

Put your “big girl” voice on

Parliamentary heckling against female MPs

Maria Stopfner

Institute of Applied Linguistics, European Academy Bolzano

Heckles are an illegitimate, yet common way of commenting directly and immediately on what is being said at the lectern. However, (non-)verbal interjections can also be used to disconcert the speaker, thus scoring points within the parliamentary arena. In these cases, female delegates are often confronted with discriminatory remarks and comments that border on sexism and even misogyny. Based on the extensive literature on gender and discourse, the following paper will focus on gender-related heckles and analyse argumentative structures and topoi that are grounded in sexist stereotypes and conservative role-models. Presuming that these incidents are not isolated instances, the paper will compare and contrast several examples from around the world that have caught public attention.

Keywords: gender, politics, parliamentary discourse, argumentation, gender stereotypes

1. Introduction

According to data provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2017), the average percentage of female delegates in parliaments around the world ranges between 17.4% and 28.1% for both houses combined. Given that in most modern democracies it is not the people themselves but elected representatives who, ideally, debate and reach decisions on their behalf, the voice of women is severely underrepresented. What is more, even though women have become increasingly successful at setting foot in traditionally male-dominated public spheres (UN Secretary-General 2013; Walsh 2013), they are still faced with gender-specific resistance (IPU 2016). In other words, more often than not “glass ceilings [are] cracked but not broken” (Murray 2010, 29).

Regarding women in politics, political science has traditionally concentrated either on descriptive representation, i.e. the proportion of women in politics, or on substantive representation, i.e. whether gender issues are being addressed or not (Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Lovenduski 2005). However, the mere presence of women in parliament is not a guarantee for the advancement of gender equality: As “institutional barriers to political recruitment and promotion are less and less likely to be legal ones” (Randall 1987, 132), informal practices of gender exclusion become more apparent. Especially if women run for higher executive offices, they have to stand a public trial that is orchestrated by party politics and the media and seems to follow a discursive script built on gender stereotypes and institutionalized discursive norms: In order to advance their careers and move up the institutional hierarchy, individuals in general need to abide by the rules of the established community of practice. However, if women act strategically and aggressively, thereby showing characteristics that are deemed to be necessary prerequisites for political leadership, female politicians – unlike their male counterparts (see e.g. Fracchiolla 2011) – risk being perceived and portrayed as cold and calculating, thus diminishing their chances with the electorate (see e.g. Hillary Clinton’s shifting speech styles in the course of her campaigns as described by Jones 2016). On the other hand, if women show too much understanding and compassion, they are accused of being too soft and politically not “viable” (Holtz-Bacha 2009). Women are thus trapped in a double bind that they can hardly escape from (Randall 1987; Childs 2004; Cameron and Shaw 2016).

The present article is not intended to give evidence for or against feminine or masculine styles in politics, as this would necessitate more extensive quantitative and qualitative research. Instead, choosing from a series of incidents that caught public attention, the qualitative analysis will exemplify the ways in which different parliamentary communities of practice interfere with women as public speakers. By comparing cases from several national parliaments, the paper aims to clarify whether the discerned discriminatory techniques are limited to a specific national debating culture, or can be seen as general, i.e. “globalized” strategies to deter women from voicing their opinion in parliament. In a second step, the analysis will take a look at the direct and indirect effects of these interruptions, taking into account the immediate reaction by the female speaker and the parliamentary audience as well as the subsequent reaction in traditional and social media that made these incidents broadly known.

In view of the thematic scope of the Special Issue “Democracy and Discriminatory Strategies in Parliamentary Discourse: Anti-Semitism, Racism and Sexism”, the article will hence centre less on what can be said, and focus more on who is able to express their views and ideas in parliament. By exposing discursive practices in parliament that may serve to silence political voices that

only seldom get to hold the parliamentary floor in the first place, the analysis will uncover “hierarchies of belonging” (Henderson 2007) in different parliamentary cultures around the world. What is more, the article will not only critically examine democratic quality within but also outside of the plenary halls, thus evaluating the role of media as Fourth (and Fifth) Estate in democratic societies.

