries to speak to the voters as well as speaking 'for them'. Thatcher did not use the word 'we' the same way in any of her responses during both subcorpora, but a similar kind of response could be when she said that 'one could never rely on Labour'. 'One' is similar to 'we' and voters could be included in both arguments. Thatcher more frequently started her responses with 'I', which could mean that May had a stronger feeling of connection to the rest of the Conservative Party than Thatcher did. Shaw (2002: 175) explains the use of 'we' as that the Prime Minister often uses the pronoun 'we' to refer to the government whereas the Leader of Opposition rarely refers to his/her party in this way. This probably reflects the fact that the Leader of Opposition is in a less powerful position than the Prime Minister whereas every time the Prime Minister refers to 'we the government' he/she is reinforcing his/her position as the most powerful person in the debating chamber (2002: 175).

6.2. Us and them: characterising the Opposition

Ilie also notes that the insults occur through 'extremely powerful verbalisation' and the most relevant concept of power discussed in this thesis is Wirth-Koliba's (2016: 23) concept of 'us and them'. The political themes are also discussed as isolated topics - especially between

Prime Minister and his/her own MPs - but the concept of 'us and them' is always consistent when it comes to conversations between the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition.

That 'bad party' is the most common meaning category for both Prime Ministers shows that both of them found this the most effective strategy and that it was important for both to point out what was bad about the Opposition. Looking at the other common categories, however, their tactics differ. Thatcher's categories focus fully on the output of the Opposition: their ideas, actions and words ('bad ideas', 'ignore facts', 'act stupid' and say wrong'), showing that it was more important for Thatcher to criticise the ideas and policies of the Opposition than to highlight the differences between the two sides - which was clearly the case for May. A comparison between the 'act stupid' and 'you are stupid' also shows that Thatcher was far more concerned with criticising how the questioners were acting - for example how the questions were asked - than with insulting them personally, which she did extremely rarely. May, on the other hand, has had a much stronger tendency to insult members of the Opposition, for example by targeting their skills of leadership.

The responses categorised as 'say wrong' and 'ignore facts' were, accordingly, considerably more common in the case of Thatcher than for May. Also, that Thatcher made twelve more responses (29) categorised as 'act stupid' than May did (17) means that the former was more concerned with how the Opposition acted rather than criticising them for 'being' stupid. However, when it comes to the category 'you are stupid' May made eight more responses (25) than Thatcher did (17) and clearly insulted the Leader of Opposition directly more often than Thatcher did. The following responses were categorised as 'you are stupid':

Margaret Thatcher

The right hon. Gentleman never conditions his supplementary questions to my previous replies; perhaps that is beyond his capacity to think on his feet. [77]

Theresa May

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[77]<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-06-05/Orals-2.html>

I normally stand at this Dispatch Box and say I will not take any lectures from the right hon. Gentleman, but when it comes to lectures on chaos he would be the first person I turned to. [78]

Theresa May

I recognise that this may very well be the last time that the right hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to face me across the Dispatch Box-certainly if his MPs have anything to do with it. [79]

These responses are similar in that they are all insults directed at the Leader of Opposition but May's responses clearly have a higher degree of directness than Thatcher's. Thatcher uses the words 'perhaps' and 'beyond his capacity', phrasing her insult in highly indirect terms. May's responses are more direct and personal and may be seen as having a stronger entertaining value than Thatcher's response, basically being framed as jokes. May clearly has an audience in mind with this kind of responses.

Another interesting finding is that May made many more responses (30) than Thatcher (12) where she indicated that her party was better than the Opposition, categorised as 'we are better than you', and shows that it was more important to May to highlight the differences between the two sides than it was to Thatcher. Something that Thatcher did not do in any of her responses was to directly claim that the Conservative Party understood working class people better than the Labour Party. May did exactly that in a response to Corbyn and the following example could be categorised as a personal insult:

Theresa May

I have to say to him that the Labour party is drifting away from the views of Labour voters; it is Conservative party that understands working class people.[80]

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[78] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-15/debates/7CA65085-5163-4327-96DB-31530471AC5F/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[79]<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-14/debates/0F81355C-5E9D-459B-B24A-94B26C68F5E7/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[80] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-02/debates/F726F939-39F0-498F-89E5-78DEA27B682A/OralAnswersToQuestions>

Both Prime Ministers spoke negatively about the Opposition; however, the ideological differences were stronger when Thatcher was Prime Minister than they are today. The following response is an example of Thatcher criticising Kinnock for his socialist views:

> Margaret Thatcher
>
> 18/10/1990: Column 1374, 1375
>
> 'Of course he hates choice. Of course he hates higher standards. Of course he hates opportunity. He is a socialist - a crypto-communist.' [81]

These examples show that the concept of 'us and them' is highly relevant for PMQs - both when Thatcher was Prime Minister in 1989 and for May today. May's response is, however, clearly an example of how the political parties today have become more similar than they were when Thatcher was Prime Minister.

