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Constructing evidence at Prime Minister's Question Time: An analysis of the grammar, semantics and pragmatics of the verb *see*

Abstract: Constructing evidence constitutes a practice to establish the speaker's authority at Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT), a weekly half-hour session in the British House of Commons. Here the verb *see* constitutes a resource for both the questioning Leader of the Opposition (LO) and Members of Parliament (MP) as well as for the responding Prime Minister (PM) to claim first-hand perceptual experience. This paper takes an integrated approach, offering a combined analysis of the grammatical formatting, semantics and pragmatics of the verb *see* in the context of evidential moves at PMQT. It shows how the verb *see* is functional in referring to the perceptual basis of a claim made and how its grammatical formatting is reflective of the contingencies of the local interactional context. The analysis is grounded in 32 sessions of PMQT (ca. 16 hrs of video-recordings). The results can be summarised as follows: 1) The evidential function of the verb is achieved through its context-specific grammatical formatting and semantics. 2) The reference to the perceptual basis of a claim evoked by *see* may co-occur with epistemic qualification and evaluative expressions. 3) The formatting of the verb may be indexical of the political relationship between the questioner and the responding PM.

Keywords: parliamentary interaction, *see*, perception, evidentiality, epistemic modality

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1 Introduction¹

Providing evidence is an important building block in the argumentative interaction at Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT) in the British House of Commons.

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It represents a “rhetorical device” of persuasion (Antaki and Laudar 2001: 468), which is crucial to the construction of authority (cf. Du Bois 1986). This study will examine how speakers on both sides of the House construct their source of knowledge as based on first-hand perception, using the perception verb *see*. Exploring the potential of Hanks’ (2012) proposal that the study of evidentiality in social interaction “calls for three overlapping lines of research: grammar, semantics, and pragmatics” (Hanks 2012: 169), this contribution offers a first analytic account of the English verb *see* which integrates the grammatical and semantic description of the verb with the analysis of its use for evidential claims in interaction at PMQT. To this end, it will examine the workings of the grammar and semantics of the verb *see* in evidential moves and their function and positioning within the larger context of the emerging turn and sequence. The term evidential move is informed by Cornillie’s (2009) definition of evidentiality “as the functional category that refers to the perceptual and/or epistemological basis for making a speech act.” (Cornillie 2009: 45). Along these lines, evidential moves are interactional units which contain a reference to the speaker’s perceptual and/or epistemological source of knowledge and serve specific interactional and social functions.² According to Hanks (2012: 172), “[t]he term ‘knowledge’ seems preferable to ‘information,’ because it is the speaker’s access to the information, and not the information per se, that is in play”, a view further adopted in this study.

The following main points will be made: 1) It will be argued that the evidential function of the verb is achieved through its context-specific semantics, grammatical formatting (i.e. tense, aspect, modality), and situated embeddedness in local sequences of actions. 2) It will be demonstrated that this evidential function may be qualified by epistemic and evaluative expressions.³ 3) It will be shown that the grammatical formatting of the verb phrase (and clause in which it is positioned) may be indexical of the political relationship between the Leader of the Opposition (LO) or backbench Member of Parliament (MP) and the responding Prime Minister (PM) in that evidential marking is responsive to and constructive of the relationship between speaker and recipient(s)” (Fox 2001: 176).

² The turns examined may consist of more than one evidential move. Evidential moves referring to sources of knowledge other than perception will not be included in the analysis.

³ Following Nuyts (2001), “epistemic modality is the evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring or has occurred in a possible world” (Nuyts 2001: 21). As Cornillie (2009) comments, “[t]he result of the evaluation goes from absolute certainty that a state of affairs is real to absolute certainty that it is not real.” (Cornillie 2009: 46)

Consider (1) for a first illustration of those points.⁴ The MP and PM both belong to the same party. In line 2, the Speaker (S), i.e. the chairman during the debates at the House of Commons, is addressed. The antisocial behaviour legislation mentioned in line 27 refers to the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 introduced under the MP during his time as Home Secretary.