2. Parliamentary communities of practice

Democracy is built on the public discussion of controversial ideas and offers fora, such as the houses of parliament, in which opposing political groups can officially meet and reach a consensus or at least a compromise capable of achieving a majority (Sarcinelli 2011). National parliaments, though founded in the same democratic spirit and running along similar party logics, have developed different debating cultures (Ilie 2004, 2012; Wodak 2009; Stopfner 2013a,b, 2017). According to Ilie (2004, 72), studying informal practices can give insights into cross-cultural “moral and social standards, prejudices, taboos, as well as value judgements of different social and political groups and individuals in a community”, and disorderly parliamentary behaviour is precisely where “gender-related asymmetries in parliamentary power balance tend to emerge” (Ilie 2013, 501). The rules of engagement that guide informal institutionalized parliamentary language practices are established over time and defined by the parliamentary community of practice.

The concept of “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002) was originally designed in the context of situated learning and knowledge management. It denominates groups of people who interact on an ongoing basis in view of a common concern and, in the course of their engagement, develop “a body of common knowledge, practices, and approaches.” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002, 5). This concept was adopted by linguists in order to attend to “the level of social organization at which people experience the social order on a personal and day-to-day basis, and at which they jointly make sense of that social order” (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003, 58), thus focussing on the local construction of intra- and intergroup relations and identity through interaction and social practice (Walsh 2013). Within these communities, some members are “more ‘core’ than others”, which, according to Walsh (2013, 2), is based “on the degree to which individuals align themselves with the shared interests, activities and viewpoint(s) of the community as a whole”, but which can also be seen as the degree to which the community expects individuals to fit in, i.e. to share its views and principles, and is prepared to accept them on equal terms.

Until today and despite a general appeal for gender equality, women are still a minority in parliament today. Since women had to fight for access to parliament,

they were once newcomers to an already established, essentially male parliamentary community of practice. As a result, women are expected to be unaccustomed to the presumed masculinist ways of a gendered workplace such as parliament. They are, basically, assumed to lack in assertiveness and institutionalized rudeness that are considered necessary for doing politics in a traditionally “all-male club” such as parliament (Shaw 2000; Childs 2004; Ilie 2013). The notion of masculine and feminine political styles, which is not only supported by the media, but can also be found in scholarly research on women in politics, is an expression of what Cameron and Shaw (2016, 5) call the ‘different voice’ ideology of gender, language and politics. Language ideologies (Silverstein 1979) are sets of beliefs about language that involve knowledge and opinion and appear to be common sense within a community, i.e. self-evident and only natural (on ideology see also van Dijk 1998). In line with a supposedly different communicative style of women in politics, female MPs for example consider themselves to be less aggressive and combative than men and feel to be more collaborative and consensual instead (Childs 2004). The question remains, though, to what extent the ideology of a ‘different voice’ serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy and, more importantly, whether it may set limits to the way in which female politicians can contribute to the legislative process.

Within parliaments, heckling is one example of informal disorderly parliamentary behaviour, albeit a very common one. Parliamentary heckling is a means for those in the plenary who are formally compelled to assume the role of listeners to comment directly on what is being said by the official speaker (Stopfner 2013a and b). According to Burkhardt (2005, 92), it can, therefore, be defined as verbal back-channel behaviour within spoken large-group communication. Prior research on women in politics has shown that negative reactions towards women as public speakers in parliament range from purposely disinterested audiences to barracking crowds (Shaw 2000). In his analysis of heckling in the German Bundestag, Burkhardt (1992) furthermore discovered that not only the quantity, but also the quality of parliamentary heckling changes as soon as a woman is standing at the lectern: He states that female speakers are more likely to be ironized and ridiculed, insinuating that they cannot be taken seriously. Ilie (2013) found the same technique for the British House of Commons and the Swedish Riksdag, as issue-focused discussions turn into person-focused parliamentary confrontations when addressing female speakers. Due to the adversarial setting and the party logics of scoring points, attacking the ethos of the speaker is not uncommon for parliamentary debates. However, the results of these studies imply that women around the globe still have to fight against gender stereotypes in order to keep the parliamentary floor.

