

## 7 Strategy Ascriptions in Public Mediation Talks

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### 7.1 Introduction

Action formation has long been the focus of research on actions in interaction (cf. Schegloff 2007) and can be analyzed in terms of turn design and bodily resources. The ascription of an action instead can typically only be inferred by the *next-turn proof procedure* (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974), i.e., by observing next speakers' subsequent reactions to an action. It is influenced by several factors such as turn design, sequential position, and the overarching activity and social roles of the participants (Levinson 2013). Producing a turn in third position (a confirmation or disconfirmation) is crucial for establishing intersubjectivity: "An intersubjectively shared and socially valid action ascription thus is neither warranted by the agent's intention nor by the recipient's response but is the outcome of an interactional process of mutual displays and possibly negotiation" (Deppermann & Haugh, Chapter 1 in this volume, p. 000). However, establishing intersubjectivity about ongoing actions in a three-step process is sometimes not feasible for or not a primary goal for participants. Not feasible, because in some (especially institutional and public) settings, specific rules may partly determine or completely formalize the turn-taking system and do not allow immediate reactions to prior speakers. And not the main goal, because in specific situations, e.g., in conflict talk, other motives like self-positioning or winning an argument are more relevant to participants. In this case, the specific type of interaction (see Levinson 2013) and its intrinsic characteristics (such as a conflict between different parties and different relevant ideologies, see Deppermann 2015) can systematically enter into ascribing actions to prior talk in second position. Being on one side of opposing parties may influence both, which "kind of action [is presupposed] as a condition" (Deppermann & Haugh, Chapter 1 in this volume, p. 18) for a response, and which kind of action the response itself constitutes.

In public debates, speakers regularly ascribe strategies to participants of another party as a practice of overt action ascription. When speakers employ what I call 'strategy ascriptions', they overtly ascribe an action and spell out what kind of interactional plan they think opponents pursue, typically by

exposing their means (rhetorical devices, asking challenging questions, the structure of logical conclusions, etc.) and their ends (in the sense of underlying intentions such as confusing others, concealing uncomfortable truths, etc.). Consequently, ascribing strategies goes hand in hand with overtly claiming ('You do X in order to do Y') or at least tacitly indicating that speakers use those strategies intentionally. Ascribing strategies does not only reveal how participants construe prior talk, but by accusing opponents of covert intentions and questionable means of achieving them, is itself a vehicle for an action.

In this chapter, I examine the ascription of strategies in a public mediation setting that resembles a (mediated) public debate. In Section 7.1.1, I sketch the discursive framework of public debates and the particular properties and conditions for strategy ascription it establishes. Section 7.1.2 deals with strategies as a discursive practice and Section 7.1.3 specifically with strategy ascriptions in public debates. In Section 7.2, I introduce the complex participation framework and turn-taking system of the mediation talk under examination. Section 7.3 is devoted to analyses of sequences in which speakers in a public mediation session ascribe a strategy to an opponent. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the practices of strategy ascriptions in public mediation sessions and of the relevance of this chapter as a contribution to studies on (mediated) public debates and action ascription (Section 7.4).

### 7.1.1 *Public Debate and Its Confrontational Characteristics*

In specific situations and types of interactions, participants of opposing sides exchange arguments. This applies to informal conflict talk, but even more to some types of institutional and public interaction, such as courtroom interaction (Komter 2013), mediation talks (Nothdurft 1997), TV debate shows (Hutchby 1997), news interviews (Clayman 2013), and political debates (Burkhardt 2003). In many of these settings, such as courtroom interactions and mediations, coming to some kind of agreement is imposed upon participants as one main goal of the (mediated) conflict. The roles of participants such as judges and mediators are grounded in the institutional characteristics of the interaction type, and even adversative moves and actions (like accusations and defenses in courtroom interaction, cf. Komter 2013) serve this overarching main goal. This is different in some confrontational formats like specific TV talk shows, panel debate shows, and public political debates, in which participants are part of a "spectacle of confrontation" (see Hutchby 2006: 65). Participants of opposing sides orient to the public as an overhearing audience that they seek to influence and persuade (cf. Atkinson 1984; Clark & Schaefer 1992; Hutchby 2006). This may result in what has been termed "pseudo-dialogue" (cf. Burkhardt 2003: 278), in which the argumentation has the underlying main goal to strengthen the position of the speakers' party and

discredit the position of the opponents, not only on a factual but also on a moral level. In those debates, speakers use several practices in order to accuse the opponents of specific shortcomings and publicly discredit them and their credibility (cf. Deppermann, [1997] 2005: 188). One of these practices is strategy ascription with which participants indicate a violation of normative rules and moral expectations.

### 7.1.2 *Ascription of Strategies and Intentions as a Discursive Practice*

The notion of (pragmatic) ‘strategies’ implies a certain goal-orientation, i.e., that speakers employ strategies in order to achieve some effect or serve a plan of action (see Leech 1983: 15; Brown & Levinson 1987). This however, “may still be (but need not be) unconscious” (Brown & Levinson 1987: 85), i.e., rather than consciously intended it is routinized in being part of “shared sociocultural knowledge” (Culpeper 2016: 442). In line with that, researchers in the field of Conversation Analysis have pointed out that analyzing strategies cannot mean analyzing ‘pre-strategies’ (Hopper 2005; Heritage 1990/1991) that are grounded in presumptions of interlocutors’ *a priori* intentions (Haugh 2008). The recourse to *a priori* intentions for ascribing strategies may not only be superfluous, but even problematic due to the fact that evidence is rare and “usually cannot be located precisely in time” (cf. Hopper 2005: 149).