(1) PMQT 27 June 2007⁵

1 MP: ((18 sec omitted))
 2 mister SPEAKER;
 3 (-)
 4 would ↑the prIme minister aGReE;
 5 (-) that REcOrd police nUmbers,
 6 (-) TOUGH new sentences for the most dAngeRous
 criminals-
 7 (-) ZERo tolerance of antisocial behAvior-
 8 (-) two and a half
 9 (and) together with
 10 (-) TWO and a half million new jObS-
 11 (-)REcOrd investment in education;
 12 (--and ↑SURE start centres a↑cROss the country-
 13 (-) is pre↑CISEly what he mEAnt-
 14 (-) by ↑TOUGH on crime-
 15 and ↑TOUGH on the causes of cri[me];
 16 MPs: [<<f>ccc >
 17 PM: uhm
 18 (-- it ↑IS correct of course that that uh crime
 has fallen over the period of this gOvernment--
 19 =but °hh uhm
 20 (-) there are ↑STILL tremendous challenges as we
 knOw;

⁴ A more detailed analysis will be provided in Section 5.1.

⁵ The transcription follows the conventions of GAT (Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten 2011), with the transcription of audience responses being adapted from Clayman (1993):

c cheering, *c* (-1 sec), *cc* (1-2 sec), etc.

co calling out, *co* (-1 sec), *coco* (1-2 sec), etc.

j jeering, *j* (-1 sec), *jj* (1-2 sec), etc.

l laughter, *l* (-1 sec), *ll* (1-2 sec), etc.

21 (.) to over↑COME;=
 22 =↑however;
 23 °h ↑WHEN i visited my right honorable friend's uh
 constituency-
 24 ↑REcently i was ↑Able;
 25 °h to see for my↑SELF;
 26 (.) the the ↑BENefits;
 27 that the: antisocial be↑HAviour legislation-
 28 °h had brOUght aBOUT;
 29 and ↑HIS role in thAt-
 30 when: home sECretary was of im↑MENSE importance;
 31 °h uh and ↑HE never forgot EITHer;
 32 °h the im↑PORTance of investing;
 33 °h uhm IN;
 34 °h tAckling the ↑CAUses of crime==
 35 =and i ↑GENuinely belIEve;
 36 that the:
 37 °h FOCus on EARly' (.) yEARS lEARNING-
 38 (.) the ↑SURE start cEntres;
 39 the ↑CHILDren's cEntres;
 40 °h uhm the nURsery education and the extEnSion of
 it and the in↑VESTment in prImary schools;
 41 (that) in time to ↑COME;
 42 °h that will stand us in ↑GOOD stead for the
 future in creating the responsible citizens we
 all want to sEE.

The excerpt contains two verb phrases with *see*: A first instance occurs in lines 24–25 where *see* refers to the PM's first-hand past perceptual experience and forms the basis of an evidential move (lines 23–28). This move substantiates the PM's display of recipient agreement (line 42) with the MP's prior request to agree with his understanding of what the PM meant. At the same time, the epistemic framing of *see* by the semi-modal *be able to* mitigates the argumentative thrust of the account, a practice to avoid self-praise in response to a “helpful question”, i.e. “[a] question which acts as a prompt to allow the PM to set out the government position/policy and/or attack the opposition” (Bates et al. 2012: 11).

A second instance of *see* can be found in line 42, where the perceptual experience denoted by the verb is framed in terms of a desire (“we all want to sEE”). It is expressed as part of the PM's epistemic positioning (Du Bois 2007) with regard to the future effect his policy will have. Although this second use of *see* may evoke

a semantics similar to that of the first, it does not serve an evidential function: While it does refer to a perceptual experience and thus indicates “source of knowledge” in a narrow sense, the volitional construction in which it is used does not provide the evidential basis for the speaker’s situated move and thus does not have an evidential function.

The paper is organised as follows: Section 2 discusses relevant findings with respect to the study of evidentiality and the English verb *see*. Section 3 reviews past research on PMQT. In Section 4, the data and methodological procedure are described. Section 5 offers the results of the analysis. The paper ends with a summary and conclusions (Section 6).