3. Analysing parliamentary heckling and gender

Gender “is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 10), i.e. something which emerges in social interaction, “both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126). Gender is, consequently, not so much an individual property as a joint accomplishment that involves “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘nature’” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126). In this way, language as gendered social practice is an element of power that imposes limits to the way men and women can partake in society. Precisely because gender “seems natural, and beliefs about gender seem to be obvious truth”, it constitutes one of the most powerful ideologies that pervades “our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 9) and goes mostly unnoticed. This is why research on language and gender is an ongoing imperative, especially in the context of parliament, because “ideology is truly effective only when it is disguised” (Fairclough 2013, 89).

According to Wodak (2015, 699), current studies on language and gender follow three major strands: studies concerned with gender diversity that contest the idea of men and women as homogeneous groups; studies on how gender is performed and displayed in interaction; and, finally, studies that investigate how specific contexts influence gendered language patterns. As far as methodology is concerned, Bucholtz (2003) holds that discourse analysis has become the main approach to the study of language and gender. However, as to the questions of what constitutes relevant and legitimate contexts for analysis, and how language, society, culture and power relate to each other, different research traditions have found diverse, sometimes opposing answers (Bucholtz 2003): Interactional sociolinguists, rooted in anthropology, consider context “in every sense” (Tannen 1996, 46) and focus on culturally induced differences in (masculine and feminine) communication styles. Conversation analysis, on the contrary, focusses on how social configurations are constructed in interaction, and strongly opposes attempts to assume any sense of context that is not made relevant by the participants of the conversation (Schegloff 1997). Critical discourse analysis, finally, adopts an open political stance, as it wants to raise public consciousness about “how language contributes to the domination of some people by others” (Fairclough 2013, 3) not only in terms of overt manipulation, but also via “subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable” (van Dijk 1993, 254). Within a feminist agenda, critical discourse analysis, consequently, has to critique “discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order – relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and

disempower women as a social group” (Lazar 2007, 145) in order to implement social reform. Critical discourse analysis, furthermore, conceptualizes discourse as texts in context, which necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, combining socio-political background with linguistic analysis, as well as a call for intertextual, or interdiscursive research based on the concept of recontextualization that “incorporates the discursive dynamics and modification of arguments, themes, topoi, and speech acts in the transformation from one genre to another or from one public space to another” (Wodak and Weiß 2005, 127). Because of its open stance towards social change, its interdisciplinary idea of context and its interdiscursive approach towards language data, critical discourse analysis provides an adequate tool in order to evaluate parliamentary discourse in view of gender equality, and, hence, democratic quality.

In the tradition of critical discourse analysis, the aim of the following qualitative analysis is to discern discriminatory argumentative structures and topoi not only in parliamentary heckles against female speakers, but also in the (mediated) public debate that follows these instances. It is assumed that in these cases, gender is used as a relevant social categorization in order to delegitimize women as public speakers in parliament. Topoi that are most likely to warrant the claim that women are unfit to speak in public are normative arguments by definition. Persuasive definitions are typically used in advertising and election campaigns and assume the following scheme (Kienpointner 1992, 254):

- (a) If product X is defined by Y, then the purchase of product X is advisable.
 - (b) Product X is defined by Y.
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- (c) The purchase of product X is advisable.

In the communicative context of gender-related disruptive parliamentary heckling aimed at silencing female speakers, the argumentative scheme has to be adjusted as follows:

- (a') If speaker X is not defined by Y, then speaker X does not need to be heard.
 - (b') Speaker X is not defined by Y.
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- (c') Speaker X does not need to be heard.

It is furthermore assumed that, if gender is a relevant social category in the debates, attribute Y will mirror common gender stereotypes. Stereotypes (Lippman 1922; van Dijk 1984) help us to make sense of the world, offering ready-made categories through simplification, generalization and naturalization. In view of the categorization of people, stereotypes can have far-reaching consequences, as they reduce the individual to a set of (real or imagined) characteristics, applied to the group as such. These characteristics, however, assume the status of “ideological prescriptions” (Talbot 2003, 473) against which the individual and her/his behaviour are

judged. In this way, stereotyping is closely related to the construction of in- and out-groups, splitting society in normal and acceptable against abnormal and unacceptable (Talbot 2003).