Both Thatcher and May criticised the Labour Party's spending. Whereas Thatcher frequently described Labour authorities as 'extravagant' or 'gross', May said several times that Labour would 'bankrupt' the country. Spending was a frequently debated topic in both Prime Ministers' sessions, and was clearly something both thought the Labour Party was not good at.

Another similarity between the Prime Ministers is that they both made use of a phrase which could be described as 'they talk, we act'. In a response to a question from Mr. Conway in session 52 of the televised sessions, Thatcher response was 'they talk, we act' [82]. In the same session Thatcher made a similar response to Kinnock when she said 'Labour members talk; we deliver the goods' [83]. This kind of response was used even more frequently by May who responded as follows to a question from Corbyn about Brexit:

> 16/11/2016: Column 230

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[81] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-10-18/Orals-2.html>

[82] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-07-19/Orals-2.html>

[83] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-07-19/Orals-2.html>

…It seems to be yet another example of how where they talk, we act. They posture, we deliver. We are getting on with the job, he is not up to the job. [84]

May here uses exactly the same kind of response that Thatcher also made, elaborating it further. It is a way of underlining the position of power as Prime Minister and highlighting that they are much better than the Opposition. Both Prime Ministers also make much use of strong expressions such as 'never', 'always', 'nothing' and 'whatsoever'. These expressions reinforce the responses by making the message as simple and free of doubt as possible.

6.3   Responding to criticism: Thatcher and May

Because of the nature of PMQs, the strategies chosen by the Prime Ministers are always conditioned by the questions they receive, and may be seen to represent more or less routined responses to partly unexpected input. Bull and Wells' (2012: 40) have suggested five strategies in which Prime Ministers may react to questions at PMQs: talk up positive face, attack, ignore, rebut and self-justify. The strategies may be illustrated with examples from the present material as follows:

1. 'Talk up positive face': 'Unlike the right hon. Gentleman we believe we should deliver on what the British people want'. [85]
2. 'Attack': 'The right hon. Gentleman comes to Dispatch Box making all sorts of claims. Yet again, what we get from Labour is alternative facts; what it really needs is an alternative leader'. [86]

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[84] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-11-16/debates/A9D4C09E-BC91-4012-BD58-5377572F6A21/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[85] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-10-12/debates/9D603E78-5493-424C-99D9-17613E0C4EB8/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[86] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-08/debates/827A01DC-2F9B-4A6E-81E5-13C1BE07D07B/OralAnswersToQuestions>

3. 'Ignore': 'The right hon. Gentleman comes out with that question almost every time like a cracked gramophone record'. [87]

4. 'Rebut': 'That is absolute nonsense'. [88]

5. 'Self-justify': The poll tax system will reveal to the electorate—[Hon. Members :'Ah!'] The adult community charge—the new system for contributing to local authority expenditure—will be very much fairer, will make local councils accountable to their electorate and will demonstrate which are the extravagant authorities and which are the careful spenders. It is because Labour authorities are extravagant that Labour Members oppose the Community Charge'. [89]

These categories overlap with those used in the present material, and are useful for discussing the ways in which the two Prime Ministers deal with the questions. First of all, it may be noted that FTAs to positive face are by far the most frequent kind of response in the entire material. This is definitely a more effective way for the Prime Ministers to argue for their policies and criticise the Opposition than using FTAs to negative face.

Both Prime Ministers use extensive replies in the categories 'attack' and 'talk up positive face'; the following category is particularly typical of May. On the other hand, the categories 'rebut' and 'ignore' are particularly characteristics of Thatcher, who often responded with words such as 'nonsense'. Both Prime Ministers, however, frequently use the strategy 'attack' (often categorised here as 'bad party' or 'act stupid') to direct attention away from criticism. Thatcher did respond this way both pre-tv and in the televised sessions. The following example is from a pre-tv session:

Neil Kinnock

Does the Prime Minister recall saying that Britain's rate of inflation started to rise because we were following the Deutschmark? During her recent visit to Madrid, did she not agree that her objective was to return to the shadowing of the Deutschmark?