2 Evidentiality and the verb *see*

Research in evidentiality originates from an interest in the description of grammatical categories of the verb across languages. In his study of American Indian languages, Franz Boas was among the first scholars to observe that there are languages which require verbal marking for source of information (Boas 1911: 496), i.e. sources of knowledge, as we call it. Evidentiality forms part of the grammatical system in these languages, i.e. the source of knowledge is indicated through (obligatory) morphosyntactic markers. Jakobson later introduced “evidential” as a technical term in order to label this grammatical category of the verb in Russian (Jakobson [1957]1990: 392). This historic origin of the field may account for the recent interest in the study of verbs in languages where source-marking does not constitute a grammatical category (cf. Diewald and Smirnova 2010, Whitt 2010).

A common division involves “firsthand and non-firsthand sources [of information]” (Aikhenvald 2006: 1). The collection of PMQT demonstrates that firsthand evidence does indeed constitute a category relevant to participants in interaction. This becomes visible in expressions such as “I was able to see for myself”, “[they] have seen at first hand”, etc. Sources of knowledge commonly mentioned in past research include direct sources, i.e. of sensory nature (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile), and indirect ones i.e. obtained through inference or hearsay (e.g. Willett 1988).

There has been agreement in the literature that the verb *see* represents a prototypical linguistic device to indicate a knowledge source in English (e.g. Aijmer 2004, Chafe 1986, Fox 2001, Gisborne 2010, Whitt 2010). The meaning potential of the verb *see* may be conceived of as a continuum between two poles spanning from the core meaning of *see* (visual perception) to *see* as a cognitive verb (denoting dimensions of understanding and knowing). Whether the latter meaning

involves the former and thus includes both aspects of sensory perception and inferencing has been the subject of controversy (Gisborne 2010).

This list of meanings offered by the Collins English Dictionary (Anderson 2006) exemplifies the polysemy of the verb (cf. Alm-Arvius 1993, Gisborne 2010 for a detailed discussion of the polysemy of *see*):

- 1 to perceive with eyes
- 2 to perceive (an idea) mentally; understand
- 3 to perceive with any or all of the senses
- 4 to be aware in advance; foresee
- 5 to ascertain or find out (a fact); learn
- 6 to make sure (of something) or take care (of something)
- 7 to consider, deliberate, or decide
- 8 to have experience of; undergo
- 9 to allow to be in a specified condition
- 10 to be characterised by
- 11 to meet or pay a visit to
- 12 to receive, esp as a guest or visitor
- 13 to frequent the company of
- 14 to accompany or escort
- 15 to refer to or look up
- 16 (in gambling, esp in poker) to match (another player's bet) or match the bet of (another player) to stake an equal sum

It is further claimed that the sources of knowledge indicated by *see* are inter-related with specific complementation patterns. Aijmer (2004) identifies four kinds of complementation patterns governed by *see* in the sense of “perceive (visually)” and “understand”, reproduced in (3). These complementation patterns are linked with specific types of propositions. The proposition in pattern 1 refers to a process, in pattern 2 to an event and in pattern 4 to a fact (Aijmer 2004: 255–256, see also Gisborne 2010: 120).

(2) Examples from Aijmer (2004: 255–256, emphasis in the original)

1. *See + NP + Ving*

Andrew was surprised to see tears brimming in the burly Texan's eyes. (AH1)

2. *See + NP + Vinf*

The horse had won handsomely and given him a taste for future ownership, though he seldom went to see his horses run, which wasn't particularly unusual in an owner but always to me mystifying. (DF1)

3. *See* + NP + Pple (Adj)

The reason I'm asking, Celia, is that I don't want to watch, and see you hurt or unhappy, while you throw everything into the effort and then maybe it doesn't work out." (AH1)

4. *See* + that-clause

I saw that maybe Caroline had mistaken what we were talking about, and spoken as a lawyer when she should have spoken as a daughter. (JSM1)