Core dimensions relevant for gender stereotyping are agency, i.e. competence, instrumentality, and independence, versus communion, i.e. expressivity, warmth, and concern for others (Haines, Deaux and Lofaro 2016, 2). A more detailed analysis by Deaux and Lewis (1983) distinguishes between traits, physical characteristics, role behaviour, and occupations as relevant components of gender, which makes it possible to “distinguish between aspects of gender that might be relevant in different circumstances and could change independently over time” (Haines, Deaux and Lofaro 2016, 2). In the following sections, these dimensions of gender stereotyping will be used to structure the qualitative analysis of topoi within incidents, where women as public speakers were heckled based on their gender.

4. Heckling women as public speakers

The data for the following analysis is retrieved from the official transcripts of the national parliamentary debates as well as from output by social and traditional media that refers to the selected parliamentary incidents.

4.1 Into the lion’s den: Heckles focussing on personality traits

The first case, which will be analysed in more detail, is taken from the Canadian House of Commons, where, according to Gridale (2011, 38), “heckling is a force”, and involves Canada’s current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chrystia Freeland. In 2014, when the incident occurred, Freeland, a member of the then oppositional Liberal Party, was still a newcomer to the House, despite being a former business journalist and chairing the liberal Council of Economic advisors.

On February 4, Freeland is about to ask a question during Question Period based on an official report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with the aim of putting the Minister of State and Finance on the spot about the economic prospects of Canada, Freeland’s special field of expertise. However, as soon as she raises her voice, she is met with heckles by the audience, as can be seen in the following excerpt (passage 1 to 8) of the Canadian Hansard (House of Commons Debates, Hansard 147/041, 2nd session, 41st parliament, February 4, 2014, 2554):

- (1) **Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this month the IMF released a report on Canada’s economic outlook. The story the IMF tells is of a lost decade. To quote from the report, “Canada’s exports have barely

recovered from the Great Recession...”. The IMF warns that low productivity growth has, and *I quote the IMF report*, “eroded Canada’s external –”

- (2) **Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!
- (3) **The Speaker:***Order, please.* The hon. member for Toronto Centre still has the floor. *I would appreciate a little bit of order.* The hon. member for Toronto Centre.
- (4) **Ms. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Speaker, I see the government is not interested in the view of IMF economists, but I think Canadians are. *Let me continue to quote from that report. The IMF warns –*
- (5) **Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!
- (6) **The Speaker:***Order, please. There are quite a lot of interruptions. The hon. member has run out of time, and I do not think she got to the question. I will give her the floor back to put her question very quickly so that the minister can answer.* The hon. member for Toronto Centre.
- (7) **Ms. Chrystia Freeland:** Mr. Speaker, why does the Minister of Finance continue to ignore this harsh reality, *as documented by the IMF*, at the cost of Canadian jobs and economic growth?
- (8) **Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question *from the new member of Parliament*. We know her policy. We know the platform she ran on: amen to higher taxes. Thanks to the economic action plan, Canada has the strongest economic performance during both the recession and the recovery. Over 1 million new jobs have been created, of which nearly 90% are full-time and 80% are in the private sector. *The IMF and OECD both project that Canada will have among the strongest growth in the G7 in the years ahead.* Amen to those facts.

The official transcript does not, by all means, capture the raucousness with which Freeland’s question is met. As can be seen in the video recordings of the debate (available online via the Canadian House of Common’s website), the level of noise in the parliamentary plenary resembles what Grisdale (2011, 38) calls “a wall of sound”: Freeland stands no chance of making herself heard and is not able to go on with her quote from the IMF report that, constituting an argument from authority, would lend weight to her accusation of the government’s economic policy (passage 1). Similarly, Burkhardt (1992) discovered in his analysis of gendered interactions in the German Bundestag that female speakers had to face more rowdiness, jeers and unrest than their male colleagues, which made it difficult for them to get their arguments across. These results concur with further research on gender,

where interruptions have been a frequent point of reference as an example for ways of exercising power in interactions (Tannen 1996; Shaw 2000).

The Speaker reacts to the first interruption by calling the audience to order, though in a rather restrained manner (passage 3). Freeland resumes, but, again, has to break off in mid-sentence (passage 4) because of the ongoing turmoil in the audience (passage 5). The Speaker intervenes, once more, calling the plenary to order (passage 6). In the meantime, however, Freeland has run out of speaking time and is forced to phrase her question now *very quickly* (passage 6): As can be seen in passage 7, Freeland has to reformulate her question, reducing the quote from the IMF to a simple reference (*as documented by the IMF*) without verbatim excerpts as illustrative proof for her allegations. The Minister has, consequently, little trouble refuting the accusations and defending the government, mentioning the IMF himself as relevant authority (passage 8). With regard to his female opponent, the Minister highlights the fact that Freeland is a *new member of Parliament* (passage 8), thereby making status officially more salient for the interactional sequence than gender.