The notion of ‘intentions’ always plays at least tacitly a role when considering strategies, yet only as a part of a discursive practice of ascription – as with all cognitive phenomena, it is not methodologically feasible to make assumptions about cognitive states of interlocutors (see Heritage 1990/1991; Hopper 2005) and get down to speakers’ “real” intentions. When cognitive issues are considered as an object for CA studies (e.g., understanding, knowledge ascriptions, epistemic stance; see for example Heritage & Raymond 2005; Deppermann 2014; Reineke 2016), they are examined in relation to practices and interactional outcomes.

Similarly, researchers in the field of Discursive Psychology, as main advocates for an approach that considers ascriptions of cognitive phenomena as a discursive practice, emphasize that “‘intention’ here is not treated by the analyst as the driver of behavior, but is taken as a members’ resource for accountability within particular everyday and institutional settings” (Potter & Edwards 2013: 718). Furthermore, ascribed intentions are defeasible even if they become an explicit topic in an ongoing interaction (see Edwards 2008).

Consequently, scholars in CA consider ‘strategies’ as an emergent process (Hopper 2005: 140), in which participants mutually display how they ascribe (which) sense to each other (Deppermann 2014). Still, interlocutors regularly display that they (also) base their understanding of each others’ actions upon cognitive issues such as knowledge (e.g., Heritage & Raymond 2005) or

intentions, strategies, and plans (Levinson 2013). This is directly observable in statements about own intentions (Deppermann 2014) and overt ascriptions of others' intentions (Deppermann & Kaiser, Chapter 6 in this volume). Ascribing intentions as a discursive practice typically occurs for the sake of clarification and intersubjective grounding, through which speakers not only ascribe meaning to each other's actions, but also coordinate future actions (see Deppermann & Kaiser, Chapter 6 in this volume). Analysts cannot identify real intentions behind strategies, but "if an action is predicated, ascriptions of intention (and still other cognitive states, such as epistemic stances) are implied as part of its (social) semantics" (Deppermann 2012: 763). Strategy ascriptions (and thus overtly or tacitly intentions) are a form of overt action ascriptions. As a discursive practice, they are systematically used with specific interactional outcomes, especially in some interactional settings such as political debates.

### *7.1.3 Strategies and Strategy Ascriptions in Political Debates*

Speakers' orientation to (presumed) strategies and intentions is an especially interesting topic in conflictual interaction such as political debates. Especially when strategies and the underlying intentions are overtly ascribed, the ascription is not just a response in the sense of a display of understanding of a prior speaker's action, but the overt strategy ascription is itself an action in its own right (as noted by Walker, Drew & Local [2011] on indirect responses). Prior research has shown that participants in adversarial contexts, such as political debates, expose strategies and hidden motives in order to criticize the inadequacy of their interlocutors' actions (e.g., Luginbühl 1999). In public debates, speakers use strategies in order to prevail over their adversaries in an exchange of argument as well as with regard to their conversational status in the overarching discussion: strategies may have an effect on the own and the opponents' credibility, expertise, and distribution of speaking rights.

Conversely, exposing an opponent's use of conversational strategies has a comparable effect itself. Speakers treat strategies they expose as intentional, morally contaminated (i.e., as unfair), and concealed (i.e., in contrast to what the speaker overtly claims to do). When speakers spell this out, they accuse opponents of using strategies that violate the normative rules of a conversation. Especially when participants display that they hold their opponents morally responsible for their actions (Robinson 2016) and impose commitment to a specific (discredited) standpoint onto their opponents (cf. Kampf 2013: 5), this may have effects on the course of interaction and the conversational status of the speakers.

The larger interaction type enters fundamentally into strategy ascriptions. Some public political debates comprise not only (at least) two opposing sides

with category-bound expectations (Sacks 1972, 1992) about members of the opposing party, but also an absent or present overhearing audience that is ought to be convinced (see Section 7.1.1). Purporting to uncover opponents' strategies is thus a vehicle for accusations that ought to strengthen the own party, weaken the other, and persuade the audience.

Prior research has shown that exposing opponent's strategies is used in order to deal with face-threatening prior turns such as leading questions, loaded statements or overt accusations (cf. Deppermann 2015: 30). Participants claim a shortcoming in their opponents' conduct and indicate that political interests of their party are an underlying scheme of any of their actions (Deppermann 2015: 33). A prototypical example is the accusation of untruthfulness of other participants, when speakers point out that their opponents are concealing information that would be relevant for evaluating the subject (Luginbühl 1999: 206). When interlocutors treat knowledge as a moral domain (Stivers, Mondada & Steensig 2011), speakers hint at their opponents' moral shortcomings. Other accusations operate on a moral domain too, e.g., when speakers claim that opponents employ distractions to avoid a direct answer to a question (Luginbühl 1999: 210), or act strategically with a view to future elections (Luginbühl 1999: 214). Exposing those strategies has always a twofold function: speakers judge their opponents by high moral standards that they claim for themselves (Luginbühl 1999: 207) for the sake of strengthening their own positions and weakening the others'. This is typical of public political debates and the public mediation that I discuss in this chapter.

## 7.2 Data

All data samples in this chapter stem from three sessions (ca. 16 hours in total) of a public mediation that took place in 2010 in Stuttgart, Germany. The reason and background for the mediation go back to the 1990s. In 1994, Deutsche Bahn (DB, 'German Railways') presented a railway and urban development project called "Stuttgart 21" ("S21" for short), which included a plan for restructuring Stuttgart main station from a terminus station to an underground through station. The project was controversial, and the public and politicians discussed it over a number of years, especially in terms of cost risks and environmental protection. In 2010, these discussions led to massive protests and a serious conflict between supporters and opponents of the project, in the course of which more than a hundred people were injured during demonstrations. To solve the conflict, the federal state of Baden-Württemberg appointed a mediator and set up mediation talks spanning nine sessions from October 22 to November 30, 2010, at Stuttgart town hall. Due to the public interest, the mediation was broadcast live on German TV. During the mediation sessions, the problems were discussed by around seventy participants from the opposing

sides and/or persons with technical expertise. More concretely, the participation framework can be summed up as follows (cf. Reineke 2016: 70):

- The mediator, Heiner Geißler,<sup>1</sup> served as the chair of the sessions. He was responsible for assuring compliance with the structure and schedule of each session, for distributing the right to speak (i.e., for turn allocation), and for formulating a binding arbitral verdict at the end of the mediation process.
- On the side of the supporters of project S21 there were several politicians (especially members of the regional government at that time) and German Railways representatives.
- On the side of the opponents of S21 there were representatives and politicians of other German parties.
- Each side had recruited experts who contributed to the discussion, for example by providing (and debating) expert reports regarding technical questions (tunnel construction, environmental protection, etc.).
- Some neutral accountants were in charge of evaluating the financial plans of the project.