The semantics of the verb in patterns 1–3 involves direct perception, whereas the complement governed by *see* in pattern 4 is presented “as a conclusion and does not report what the subject immediately perceives” (Aijmer 2004: 257). It is further argued that this distribution of meanings is evidenced by the Swedish translations of those examples, where *see* is translated with *se* ‘see’ in patterns 1–3, and with *inse* ‘realise’, *förstå* ‘understand’ or *finna* ‘find’ in pattern 4 (Aijmer 2004: 256). Yet Whitt (2010) points out that perception pertains to all types of source of knowledge: “Even where indirect evidentiality is concerned, perception plays a role: one cannot partake in hearsay unless one has heard something, and any information or evidence used for inference must be acquired through some form of perception. Hence perception is integral to all types of evidential meaning.” (Whitt 2010: 11) In a similar vein, Bednarek (2006) subsumes mental perception/inference, visual perception and what she calls “showing” under one and the same category of base of knowledge, *viz.* “perception”. She argues that “[m]ental perception shades into sensory perception in many cases, and the difference between sensory perception and showing is predominantly one of construal.” (Bednarek 2006: 640) The findings of the present analysis confirm this categorisation. The semantics of *see* in the evidential moves examined largely comprises an underspecified meaning covering both mental and general sensory perception, while other meanings of the verb represent a rare exception (cf. (11) below). Following Bednarek (2006), this conglomerate of meanings will be labeled “perception”.

3 Providing evidence at Prime Minister's Question Time

PMQT in today's form takes place in weekly, half-hour sessions in the House of Commons. Having been broadcast on the radio since April 1978 and televised since the MPs' vote in 1988 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2012/mar/>

14/archive-mps-yes-cameras-commons), PMQT constitutes mediated interaction,⁶ which provides for a multi-layered participation framework:

While engaging in a ritualised debate, the interlocutors use and take advantage of institutional practices to exploit each other's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Members of Parliament (henceforth MPs) can be seen to challenge, ridicule and question their opponents' ethos, which in its turn contributes to increasing the intensity of their own pathos (see Ilie 2001). At the same time, their interaction is constantly marked by a strong awareness of acting for and in front of several sets of audiences that may often have decisive roles to play in the development and outcome of the interaction. During the process of establishing and reinforcing a viable relationship with these audiences, MPs are actually involved in strengthening their own ethos, namely personal credibility and institutional reliability. (Ilie 2010: 61)

With turn length and allocation being largely fixed and speaker contributions being prepared in written form, the interaction is further marked by "elements of both predictability and spontaneity" (Harris 2001: 454). While the interaction between the PM and LO/MPs has been generally described as question-answer sequences (e.g. Bates et al. 2012, Bull and Wells 2012, Harris 2001, Ilie 2004), it has been argued that these so-called questions "are either requests for information or requests for action" (Chilton 2004, 98, referring to Harris' (2001) distinction between action-seeking and information-seeking questions), a finding corroborated by our research (Reber submitted).

It will be argued that claiming evidence is vital to the (re)construction of speakers' personal credibility and institutional reliability at PMQT. Moreover, it ultimately serves to establish the authority of all parties engaged at PMQT (cf. Du Bois 1986: 322).⁷ The relevance of evidential claims becomes visible in the way participants design their turns: Evidential moves are not only pervasive to the turn construction but their formatting is also reflective of the local contingencies of the emerging interactional project. In order to flesh out how evidential moves are functionally organised in the internal structure of turns, Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST, Mann and Thompson 1988) offers a valuable framework. Among the list of discourse relations proposed are "Evidence" and "Justify", which "both involve the reader's attitude" (Mann and Thompson 1988: 251) towards a claim. (3) illustrates the Evidence relation, with each line representing a unit.

⁶ The video recordings can also be retrieved from the official website of the British parliament (<http://www.parliamentlive.tv/>).

⁷ According to Du Bois (1986), "providing evidence is simply a special case of providing authority". Furthermore, "NO UTTERANCE IS ACCEPTED WITHOUT AUTHORITY" (Du Bois 1986: 322, emphasis in the original).