Outside the parliament, the scene in the House of Commons and the treatment of Chrystia Freeland as speaker subsequently sparked a lively debate on Twitter, as people tried to find reasons for the behaviour of the plenary crowd. Fault was found in the manner in which the question was initially framed – *too long & detailed for 60 sec slot* (18:54, 4 Feb 2014) – and the physical voice of the speaker – *women's voices tend to rise* (19:00, 4 Feb 2014) – relating the incident to the mistakes of an inexperienced newcomer in parliament. Yet, there were other tweets that interpreted the tumultuous reaction in the plenary as a defensive act by the members of the governmental party (e.g. *The Conservatives really didn't want @cafreeland [Chrystia Freeland] to ask her question* 11:52, 4 Feb 2014) in the face of a strong, renowned and competent political opponent (e.g. *highly regarded by economic heavyweights*. 12:03, 4 Feb 2014) whose voice had to be considered as a viable threat to the conservatives (e.g. *She was pretty impressive*. 12:01, 4 Feb 2014). However, the tweet that caught most public attention was written by a journalist for *The Vancouver Observer* who ironically infantilises Freeland and casts doubt on her capacity to assert herself in parliament by saying: *Put your "big girl" voice on for #QP @cafreeland [Chrystia Freeland] ... the Hon. Members water glasses are shattering ... #cdnpoli* (as cited in Maloney 2014, n.p.).

Research on gender stereotypes (Kite, Deaux and Haines 2008, 207) found that women are considered to be more emotional, gentle, understanding, and devoted, whereas men are seen as more active, competitive, independent, and self-confident. Telling Freeland *to put her "big girl" voice on* is reflective of these stereotypical attributes and alludes to the concept of viability that is frequently found in discourse on the prospects of women and men in politics (Holtz-Bacha

2009). The journalist, furthermore, makes fun of Freeland's physical voice (*the Hon. Members water glasses are shattering*) that merely increases in pitch, but is not strong enough to make herself heard. Interestingly, Burkhardt (1992) repeatedly found the same delegitimizing reference to female high-pitched voices in heckles within the German Bundestag. All in all, the tweet constitutes a fallacious ad hominem attack that is exclusively based on gender stereotypes. The topos he uses follows the structure of persuasive definitions and can be reconstructed as follows:

(a') If Chrystia Freeland does not have self-assertion, then Chrystia Freeland does not need to be heard.

(b') Chrystia Freeland does not have self-assertion.

(c') Chrystia Freeland does not need to be heard.

The basic argumentative structure is fleshed out with the common-place idea that in order to be politically viable politicians need to assert themselves and come out on top. This tweet can generally be seen as the verbalization of the general bedlam with which women at the lectern are confronted: Based on the same topos and common-place ideas, female speakers have to prove themselves worthy of parliament by fighting their way through the racket and making themselves heard. In this respect, the parliamentary community of practice does resemble a "big boys" club (Grisdale 2011) and speaking publicly at the lectern constitutes one of its initiation rites.

What followed this tweet, was, first, a tweeted reply by Chrystia Freeland herself: *This is 2014!* [...] (11:56, 4 Feb 2014). Soon, others chimed in, most importantly Michelle Rempel, then conservative Minister of State, calling the author of the offensive tweet a *#sexist #jerk* (12:05, 4 Feb 2014). Half an hour after Rempel's tweet, the journalist apologized on twitter and, what is more, also published an article in the *Vancouver Observer*, characterizing his tweet as *an immature comment and a mistake that I deeply regret* (Millar 2014, n.p.). Within the debate on Twitter, the initial "big girl" tweet was almost unanimously condemned as completely out of line and, ultimately, sexist, e.g. *So ridiculous!! @cafreeland [Chrystia Freeland] is right, it's 2014 – apology aside, I don't know HOW @[journalist] could have thought this is okay #sexist* (13:16, 4. Feb 2014). In this way, interactive online media served as a crowd-based Fifth Pillar for democratic quality even outside the plenary halls.