87 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1989-12-05/Orals-2.html>

88 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-07-27/Orals-2.html>

89 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-01-18/Orals-2.html>

Margaret Thatcher

…Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that Labour holds the record for inflation this century? Under Labour, it reached 27 per cent.—more than one quarter of the value of the pound—in one year. [90]

In this example Thatcher clearly accuses the Labour party of inconsistency after being criticised. The concept of 'us and them' is also relevant in relation to this response - Kinnock is challenging Thatcher and the Prime Minister uses extremely powerful verbalisation when she describes it as 'the record for inflation this century'. The following example is from a televised session and shows again how Thatcher responds to criticism with an accusation of inconsistency:

Neil Kinnock

Has not the Prime Minister grasped the idea that her policies are failing to manage demand? They are increasing inflation, decreasing manufacturing investment and clobbering every home buyer in the country. How is that helping to reduce inflation, which is an objective shared by all sensible people but not fulfilled by the Prime Minister and her policies?

Margaret Thatcher

…In any case, we do not take lessons from the right hon. Gentleman on inflation, which rose under the previous Labour Government to 27 per cent.—a record for this century. [91]

Again - Thatcher pointed out that Labour had the record of inflation for this century. Kinnock's question and Thatcher's response are examples of how insults are traded and this particular sequence is also a good example of how power-relations work in PMQs. Kinnock challenges the Prime Minister and she responds by referring to exact figures from Labour's

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[90] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198889/cmhansrd/1989-06-29/Orals-2.html>

[91] <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm198990/cmhansrd/1990-03-13/Orals-2.html>

time in Government. She does not admit to anything that Kinnock said but rather shows that things were worse under Labour rule.

May uses similar attacks, turning the focus on earlier shortcomings of the Opposition party:

Jeremy Corbyn

In 2002, the Prime Minister made a speech to the Conservative Party conference. I remember it very well. I was watching it on television. She described her party as the 'nasty party' and said: Some Tories have tried to make political capital by demonising minorities. This week, her policy chair suggested that people with debilitating conditions were those who were taking pills at home, who suffer from anxiety and were not really disabled. Is that not proof that the 'nasty party' is still around?

Theresa May

How many years were Labour in Government and did nothing about it? Thirteen years! [92]

This is an example of May responding to criticism with an accusation of inconsistency and again points out the thirteen years were the Labour Party 'did nothing'.

Both Prime Ministers frequently used insults as ways to 'drift away from the main issue' (Ilie 2004: 79), usually by ignoring a question and criticising the Opposition or the way in which the question was asked. Both also commonly respond to criticism with 'accusations of inconsistency' (Mohammed 2009: 7).

In relation to Bull and Well's categories, the category 'rebut' (see p. 27) would be the equivalent one to 'ignore facts' and 'say wrong'. Thatcher aims to prove that their accusations are wrong or false and a frequent way of doing this was to respond with the word 'nonsense'. Stylistically, this is perhaps her most characteristic trait compared to May: while May's replies are typically long, and she uses them to 'hold the floor', Thatcher frequently uses

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[92]<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-01/debates/F11237E0-E558-48C2-B944-951ECE390FF7/OralAnswersToQuestions>

short rebuttals such as 'nonsense', signalling maximal certainty rather than attempting to hold the floor as a speaker.

6.4 Being rude: a brief comparison with Tony Blair and David Cameron

As Thatcher and May are the only female Prime Ministers of the UK so far, it would clearly be of interest to compare their impoliteness strategies to those of male Prime Ministers. Such a comparison is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, it will be of interest to note a specific difference that is immediately visible from a brief look at the data. In a BA thesis from 2016, the present writer made a brief study of insults used by Tony Blair and David Cameron, Prime Ministers in the periods [1997-2007 and 2010-2016] respectively. The utterances from Blair and Cameron were also collected from Hansard Parliament. The material suggests that the male Prime Ministers could be seen as considerably more rude and direct in their utterances. While both Thatcher and May use personal insults occasionally, May much more commonly than Thatcher, neither of them ever resort to name-calling; the strategy is, however, relatively commonly used by the male Prime Ministers.