(3) Example adapted from Mann and Thompson (1988: 251)

- 1 *The program as published for calendar year 1980 really works.*
- 2 *In only a few minutes, I entered all the figures from my 1980 tax return*
- 3 *and got a result which agreed with my hand calculations to the penny.*

Unit 1 constitutes a claim which is backed up by the evidence provided in units 2 and 3. Units 2–3 thus serve to “increase the reader’s belief in the claim expressed in Unit 1.” (Mann and Thompson 1988: 251).⁸ While evidence relations intend to increase the recipient’s belief, justify relations increase the recipient’s “readiness to accept [the writer’s] right to present [a claim]” (Mann and Thompson 1988: 252). This is reflected in the data in the sense that evidential moves are commonly linked to the claims made by the PM in an evidence relation, whereas to the requests for information and action performed in the turns of the LO and MPs, they are generally connected in a justify relation.

4 Data and methodology

The study is based on a collection of 32 PMQT sessions from 2003 to 2011 which comprise ca. 16 hours of video recordings and for which official transcripts by the House of Commons (Hansard) are available.⁹ The analysis involved the following steps: 1) The transcripts were searched for instances of the verb *see*. Here a total of 211 instances were found. 2) This collection was checked for validity through repeated listening to the recordings and classified in grammatical terms (tense, aspect, modality, voice, person and number) and with respect to the semantics of the verb and institutional role of the speaker (PM, LO/MPs). 3) On the basis of the video recordings it was examined which of these instances are produced within an evidential move, and how these evidential moves are positioned and functional in the overall organisation of the turn and sequence. 4) Relevant sequences, i.e. sequences where the use of *see* had an evidential function, were re-transcribed for further analysis. This meant that new transcripts were prepared by repeated listening to the recordings, and later compared with Hansard. This detailed analytic procedure revealed that the evidential moves found are organised themselves in terms of further discourse relations such as concession or

⁸ This functional definition of evidence ties in with Fetzer and Oishi (this volume), who argue that “evidence is only mentioned, when the validity of a contribution and of one or more of its constitutive claims is at stake.” (Fetzer and Oishi this volume: 328)

⁹ Hansard can be accessed at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/>.

antithesis (cf. Fetzer this volume for a similar observation on academic written texts), a finding, which is further corroborated by RST.

5 Results

Evidential moves containing claims of perceptual experience are produced in both adversarial interaction across party lines and amicable interaction between fellow party members. The analysis is organised around the grammatical structure of the verb phrase with *see* in order to show that the formatting of the verb phrase reflects those interactional contingencies. It examines the semantics and grammatical formatting of the verb and the positioning and function of the evidential move within the emerging turn.

5.1 Uses of *see* for evidential moves in the PM's answers

Evidential moves with *see* make reference to the perceptual experience of past and current events/state of affairs or anticipate the perceptual experience of an event/a state-of affairs in the future. These references may also be subject to modal and evaluative/affective qualification. What is crucial is that these evidential moves are generally tailored to deal with the contingencies of the MP/LO's question and to support the rhetorical project underway, evidencing the PM's factual claims (cf. Anderson 1986: 273) and thus (re)establishing his authority as head of government.

When making reference to past events and states of affairs, the variety of grammatical formats of the verb phrase includes the 1) present perfect and 2) present simple forms of *see* and 3) past forms of modal auxiliaries in conjunction with *see*, but no instance of *see* in the past simple was found.

The present perfect form of *see* is used for reference to past events outside the immediate interactional context (cf. 4) and to the prior question (cf. 5).

(4) PMQT 11 July 2007

1 S: lembit Öpik-
 2 (--)
 3 MP: the: uh prIme minister's PREdecessor;
 4 (.) was hugely supPORTive;
 5 o:f the motor neurone disease association's
 campAIGN to raise
 6 FIFtEEn million pOUNds,