4.2 Feminine wiles: Heckles focussing on physical characteristics

Apart from having trouble getting their voices heard in parliament, women also commonly have to cope with demeaning sexist comments focussing on their outward appearance, for which Burkhardt (1992, 298) provides some examples taken from the German Bundestag: *Sie sehen besser aus, als Sie reden* [...]! ('You

look better than you speak [...]!'), *Sie hat sich extra die Jeans angezogen!* ('She has put on jeans especially for this occasion!'). Grisdale (2011, 40) reports similar heckles for the Canadian parliament, e.g. *That was dumber than you look*. Using outward appearances as a basis for challenging the importance and seriousness of the speaker is also at the core of the following incident, taken from the French *Assemblée Nationale*.

On July 17, 2012, Cécile Duflot, member of the French Greens and by then Minister of Territorial Equality and Housing, walks up to the microphone in order to speak about an infrastructural project. Duflot is wearing a floral dress, which the members of the centre-right "Union pour un mouvement populaire" (UMP) comment upon by hooting and wolf-whistling at her (see recordings of the debate, available online via the video portal of the *Assemblée Nationale*). In an interview with the French quality paper *Le Figaro* on the day after the incident (July 18, 2012), Republican MP Patrick Balkany, however, denied hooting and whistling at Cécile Duflot, maintaining that he and his colleagues had merely admired her looks and insinuating that Duflot had changed her looks on purpose in order to distract the audience. What is more, Balkany reasoned that, if Duflot had not had wanted them to look, she would have had to dress differently (*si elle ne veut pas qu'on s'y intéresse, elle peut ne pas changer de look*). Balkany's reasoning is an example of victim-perpetrator reversal, an argumentative strategy that is frequently used to turn rapists "into the role of passive victims who were seduced and could not defend themselves against their sexual drives" (Wodak and Busch 2004, 116). In this way, women, perversely, become guilty of having been raped, because they are accused of provoking male aggression by their behaviour and, in the case of Cécile Duflot, by wearing a floral dress.

Research on gender stereotypes has shown (Kite, Deaux and Haines 2008, 207) that attributes concerning women's and men's physical appearance are especially strong and marked. But while men's physical characteristics are only occasionally a matter of discussion in politics, female politicians' looks remain a focal point of interest, especially as regards media coverage. However, reducing the individual to mere looks is one of the features of objectification that is, ultimately, disempowering (Lakoff 2003). Objectification is especially harmful for women in politics, as they are reduced to the traditional role of someone "who is seen rather than one who sees and acts" (Lakoff 2003, 173), which makes them once more seem unfit for (pro-)active political work. As a matter of fact, agency, i.e. whether the individual is expected to act competently and independently based on their gender, ranks among the core dimensions relevant for gender stereotyping. As agency is predominantly ascribed to men and not women (Haines, Deaux and Lofaro 2016, 2), the argumentative scheme behind objectification could thus be formulated as follows:

- (a') If Cécile Duflot is not agentive, then Cécile Duflot does not need to be heard.
 (b') Cécile Duflot is not agentive.
 (c') Cécile Duflot does not need to be heard.
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As any elaborate discussion of appearance, be it positive or negative, serves to objectify the individual (Lakoff 2003), the only way to level the odds between male and female politicians is to either intensify the focus on masculine looks and its importance for politics, or simply to just stop debating outward appearances in politics altogether, thus giving the matter the attention and relevance it deserves.

4.3 Clucking hens: Heckles focussing on role behaviour

According to Talbot (2003), women are, on the one hand, faced with “good” stereotypes, such as being warm and understanding. These good stereotypes, however, put pressure on women to live up to these reductive expectations as ideological prescriptions of society towards their gender. On the other hand, they are also confronted with “bad” stereotypes that sanction “unwomanly” behaviour, such as trying to dominate or taking control (Talbot 2003). Especially in view of language use, women are also ascribed a series of negative stereotypes, such as nagging, gossiping, or chattering. Perceiving women as too talkative is, however, not put in relation to how much men talk, but has to be interpreted against the backdrop of a gendered stereotypical ideal: female silence (Talbot 2003, 473).