Apart from these actively contributing and debating participants there were several passive attendants, that is, people who were not given the right to contribute to the discussion: journalists, a transcript writer, and several assistants.

The mediation sessions could be observed by spectators on a screen outside the mediation hall. In addition, two German TV stations broadcast the sessions.<sup>2</sup> Since the presentations and discussions were designed for an audience, the interaction type ranged between a mediation and a public political debate. Due to these circumstances, publicity is a central aspect and even a central purpose of the mediation. The purpose is not only to find and formulate a binding arbitral verdict, but also to lay out the details of the project and its problems for the public and to provide the audience with information about the complex facts (see Reineke 2016: 66).

Not only are the setting and participation framework complex, but the mediation sessions themselves follow a complex course of action (cf. Reineke 2016: 68). In each session, there are several thematic slots with predetermined presentations about specific topics. Each slot is restricted in time and comprises presentations in favor and against the project with regard to the determined topic. Each slot is followed by a mediated discussion. For the

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will be using real names, not pseudonyms, because the interactions are public data.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that the mediation sessions were broadcast implies a problem regarding a potential multimodal analysis of the data: usually only the current speaker is visible; there are only few long shots in which it is clearly retraceable to which specific participants current speakers are addressing their talk. On account of this problem, multimodal analyses of the extracts are not provided (systematically) in this chapter, but only where it is possible and adequate.

mediated discussion, speakers indicate their intention to contribute; the mediator compiles a list of prospective speakers, and then works through the list more or less in the order in which persons expressed their intent to speak. Due to this strict handling of turn allocation, reactions of recipients of certain presentations may be more or less adjacent (after a turn allocation of the chair/mediator), but more often they occur with some (and sometimes quite long) latency relative to the related prior turn. The public mediations talks therefore are similar to what Greatbatch (1992) analyzes as *panel interviews*: each party's turns are elicited by intervening questions and turn allocation devices by a moderator who mediates the contrasting statements and positions.

Only the mediator Heiner Geißler himself is authorized to interrupt speakers during a contribution in order to clarify something or to rebuke a certain type of behavior. Geißler pursues neutrality in his assertions (cf. Clayman 1992) and strives for moderately formulated ascriptions, evaluations, etc. by other speakers. This leads to the exigency of employing potentially challenging actions without personal attacks, because Geißler rebukes overt and personal accusations as well as 'unauthorized' direct quarrels between participants.

When a participant switches to the status of current speaker, their microphone is turned on; otherwise it is turned off. Heckles by non-current speakers do still occur, but are not always audible (at least not for the public) and are not always dealt with by current speakers.

This distinctive turn-taking system has consequences for speakers' turn designs: once they have been allocated the right to speak, they can produce long turns in which they can develop complex arguments without having to fear interruptions by opponents.

In the 16 hours of video recordings, I found sixty-seven cases of strategy ascriptions, in which participants ascribe actions to opponents when responding to their prior talk. I excluded all cases of strategy ascriptions that did not refer to prior talk, but to overarching strategic conduct of the parties (such as refusing to distribute specific documents) or to quotations of absent agents of parties (cited in newspaper articles, etc.). I identified three main types of strategy ascription, the most frequent being the exposure of untruthfulness, followed by the exposure of using a rhetorical strategy and the exposure of using false premises as a basis for an argument (basically equally distributed, see Table 7.1). As the first type is typically designed in a less overt way, I start with the more clear-cut cases for my analysis.

### **7.3      Strategy Ascriptions in the "Stuttgart 21" Mediation**

As shown in Table 7.1, speakers in the mediation talks ascribe different strategies to other participants, typically spelling out both the devices their opponents use as well as exposing or at least hinting at the "hidden motives" (cf. Deppermann & Kaiser, Chapter 6 in this volume, p. 150) as a

Table 7.1 *Main types of strategy ascriptions in the public mediation sessions*

Type of strategy ascription	Number (%)
Exposing untruthfulness/lies/telling half-truths (consciously revealing knowledge)	28 (41.8)
Using a rhetorical strategy	14 (20.9)
Using false premises for argumentation	12 (17.9)
Other	13 (19.4)
Total	67

presupposition of the turns to which they are responding. I will illustrate the exposure of three strategies that speakers ascribe to prior speakers, and I will trace how speakers use strategy ascription as accusations for the sake of strengthening their own position.

### 7.3.1 Exposing a Rhetorical Strategy

In one of the mediation sessions, the plenum discusses the construction risks and the consequences of the construction for mineral springs and ground water. Walter Wittke, a professor for geotechnics and an expert in favor of the supporters of the S21 project, had presented information about problems and solutions regarding the construction of tunnels for the project. One of the main problems is that constructing new tunnels could cause an influx of water. When water gets into contact with the nearby mineral anhydrite, it swells and can destroy the walls of the tunnels, leading to additional repair costs.