- 7 °h to find a CURE;
 8 for this drEAdful (.) and terminal diSEASE-
 9 °h as a dirEct reSULT;
 10 so far we have raised almost FOUR million pounds
 thIs year from private dOnors.
 11 °h could i ask if the ↑NEW prime minister wOUld
 meet represEntatives;
 12 °h OF the em en dee associAtion;
 13 to mainTAIN the momentum;
 14 °h and hElp us achieve a GOAL-
 15 i believe we ALL share;
 16 °h a world FREE of (.) Em en dee.
 17 (-)
 18 MPs: <<p>HEAR hear>;=
 19 PM: =i under? i understand the (-) uh (-)
 20 the honorable member's interest in this uh
 21 °h and i know that he has been a LONG standing
 campaigner;
 22 for support for both the ↑MEDical research council;
 23 and ↑Others to do greater research onto motor
 neurone disease;
 24 °hh i support as someone who has ↑ALso seen uh
 people die of motor neurone disease;
 25 °h uh the re↑SEARCH that's being done-
 26 i will do my ↑BEST to support everything that he
 is doing-
 27 (.) i would be vERY happy to meet HIM-
 28 °h and All those that are associated WITH this
 good work;
 29 °h and i'll be very happy to MEET them in downing
 street at the soonest possible opportunity.
 30 (-)
 31 MPs: <pp>c>

The PM's response to the request for action (lines 11–16) is organised as follows: it begins with the PM's acknowledgement of the MP's request (lines 19–20), which is supported by an evidential move (lines 21–23). The PM then makes another affiliative claim (lines 24–25), which is this time authorised by an evidential claim based on perception (line 24). The turn ends with the granting of the MP's request (lines 26–29).

The reference to his first-hand perceptual experience, conveyed in the relative clause (line 24), is expressed in the present perfect. It leaves the time of the perceptual experience unspecified, putting the focus on its result and its relevance to the evolving action. The semantics of the verb *see* is equally fuzzy in that it merely conveys a generalised meaning of perception: It is not made explicit with what senses the speaker perceived people's dying of the disease; and even if he actually experienced it, to perceive that someone is dying involves mental processes. The adverbial "↑ALso" further constructs the PM as a member of a group who shares this perceptual experience (potentially including the MP who produced the question and other supporters of the cause), making him seem more authoritative: He is, in a way, claiming to "know" what he is talking about, and therefore to be justified, not only in what he is saying, but in saying it at all (I owe this latter observation to David Scott-Macnab, p.c.).

The data also shows instances in the PM's answers where clauses with *see* in the present perfect, first person, are used in order to refer to the previous speaker in the here and now (*I have not seen X doing Y; I have not seen Y by X; What we have seen is Y*). (5) illustrates such a case particularly well. Semantically, the meaning of *see* evoked in this example is again a combination of processes and/or results of understanding and sensory perception.

(5) PMQT 17 October 2007

- 1 S: vincent ↑CABLE==
 2 MP: =(4 seconds omitted)
 3 uh:?' (.) ↑BOTH of us are:;
 4 (.)↑HAPPily married mEn;
 5 °h uh but uh [↑why has he uh
 6 MPs: [llll[l=
 7 MP: [↑WHY has he crafted;
 8 MPs: =ll[l=
 9 MP: [↑WHY has he crAfted;
 10 MPs: =[lll
 11 MP: [(.)an in↑HERitance tax system;
 12 (---)↑WHY has he crafted an in↑hERitance tax
 system;
 13 (--)that dis↑CRIMinates;
 14 (-)against ↑MILLions of Unmarried couples;
 15 (.)↑AND their children.
 16 (-)and ↑WHY is he lining up with the ↑tOries;
 17 (-)to de↑FEND the principle.
 18 (-)that ↑THESE families.

- 19 (-) should ↑NOT merely be condemned to the
everlasting flames of hEll;
- 20 (.) but should be ↑TAXED more on the [↑wAy;
- 21 MPs: [lcolco[lco=
22 PM: [i? (-)
23 MPs: =[lco=
24 PM: [i? i? i'm grate i'm GRATEful;
- 25 MPs: =[lcolcolco
26 PM: [uh to him for letting me into the SEcrets of his
uh mArriage;
- 27 (--)) can can i ↑SAY on on inhEritage tax;
- 28 (.) it has ↑ALways been the case;
- 29 (-) that MARriage is recognised in the inheritance
tax sYstem,
- 30 °h i ↑HAVE not seen him making uh very detailed
proposals to ↑chAnge that in recent uh yEArS,
- 31 °h as ↑FAR as inheritance tax is concerned=
32 =if we took up ↑HIS proposal,
33 °h and extended it to ↑EVERyone,
34 °h that would be a ↑VERY great expense;;
35 that is adDITIONal indeed;
- 36 °h and i ↑DO not know how liberal party policies
would be able to ↑cOpe;
- 37 (-) with yet another (.) spending commitment;