The stereotypical idea of women as mindless chatterboxes is at the basis of the following incident, again taken from the French Assemblée Nationale. On October 8, 2013, Véronique Massonneau, a member of the French green party, rises to speak about the future and equity of the French pension system. While she is giving reasons for not supporting the motion to prolong working life, she is interrupted by a member of the centre-right “Union pour un mouvement populaire” (UMP) who is imitating chicken sounds: *Cot, cot, cot codec!* (Compte rendu integral, Assemblée nationale XIVe législature, Session ordinaire de 2013–2014, Deuxième séance du mardi, Oct 8, 2013, n.p.). The heckles by the UMP members are doubly insulting, as the chicken metaphor not only invokes the idea of incessant chattering, but also carries the connotation of being empty-headed and irrational. By this, the heckle follows the logics of common gender stereotypes that ascribe abstract thinking and problem solving skills to men, not women (Kite, Deaux and Haines 2008, 207). In this way, the French cackling scene resembles incidents reported by Burkhardt (1992, 302) where German MPs ironically heckled female colleagues as *sehr intelligent* (‘very intelligent’) and claimed: *Da lohnt sich noch nicht einmal ein Zwischenruf!* (‘This isn’t even worth to be heckled!’). The argumentative structure behind the incident can thus be reconstructed as follows:

- (a') If Véronique Massonneau is not rational/substantial, then Véronique Massonneau does not need to be heard.
 (b') Véronique Massonneau is not rational/substantial.
 (c') Véronique Massonneau does not need to be heard.

Even as Massonneau resumes her speech, the delegates of the UMP still continue to heckle her. Other members of parliament start commenting on the behaviour of the UMP members, marking it as unacceptable and casting doubt on the accountability of the hecklers: *Ce comportement est honteux, scandaleux!* ('This behaviour is shameful, scandalous!'), *Complètement avinés!* ('Completely drunk!'). At the end of Massonneau's speaking time, the Speaker feels the need to interrupt the session for three minutes and resumes the sitting by dealing out criticism and issuing a warning linking inappropriate social behaviour in parliament with election outcome and placing responsibility for the raise of populism on those members of parliament who do not adhere to parliamentary standards. As a result, the Speaker's conference reprimanded the MP responsible for the cackling sounds, withholding a quarter of his parliamentary allowance.

The incident was initially made public on Twitter by a member of the Greens and swiftly gained momentum under the hashtag #*PouleGate* ('#ChickenGate') – even more so, because traditional media, print as well as radio and television, not only reported on the events in parliament, but also repeatedly referred to the Twitter debate online. The community on Twitter almost unanimously condemned the behaviour of the UMP member (e.g. *Imiter une poule à l'assemblée, avant d'être sexiste, c'est surtout très con. #PouleGate*, 11:12, 9 Oct 2013 – 'Imitating a chicken in parliament is not just sexist, but first and foremost very idiotic. #ChickenGate'), and appreciated the verdict by the Speaker's conference. However, some commenters were less critical of the individual heckle as such, than of parliament and its members in general, e.g. *Triste représentation d'une démocratie décadente* (14:53, 9 Oct 2013) ('Sad representation of a decadent democracy'). What can be derived from such tweets supports the view taken by the Speaker of the Assemblée Nationale: The public impression of inappropriate behaviour in parliament does play into the hands of groups that aim to destroy the democratic system, because it undermines institutional credibility.

4.4 Wife and mother: Heckles focussing on occupation

As far as typically male and typically female occupations are concerned, men are stereotypically seen as leaders and financial providers, while women are those who tend to the house and take care of the family (Kite, Deaux and Haines 2008, 207). This stereotypical division of labour cannot only be found in heckles, but is also

reflected in the tendency “to relegate [women] to those fields considered to be the logical extension of traditional feminine concerns – health, welfare, education, culture, the family, consumer affairs” (Randall 1987, 112). In this way, most parliamentary sittings are gendered to begin with. What is more, an analysis of sittings of the Austrian National Council shows that women themselves heckle more often during debates on topics concerning family and education, than e.g. during the budget statement (Stopfner 2013a).