In the discussion, Boris Palmer (an opponent of S21) addresses Walter Wittke after his presentation:<sup>3</sup>

#### Excerpt 7.1 FOLK\_00069\_SE\_01\_T\_03\_c161ff.

(BPA = Boris Palmer [mayor of Tübingen, member of the Green Party Die Grünen, against S21],

WWI = Walter Wittke [professor of geotechnics, expert on the side of the S21 supporters],

HGE = Heiner Geißler [mediator, chair])

- 01 BPA: und jetzt möcht ich herrn wittke n paar FRAGen stellen.  
*and now I'd like to ask Mister Wittke some questions*
- 02 °hh sIE haben wenn ich sie richtig verstanden hab (.) gesAGT,  
*if I understood you correctly, you said*
- 03 es ist nicht (.) Überall möglich wasserzutritte vollständig  
 AUSzuschließen.  
*it is not possible everywhere to entirely avoid influxes of water*

<sup>3</sup> All extracts follow GAT2-conventions (Selting et al. 2009).

04 (0.2)

05 BPA: °hh kann ich (.) daraus FOLgern,  
can I deduce from that

06 dass auch SIE nicht sAgen;  
that you, too, are not saying

07 es ist hundert prozent SIcher;  
it is a hundred percent certain

08 (0.2)

09 BPA: dass bei den tunneln die hier gebaut werden (.) NIRgendwo (.)  
das quellproblem AUFtritt.  
that with the tunnels that are being built here the problem with  
swelling will not arise anywhere

10 oder können sie des hUndertprozentig AUsschließen.  
or can you exclude that hundred percent

11 das is meine ERSTte frage.=  
that's my first question

12 =[meine zwei-]  
my secon-

13 WWI: [ei\_moment ] darf ich die frage der REIhe nach beant[worten.  
] just a moment may I answer the question in order

14 BPA: [wenn sie sie  
[mit ja order NEINbeantworten,]  
if you answer them with yes or no

15 HGE [ja-BITte schön-            beANTwo]rten sie-  
yes please                         answer

16 kommen dann gleich wieder DRAN herr [palmer.        ]  
(it'11) be your turn again right after master palmer

17 BPA: [gut,                      ]  
fine

18 WWI: [ich würde] gurne die fragen (.) der REIhe nach beantworten.  
I'd like to answer the.questions.in.order

19 HGE: [ja-                  ]  
yes

20 WWI: =>[weil es] ein übliches verfahren is zehn [FRAGen zu stellen  
und] (.) redner zu verwIRren,  
Because it is a common procedure to ask ten questions and confuse  
speakers

21 HGE: [ja vöilling RICHTig; ]  
Yes absolutely correct

22 WWI: => ansichließend frag (sind/ist) die erste frage verGESsen.  
Afterwards ques- the first question (has/have) been forgotten

23 hhh das möcht ich ni most ich nich (.) äh möch.ich.nich  
äh [dem AUSgesetzt        ]sein;  
that I don't want I don't want (.) eh.i don't want (.) to be  
exposed to  
That

- 24 HGE: [wie würden SIE den;]  
*how would you*
- 25 HGE: ja-  
*yes*
- 26 WWI: °h
- 27 HGE: gut OKAY.  
*fine okay*

Palmer begins with what could be interpreted as a request for clarification (lines 2–10) due to the epistemic hedge (line 2) and the interrogative format (see lines 5/10). However, Palmer's inference turns out to be a challenge. If Wittke really said that he cannot exclude the influx of water in the range of the tunnel constructions (line 3), this would imply that he cannot exclude anhydrite coming into contact with that water and causing the problem with 'swelling' ("quellproblem", line 9). Admitting this would not only imply a high risk of problems with the tunnel constructions and unplanned additional costs, but would also be threatening for Wittke's positive face (see Brown & Levinson, pp. 61), as he had previously denied such risks.

Palmer is about to ask a second question (line 12), but is interrupted by Wittke (line 13), who indicates that he wants to answer each part of the questions in turn. After a short verbal exchange and the approval of the chair, Heiner Geißler (lines 15, 16), Wittke moves to meta-pragmatic talk (see Haugh 2008: 25). In an impersonal claim, he states that it is a 'common procedure' ("übliches verfahren", line 20), i.e., a rhetorical strategy, to ask a lot of questions in order to confuse speakers and make them forget the first question. Wittke indicates that the prior action ('to ask ten question') is a means to an end ('confuse speakers'). Wittke uses an impersonal construction ("es [...] is", 'it is', line 20), avoiding a personal attack on the opponent. Yet his "weil" ('because'), with which he connects his explication back to his prior request, works on a discourse level rather than on a propositional level (see Gohl & Günthner 1999). Thus, Wittke turns the ascription of the rhetorical strategy into a justification on a discourse level, exposing it as a potential risk that his opponent Palmer must at least be potentially aware of. Even if the strategy is not openly ascribed to Palmer (so that Wittke himself could not be held accountable for accusing his opponent of acting strategically), Wittke's statement lets the other participants infer that Palmer is using this rhetorical strategy and is morally accountable for using it. Wittke uses the meta-pragmatic strategy ascription as a vehicle for an accusation and designs it to challenge his opponent's motives for asking questions in the way he does (i.e., not [only] in order to retrieve information). When justifying his wish to proceed directly, Wittke states that he does not want to be 'exposed' ("AUSgesetzt sein;")

line 23) to this strategy, a word choice that suggests his status as a potential victim.<sup>4</sup>

In Excerpt 7.1, exposing the use of a rhetorical strategy has positive interactive consequences for Wittke: he is allowed to answer the question after Geißler's turn allocation. Interestingly, Geißler had moved to grant his wish twice (line 15, line 19), before Wittke explicitly refers to the rhetorical strategy. This suggests that the exposure of the strategy serves not only to get the floor, but also to discredit Palmer in front of the other participants and the audience for at least potentially using unfair means to weaken the case of the S21 supporters. Thus Palmer is under suspicion of trying to violate the normative rules of a successful communication and discussion. The fact that Geißler strongly agrees (line 21), neither denying nor rebuking Wittke's ascription, may support Wittke's depiction of Palmer.