The first example is a response where Blair compared the Leader of Opposition to a robber:

> Tony Blair
> The only difference between the robbers who were caught at the dome yesterday and the right hon. Gentleman is the fact that the Tories are never caught at the scene of the crime.[93]

Here Blair compares the Leader of Opposition to a robber and then includes the rest of the Conservative party in the final part of the statement. In terms of basic meaning the statement could be classified as 'your party is bad' in the sense that he accuses them of being criminal but points out that they are never caught.

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[93]<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmhansrd/vo001108/debtext/01108-02.htm#01108-02_spmin4>

More direclty, Cameron made a personal statement about the Leader of Opposition and called him a 'muttering idiot':

> David Cameron
>
> Which we would not have if we listened to the muttering idiot sitting opposite me. [94]

This is a highly personal insult and in terms of basic meaning it could be classified as 'you are stupid'. The words 'muttering idiot' are openly insulting in a way traditionally not expected in political discourse; at this point the Speaker actually interrupted, saying that 'the Prime Minister will please withdraw the word "idiot". It is unparliamentary.' [95]
Neither Thatcher nor May would use words like 'muttering idiot' during a session of PMQs, and name-calling, as well as direct accusation of crime, are strategies that are completely absent in the material collected for this thesis.

Finally, in a response to a question from Jeremy Corbyn, David Cameron spoke about his mother:

> David Cameron
>
> Ask my mother? I know what my mother would say. She would look across the Dispatch Box and say, "Put on a proper suit, do up your tie and sing the national anthem."[96]

This kind of response, bringing in personal aspects in a joking way, would also seem quite unlike to appear in Thatcher's or May's sessions. At the same time, Cameron's response is another example of how the Prime Minister and Leader of Opposition today strive to respond in a way which would capture the interest of the audience.

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[94]<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2012-05-23/debates/12052368000007/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[95] <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2012-05-23/debates/12052368000007/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[96]<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-02-24/debates/16022449000007/OralAnswersToQuestions>

7   Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to collect and classify all FTAs from a comparable number of PMQs sessions and to compare the impoliteness and power discourse strategies used by to female Prime Ministers, Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. A comparison of Thatcher's pre-tv sessions was made with the televised ones, and Thatcher's responses were compared to May's. A very brief comparison was also made with two male Prime Ministers, Tony Blair and David Cameron.

To point out what was bad about the Opposition was important to both Prime Ministers, and the majority of their responses were statements of fact. Many of the statements of both Prime Ministers were also personal statements; however, Thatcher's use of personal expressions was reduced considerably after televising. The main difference between the two is that, while Thatcher was mostly concerned with telling the questioners that what they said was wrong, May was more concerned with highlighting the differences between the two sides, as well as personally insulting the Leader of Opposition. Thatcher did more FTAs per hour than May did; however, May's responses tended to be longer.

It is clear that both Prime Ministers use their positions to remain in control during the sessions and they both speak very highly about their own policies as well as completely rejecting the policies of the Opposition. Many of their responses are made up of strong expressions and powerful words which reinforce their power. The linguistic strategies chosen by both Prime Ministers aim at minimising doubt, and both favour simple and straightforward expression; however, while Thatcher's responses tend to be brief and often dismissive, May uses imagery and humour to produce entertaining and memorable utterances.

The responses of both Prime Ministers were predominantly FTAs to positive face and FTAs to negative face did rarely occur. The concept of 'us and them' was consistent in both Prime Minister's sequences of questions and responses with the Leader of Opposition and insults were traded in both cases. Both Prime Ministers did also respond to criticism with accusations of inconsistency. While May has been more likely to use direct personal insults, neither Thatcher nor May ever use strategies such as name-calling or accusations of crime, such as were found in a brief study of two male Prime Ministers.

Thatcher's strategies changes relatively little with televising, but she seems to have become less personal as well as more careful and polite after the sessions became televised. May clearly has the audience in mind when making her responses and they clearly have an entertaining value attached to them. The TV audience is very clearly more important now than it was during the first period of televised sessions.

May's active use of the media is perhaps the greatest difference when it comes to the responses of the two Prime Ministers: their strategies are very much influenced by the time in which they occur. In the age of extreme media coverage, May knows how to appeal to the audience and to capture their interest; her responses could be seen as intentionally more entertaining than Thatcher's. As Thatcher was the Prime Minister in the first ever televised sessions of PMQs she was there from the beginning, before the Question Time had fully developed into the media event that it is now. This clearly had an influence on her responses: while they seem to have changed with televising, the great changes have taken place during the 29 years since the first televising.

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