In the following excerpt (passage 9) taken from a debate in the Austrian National Council, Barbara Zwerschitz from the Greens is speaking about the problems of working mothers, criticising the lack of childcare facilities. During her speech, Zwerschitz comes under heavy attack by a female heckler, Ridi Steibl from the conservative People’s Party (Stenographisches Protokoll, 14. Sitzung des Nationalrates der Republik Österreich, XXIII. Gesetzgebungsperiode, Wednesday, March 7, 2007, 94):

- (9) Abg. Zwerschitz: [...] Ich fordere jetzt von der Regierung, dass sie endlich einmal etwas tut außer Luftblasen ausstoßen. [...] (Abg. Steibl – in Richtung der Abg. Zwerschitz –: Ich glaube, die hat Probleme mit der Familie! Ich glaube, die hat keinen Mann, der ihr helfen kann! So viel Blödsinn, was sie da erzählt! [...])
 (‘I demand from the government that they finally do something besides producing pipe dreams. [...] (MP Steibl – in the direction of MP Zwerschitz – : I think she has trouble with her family! I think she doesn’t have a husband who can help her! She is talking so much rot!’)

In order to delegitimize the contribution of the speaker, Steibl recurs to typically female role models, implying that Zwerschitz has troubles within her family and is lacking in male support. The respective argumentative structure can be formulated as follows:

- (a’) If Barbara Zwerschitz does not have a trouble-free family life/a husband, then Barbara Zwerschitz does not need to be heard on the topic of family issues.
 (b’) Barbara Zwerschitz does not have a trouble-free family life/a husband.
 (c’) Barbara Zwerschitz does not need to be heard on the topic of family issues.

Similar heckles cannot only be found in Burkhardt’s analysis of heckles in the German Bundestag (1992, 302): *Haben Sie zu Haus überhaupt einen Mann?* (‘Do you even have a husband at home?’), but also in a completely different part of the world: In June 2014, Japanese politician Ayaka Shiomura is speaking at the lectern of the Tokyo assembly, criticising the city government for lacking support for pregnant women and young mothers, when two heckles from a member of the audience interrupt her: one telling her to get married, the other asking whether

she can bear children. Due to the heckles, Shiomura briefly falters in her speech and appears to be emotionally shaken, as can be seen from the audio-visual material of the incident still available online e.g. via CNN (Ripley and Henry 2014). The incident made international headlines and, finally, resulted in an official apology by the member of the conservative party who had voiced the comments.

5. Conclusions

The general strategy behind parliamentary heckling against women as public speakers can be subsumed as follows: In order to challenge the female speaker, the (conservative) parliamentary community of practice refers to traditional gender stereotypes, which, in case of the incidents chosen for this article, are self-assertion, agency, rationality and matrimony. Applying the normative argumentative structure of persuasive definition, these stereotypes serve as a (false) premise for the definition of speakers that do not need to be heard in parliament. By attributing these gendered characteristics to the respective female speaker, the warranted conclusion follows: The respective female speaker does not need to be heard in parliament.

All in all, it seems as if, even though female and male MPs officially are members of the same community of practice, they appear to “belong to that community on different terms of participation” (Shaw 2000, 402). While male parliamentarians by virtue of their gender are expected to be (or, in the case of newcomers, become) core members of the community to begin with, women need to prove that they fit in and that their contributions are worthy of being heard in parliament. Based on the incidents analysed in this article, the value of female contributions seems to be especially hard to prove with respect to centre-right parties that build their political self-concept on traditional role-models. The behaviour of the conservative community of practice in parliament and the subsequent reaction by the public demonstrates that gender is a divergent concept and a social process that “is created and renegotiated in interpersonal relationships and encouraged and maintained through social structures” (Weatherall 2002, 85). As such, it is subject to change, so that “there may be a time in the future when male and female are just two of several sex/gender categories [...]” (Weatherall 2002, 7) and maybe there will also be a time when referring to the gender of the speaker in order to disprove a point of argument in parliamentary debates is as absurd as referring to the speaker’s eye colour.

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Address for correspondence

Maria Stopfner
Drususallee 1
39100 Bozen
Italy

Maria.stopfner@eurac.edu

Biographical notes

Maria Stopfner is working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the European Academy (Eurac Research) in Bozen/Bolzano, Italy. For her work in the field of language and politics she received the Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler Award, the Erwin Wenzl Recognition Award and the Dr. Otto Seibert Award. Her research focusses on the interrelationship between discourse, media and politics, with a special focus on new rhetoric and argumentation.

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