### 7.3.2 *Exposing the Use of False Premises*

In one of the mediation sessions, the plenum discusses the financial plan of the project, which reaches back to the 1990s. After the currency changeover from the Deutsche Mark to the euro in 2002, the costs for S21 were calculated for an in-house document of the German Railways (called BAST: *Betriebliche Aufgabenstellung für die Umsetzung der Konzeption Netz 21*, 'Operational task for the realization of the concept Net 21') to amount to 4.2 billion euro. However, the German Railways officially communicated a total sum of 2.5 billion euro in the same year and corrected it only in 2010 to a total of 4.1 billion euro. The opponents of the project believe that German Railways had already known of the higher sum in 2002, and they take the BAST document as support for this accusation. German Railways, on the other hand argues that the persons responsible for the document made a simple currency error: they accidentally calculated using D-Marks instead of euros (4.2 billion D-Mark = ca. 2.5 billion euro), even though all other prices were given in euro.

Subsequently to this discussion, Michael Holzhey (an economist on the side of the opponents of S21) shows a slide that reveals unrealistic planning costs. He presents a value (5.22 billion euro), which according to him would be more realistic and insinuates that the planners are either deceiving the public consciously or engaging in poor planning. However, he had calculated his own value based on the presumably correct value (4.2 billion euro instead of 2.5 billion euro). Volker Kefer, a supporter of S21, who had explained that the

<sup>4</sup> In fact, given the complex participation framework, there is a high risk that recipients of questions or accusations may not get an opportunity to react. Participants frequently orient to this risk and also treat the lack of anticipated answers as a proof of lack of knowledge.

value in the BAST document was based on a typo (D-Marks vs. euros), reacts to this in Excerpt 7.2:

## Excerpt 7.2 FOLK\_E\_00070\_SE\_01\_T\_04\_DF\_01\_c726ff.

(VKE = Volker Kefer [board member of German Railways, S21 supporter],

MHO = Michael Holzhey [economist, consultant and expert of the S21 opponents].

HGE = Heiner Geißler [chair, mediator])

- 01 VKE: **herr HOLZhey;**  
02           *Mr. Holzhey*  
03           **zweitausendZWEI der wert;**  
04           *two thousand and two that value*  
05           **(.) die vier ZWANzig;**  
06           *the four twenty*  
07           **wo kommen die HER;**  
08           *where do they come from*  
09           **(1.05)**  
10          **MHO:** **bast;**  
11           *BAST*  
12          **(0.55)**  
13 VKE: **das is der wert den ich vorhin RICHTiggestellt ha[be.]**  
14           *that is the value that I corrected earlier*  
15 MHO: **[ja; ]**  
16           *yes*  
17          **11 MHO: ich SAG j[a;]**  
18           *well, like I say*  
19 VKE: **\*[a ]HA.**  
20           *I see*  
21 vke        *\*smiles ->*  
22 fig        **#fig. 7.1**  
23 MH=: **[(der aktuelle)]**  
24           *(the current)*  
25 VKE: => **^h [des heißt als ]omit falschen zAhlen wern\* falsche arguMENTe auf[gebaut. ]**  
26           *so that means with false numbers false arguments are being constructed*  
27 vke -----  
28 MHO: **[<t,f>nein, ]**  
29           *no*  
30          **16 ich habe-**  
31           *I said*  
32          **(.) ich habe offen gesagt ich habe hier den BAST wert eingetragen;-**  
33           *I said openly ((that)) I inserted the BAST-value here*  
34          **=ich hab sogar gesagt dass ich NICHT station und service drin habe;**  
35           *I even said that I did not have station and service included*  
36 VKE: **ich hatte grade ausgeführt dass des DE mark warn un nicht EUro.**  
37           *I had just laid out that that was D-Mark and not Euro*  
38 MHO: **ich hatte ausgeführt dass ich ihnen nicht GLAUbe.**  
39           *I had laid out that I do not believe you*

- 21 °**h und ich da steht jetzt erst mal aussage gegen AU[Ssage, ]**  
*and I now for the moment it's one person's word against another's*
- 22 **HGE:** [na GUT ab]er-  
*fair enough but*
- 23     **aber des GEHT nicht;**  
*but that's not okay*
- 24     (.) **nich wahr;=des ham wer ja nun erÖRtert-**  
*right we have already discussed that*

As in Excerpt 7.1, Volker Kefer begins with a challenging question, asking about the origin of the value of 4.2 billion euro. After Holzhey admits that he took the figure from the BAST document (lines 6), Kefer claims that he had rectified the value (line 8). Holzhey confirms this (line 9) and starts to give an account (line 11) that is abandoned due to Kefer's interruption. Kefer uses the change-of-state token "aHA" ('I see', line 12), which typically indexes a receipt of new information (cf. Imo 2009). In this case, Kefer's smile (Figure 7.1) indicates that he had already expected the answer and has discovered Holzhey's strategy.

Still smiling and again in overlap with Holzhey (line 13), Kefer exposes the strategy that he believes Holzhey is applying: "des heißt also mit falschen zAhlen wern falsche arguMENte aufgebaut" ('so that means with false numbers false arguments are being constructed', line 14). As in Excerpt 7.1, Kefer indicates that (parts of) the prior action ('using [false] numbers') is used as a means to an end ('constructing [false] arguments'). Kefer's ascription is formulated in the passive voice, avoiding a personal attack on the opponent. Yet, the connectors *das heißt* and *also* indicate a logical conclusion (cf. Deppeermann & Helmer 2013; Helmer & Zinken 2019) that Kefer is drawing on the basis of his opponent's claims and premises (false values) and on the presupposition that his own estimates are correct. It works similar to an *if-then*-construction: Kefer's accusation about the incorrectness of Holzhey's arguments operates as an *apodosis* to the *protasis* (that the BAST-value is wrong and the value Kefer has declared is correct), implying that using the corrected value would have been adequate and expected (cf. Günthner 2000: 109).

The implication of course is not only that Holzhey's argument and calculated total sum are obsolete and that Kefer is right on a factual level. In



Figure 7.1 Kefer's smile at the beginning of "aHA" (line 12)

addition, the strategy ascription is a vehicle for an accusation: Kefer is discrediting his opponent as morally questionable (see Andone 2013), since he is suspected of using the wrong value intentionally for his own argument and against his better knowledge (see Stivers, Mondada & Steensig 2011).

Holzhey orients to this moral level when he defends himself and stresses his consequent transparency about his calculations (lines 17–18). When Kefer repeats that he had already laid out that the BAST-value is based on a typo (line 19), this brings Holzhey to openly state that he doesn't believe Kefer, implying that Kefer is lying, which is a strong accusation in service of discrediting an opponent (see Deppermann [1997] 2005: 128–41; Luginbühl 1999: 205–17). There is evidence for this interpretation in Heiner Geißler's conduct: Heiner Geißler intervenes and cuts off the discussion (lines 22–4). In the later course of interaction (not shown), the mediator further accuses Holzhey and the other opponents of acting within the range of speculation and downgrades the relevance of the whole discussion.

Considering this sanction, Kefer's move to expose Holzhey's (alleged) strategy works for him as a way to prevent Holzhey from continuing his argument about the unrealistic total sum the S21 supporters had communicated, which had been challenging and thereby face-threatening for the S21 supporters.

### 7.3.3 *Exposing the Telling of a Half-Truth*

The mediator treats accusations of using a rhetorical strategy or spelling out incorrect conclusions (see Excerpts 7.1 and 7.2) less as a personal attack than accusations of lies or concealment of facts (see end of Excerpt 7.2). Nevertheless, most frequently (see Table 7.1) speakers suggest that opponents intentionally tell only half-truths and thereby conceal uncomfortable facts that could weaken an argument. In order to deal with potential interventions of the mediator, these cases are designed implicitly rather than overtly, and the boundaries between propositional content and meta-pragmatic talk are much fuzzier compared to instances when speakers expose rhetorical strategies or wrong conclusions. This is illustrated by the following exchange of arguments in another mediation session. Excerpt 7.3 shows a quite implicit strategy ascription, Excerpt 7.4 a more overt one.

During one session, the feasibility of shorter passenger transfer times (one goal of the S21 project) is discussed. The S21 supporters had presented a movie clip showing a platform of the station in Bad Cannstatt (an outer district of Stuttgart), where only a few passengers are present, so that a train leaves without delay. Later, the opponents of S21 had presented a short movie clip showing another platform in the same station during rush hour, so that it is overcrowded with passengers, who need more than five minutes to get off or on the waiting train. The S21 opponent Boris Palmer had suggested that the first movie clip presented by German Railways had been shown to prove that trains in a through

station can leave quicker than in the current terminus station (due to technical and staff reasons). He believes that German Railways wants to use this to build an argument for reconstructing Stuttgart main station as a through station for the sake of shorter transfer times. Palmer had claimed that for a correct estimation of the transfer time, it would be necessary to consider commuter traffic with a high occupancy of trains. Tanja Gönner, the then-minister for environment of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, and a supporter of S21, reacts to Palmer's assumption and his claim. In her reaction, she implicitly indicates that Palmer is hiding the fact that the supporters actually recorded the video during a time span that qualifies as rush hour.

### **Excerpt 7.3 FOLK\_E\_00068\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_c237**

(TGO = Tanja Gönner

[minister for environment, Baden-Württemberg, member of the Christian Democratic Union party, supporter of S21])

- 01 TGO: °h lieber herr PALmer;  
*dear Mr. Palmer*
- 02 TGO: (.) SIEBzehn uhr dreißig bad CANNstatt war des was wir vorgeführt haben-  
*five thirty pm Bad Cannstatt was what we presented*
- 03 TGO: => °h ich finde es erstaunlich dass bei ihnen siebzehn uhr dreißig seit neustem (.) !KEIN! °h äh (.) rushhour mehr isch;=  
*I find it astonishing that for you five thirty pm is as of most recently no longer rush hour*
- 04 TGO: =weil im übrigen genau zu diesen zeiten °h auch die frage des äh (.) berUFSverkehrs isch;=  
*because by the way these are the exact times for which the question about commuter traffic comes up*

After clarifying that the movie clip of the S21 supporters had been recorded at 5:30pm (line 2), Gönner insinuates that Palmer has just recently decided that the time is not classifiable as rush hour. Using irony, she implies her belief that Palmer must know that 5:30 pm qualifies as 'rush hour'. She insinuates that Palmer is intentionally keeping the time of day secret when he accuses the supporters of using an unsuitable movie clip. Claiming "ich finde es erstaunlich" ('I find it astonishing', line 3), she ironically marks this as counter to her own expectations and hints at Palmer's incredulity. With "seit neustem" ('as of most recently', line 3) she alludes to the fact that Palmer's argument is contradictory to common sense and prior opinions – the S21 supporters had already considered rush hour as an important factor. Clearly, her goal in this extract is not (only) to clarify the time of the video-recording on a factual level, but to show that and why Palmer's claim is (morally) questionable and not a valid argument for the discussion. However, by avoiding an explicit and personal accusation, she leaves the audience to decide whether Palmer's

position exhibits incompetence (not considering 5:30 pm as rush hour) or reveals a strategy of serving unavowed goals (e.g., concealing inconvenient truths). In other comparable extracts, too, speakers use expressions like 'all of a sudden' or 'recently' to suggest that a change or inconsistency in an opponent's conduct points to hidden dishonest motives. Sometimes they explicitly contrast two incompatible utterances and indicate moral double standards ('when you talk about your side, you say X, but when you talk about the other side, you say Y').

After a short discussion with the mediator, Palmer is allowed to respond to Gönner's accusation. He in turn exposes Gönner's strategy of telling a half-truth and concealing the whole:

**Excerpt 7.4 FOLK\_E\_00068\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_c342ff.**

(BPA - Boris Palmer

[mayor of Tübingen, member of Die Grünen, opponent of S21])

- 01 BPA: **sie haben züge (.) gewählt die schwach AUSgelastet sind;**  
*you have chosen trains that are sparsely frequented*
- 02 **wir nehmen einen vOll ausgelasteten beRUFsverkehr?**  
*we take commuter traffic operating at full capacity*
- 03 => **°h statt zuzugeben dass es so IS sagt frau gönner,**  
*instead of admitting that it is so Ms. Gönner says*  
 (0.22)
- 05 **wir haben AUCH einen zug im berufsverkehr genommen.**  
*we took a train in commuter traffic too*  
 (0.28)
- 07 **siebzehn uhr DREIßig:=**  
*five thirty pm*
- 08 **=stimmt.**  
*that is true*
- 09 => **°hh aber ich finde sie sollten dann so EHRlich sein zu sagen,=**  
*but I think then you should be so honest to say*  
 10 **=dass sie einen zug richtung stuttgart HAUPTbahnhof genommen**  
**haben,=**  
*that you took a train towards Stuttgart main station*
- 11 **=und dass des die SCHWACHlast richtung ist;**  
*and that that is the less frequented direction*
- 12 **°h es fahren eben abends um sechs relativ wenig leute nach**  
**stuttgart REIN?**  
*there are just relatively few people going to Stuttgart in the*  
*evening*
- 13 **die meisten fahren RAUS.**  
*most of them leave (the city)*
- 14 **so isch des.**  
*that's the way it is*  
 (0.27)
- 15 **in STUTTgart.**  
*in Stuttgart*

- 17 => °h un wenn sie so (.) nEtt wären uns nicht mit solchen NEbelkerzen  
**aufzuhalten,=**  
*and if you would be so kind not to distract us with such red  
 herrings*
- 18 => **=sondern zuzugeben dass sie\_n zug genommen ham wo wenig LEUte  
 ein und aussteigen,=**  
*but admit that you took a train on which few people get on and off*
- 19 => **=kommen wir bei diesen schlichtungsgesprächen besser voRAN.**  
*we ('d) make better progress in these mediation sessions*

Palmer repeats the prior claim he wanted to make with his movie clip (lines 1–2). The argument that is spelled out here, is the following. The time of the opponents' recording (5:30 pm) may indeed qualify as rush hour (lines 5–8). Yet the train recorded by the supporters was not leaving Stuttgart, but going into the city, so that the track showed only a few commuters (because the typical commuters, who work in the city and live outside it, are on another track; lines 9–14).

During his argument, Palmer indicates that Gönner is using a strategy ('deliberately not telling the whole truth') as a means to an ends ('distracting the mediation process and potentially deceiving the public'). Exposing this strategy again is used as a vehicle for accusations in order to discredit Gönner and question her credibility. Palmer alludes to this four times (lines 3, 9, 17, 18). He accuses her of not admitting that the supporters – in contrast to the opponents of the project – deliberately recorded a sparsely frequented train (lines 1–3 and line 18). With "statt zuzugeben" ('instead of admitting', line 3) and "sondern zuzugeben" ('but admit', line 18) he overtly exposes the strategic (and thus intentional) concealment of significant details that might be compromising for German Railways and the supporters of S21. By exposing that Gönner is acting strategically, Palmer discredits her motives (cf. Deppermann [1997] 2005: 128) and points to her moral responsibility (Robinson 2016).

After confirming the correct time (5:30 pm) he uses a deontic suggestion to allude to Gönner's strategic untruthfulness: "aber ich finde sie sollten dann so EHRlich sein zu sagen," ('but I think then you should be so honest to say', line 9). His turn operates on a logical level, since *dann* ('then') pretends to be an *apodosis* of a conditional, drawing a conclusion from prior utterances. The *protasis* would be the fact that Gönner claims to have shown a train during commuter traffic (basically, 'if you claim to show a train during rush hour, you should at least admit that it's the wrong direction'; see also Deppermann & Helmer 2013: 23). The deontic suggestion includes the modal verb *sollten* ('should'; see Couper-Kuhlen 2014) in *irrealis* (and not with past perfect: *hätten tun/sein sollen*, 'should have done/been'). *Sollten* is ambiguous as a deontic expression – on the one hand it is used to refer to a past action, but on

the other hand it can also recommend a future action (here, to tell the whole truth subsequently). Palmer, however, reveals the truth himself (lines 10–14) so that Gönner has no option but to account for her action in the first place.

Continuing his talk, Palmer formulates another deontic suggestion that alludes to Gönner's strategy (as a means) and her intention (as an end): “wenn sie so (.) nEtt wären uns nicht mit solchen NEbelkerzen aufzuhalten” ('if you would be so kind not to detain us with such red herrings', line 17); “kommen wir bei diesen schlichtungsgesprächen besser voRAN” ('we[’d] make better progress in these mediation sessions', line 19). He accuses her of at least potentially inhibiting the progress of the mediation itself. The accusation of using distractions is another variety of accusing opponents of being untruthful (see Luginbühl 1999: 210). Palmer questions Gönner's willingness to cooperate or to come to an agreement at all, which would undermine the fundamental basis of the mediation (the ‘willingness to reach agreement’, cf. Nothdurft & Spranz-Fogasy 2005). He strives to prove that Gönner's handling and presentation of reality is fundamentally biased and that she is acting strategically in order to strengthen her position instead of acting cooperatively for the sake of the mediation.

The exposure of Gönner's strategy has a positive effect for Palmer which can be seen in the subsequent interaction:

#### **Excerpt 7.5 FOLK\_E\_00068\_SE\_01\_T\_02\_c350**

(HGE = Heiner Geißler  
[chair, mediator])

- 01 HGE: °h **herr PALmer-**  
*Mr. Palmer*
- 02 °h äh die nebelkerzen lass\_ich ZU?  
*uh I tolerate the red herrings*
- 03 °h ähm aber (.) wenn sie sagen- sie SOLLten so ehrlich sein,  
*but when you say you should be so honest*
- 04 °h des FINde ich,  
*I find that*
- 05 äh des is halt so ne sache die °h äh an die grenze DESsen geht-  
*that is just a thing that pushes the envelope of*
- 06 => (.) °h äh (.) obwohl er in der SAche, (.)  
*however factually*
- 07 => hat er da RECHT frau gó (.) frau gönner;=nicht?  
*he is right Ms. Gönner isn't he*
- 08 => °h sie ham also (.) die falsche ZUGrichtung (.) öh gema-  
*so you (chose) the wrong direction of the train*

The mediator Geißler sanctions Palmer for committing a personal attack on Gönner's credibility by accusing her of being dishonest (lines 3–5). This intervention demonstrates again that exposing untruthfulness and personal attacks are riskier than other strategy ascriptions and impersonal formulations

or use of the passive voice (cf. Excerpts 7.1 and 7.2). Yet, the mediator concedes (“obwohl”, ‘however/although’, line 6) that at least factually Palmer has a point and that the S21 supporters used a train going in the wrong direction. About a minute later when he tries to close the topic (not shown here), he explicitly refers to the potential strategy of telling only half-truths, recommending that all participants deliver complete information.

In sum, ascribing the strategy of untruthfulness to someone is a strong personal attack (see Luginbühl 1999: 205), because it serves to imply that the speaker is violating basic rules of communication. This in turn may have consequences for the speaker to whom it is ascribed (cf. Deppermann [1997] 2005: 122). Locally, it may lead to a decrease in the opponent’s speaking rights (through a cutting-off of the ongoing argument); globally, it may change how strictly the mediator treats similar violations, and it may even result in a decrease in the credibility of the opponent’s future arguments. As a second function, Palmer implicitly claims the high moral value of honesty for himself (Luginbühl 1999: 207). Revealing Gönner’s strategy is thus itself an accusation that serves to strengthen his own position.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed when and how speakers in a public mediation session employ strategy ascriptions as an overt form of action ascriptions and what short- and long-term interactive consequences strategy ascriptions have. Furthermore, I have shown that strategy ascription constitutes an action itself – in public debate, mainly an accusation.

Speakers who employ a strategy ascription do not only or primarily orient to the prior turn’s primary action (such as a question, a request, an offer, etc.). They also orient to an “off-record action” (Levinson 2013: 107) such as a challenge, avoidance of an answer, etc. that is constituted by the prior turn. Exposing these off-record actions in second position, speakers make publicly available “why [opponents do] that now” (Schegloff & Sacks 1973: 299). Spelling out how opponents employ an action as a means to an underlying end serves their position and status and damages that of the others.

During debates, speakers typically employ overt strategy ascriptions in response to prior turns that threaten the face of currently arguing participants or challenge their party’s position. Exposing strategies of their opponents, such as the use of rhetorical strategies, false premises, or untruthfulness, is used as a vehicle for accusations.

Speakers frequently accuse their opponents of asking too many questions at once so that they do not get a fair chance to answer them (see Excerpt 7.1). Sometimes speakers accuse opponents of still owing them a (straight) answer

and concealing this with rhetorical strategies. Speakers expose the strategic use of false premises in order to accuse their opponents of using incorrect conclusions (see Excerpt 7.2). The premises are directly or indirectly (e.g., by requesting proof) challenged or marked as incorrect. The accused opponents typically are not able to react properly to the accusation, e.g., due to lack of time or because proof would require actions beyond the ongoing debate. Exposing opponents as telling only half-truths (as shown in Excerpts 7.3 and 7.4) is one of the stronger and riskier strategy ascriptions. Speakers using rhetorical strategies might also be evaluated as skilled and eloquent orators (see, e.g., Atkinson 1984), and the use of false premises may be explained due to non-intentional aspects like ignorance or wrong calculations so that judging stays on the level of propositional (in)correctness. In contrast, exposing the strategy of telling only half-truths often goes hand in hand with knowledge ascriptions that are strong vehicles for accusations (see Reineke 2016: 141–59), claiming that concealing knowledge violates social norms and is a morally accountable choice (Stivers, Mondada & Steensig 2011: 17, 19). All overt strategy ascriptions serve to strengthen the speaker's own position and weaken that of others.

Turn design across all types of strategy ascriptions mostly exhibits the passive voice and other impersonal formulations, for instance using metonymies ('German Railways' for the specific person[s] in charge). When more direct attacks that can be attributed to one specific person are employed, the mediator typically intervenes with a rebuke. Yet, when strategy ascriptions are designed within the normative rules of a critical discussion, they are quite effective. The chair locally concedes a point to the speaker (see Excerpts 7.1, 7.2, and 7.5), globally rebukes the specific usage of the strategy, or at least the accusation of using a strategy is articulated and may have an effect on the audience, especially if the opponents do not have the opportunity to react to it properly. Strategy ascriptions to local actions are consequently controlled globally for the sake of discrediting opponents and strengthening the speaker's own position.

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