The MP's turn contains two requests for information: The first (lines 5–15) assigns responsibility for the existing tax system to the PM, the second (lines 16–20) accuses him of “lining up with” the opposition. Quoting Bavelas et al. (1990), Bull and Wells (2012) propose that such questions “create a communicative conflict [. . .], where all the possible replies have potentially negative consequences, but nevertheless a reply is still expected.” (Bull and Wells 2012: 38). Line 30 counters this double bind in accusing the MP of non-activity and lining up with the Tories himself. At the same time, it provides evidence for the PM's claim in lines 28–29. Based on the assumption that proposals can be made in an oral fashion, this is also an impressive example that the sensory meaning of *see* is not necessarily restricted to vision but may indeed include other senses such as hearing.

The use of the present simple constitutes another practice to construct a reference to past events and states of affairs in the data. While the present perfect can be observed in argumentative but amicable exchanges, the present simple is deployed in particularly hostile contexts in which the authority of the PM is

heavily attacked. (6) is taken from a sequence between an MP and a PM whose parties (Liberal Democrats and Conservatives) form a coalition government. The jeering, shouting and cheering from other MPs are not represented in the transcript.

(6) PMQT 11 May 2011

- 1 MP: ((20 sec omitted))
 2 ↑LAST mONth;
 3 the cOalition gOvernment ↑CUT Income tax;
 4 (--)↑Liberally (.) hElping (.) mIllions (.) of
 pEOple;
 5 (-) but i ↑HAVE to ask the prIme minister this;
 6 (--)↑IF we are all in this togEther;
 7 (-)↑whAt is he going to do about the obSCENity,
 8 (-) of ↑ONE thousand multimillionAIres,
 9 (-) ↑BOOSTing their pErsonal;
 10 (--) uhm
 11 (.) their personal uhm
 12 (-) !WEALTH!;
 13 (-) their pErsonal wealth by (.) ↑EIGHteen percent
 in the last yEAR;
 14 PM: (1.76) ↑ONE of the things we? we? we? absolutely
 ↑wIll do;=
 15 =and we ↑PUT in the mONey to make sure it hAppens,
 16 °h is to ↑CRACK down,
 17 °h on the tax: e↑VAsion that takes place;
 18 °h so widely in our ↑COUNtry;
 19 and the ↑TREASury put mONey ↑Into that campaign to
 make sure °h that it hAppens;
 20 °h but he makes a ↑GOOD point;
 21 °h that be↑CAUSE of our coalition gOvernment;
 22 °h we have lifted a ↑MILLion people out of Income
 tax,
 23 (-) and at the ↑SAME time,
 24 ↑Over the past yEAR;
 25 (.) we see ↑EXports up-
 26 we see ↑PRIVate sector jobs up-
 27 (.) we see the e↑CONomy growing;
 28 °h and we see BORrowing down;
 29 °h ↑ALL;

17 PM: uhm
 18 (--) it ↑IS correct of course that that uh crime
 has fallen over the period of this gOvernment--=
 19 =but °hh uhm
 20 (-) there are ↑STILL tremendous challenges as we
 knOw;
 21 (.) to over↑COME;=
 22 =↑however;
 23 °h ↑WHEN i visited my right honorable friend's uh
 constItuency-
 24 ↑REcently i was ↑Able;
 25 °h to see for my↑SELF;
 26 (.) the the ↑BENefits;
 27 that the: antisocial be↑HAviour legislation-
 28 °h had brOUght aBOUT;
 29 and ↑HIS role in thAt-
 30 when: home sECretary was of im↑MENSE importance;
 31 °h uh and ↑HE never forgot EITher;
 32 °h the im↑PORTance of investing;
 33 °h uhm IN;
 34 °h tAckling the ↑CAUses of crime--=
 35 =and i ↑GENUinely beLIeve;
 36 that the:
 37 °h FOCUS on EARly? (.) yEARS lEARNING-
 38 (.) the ↑SURE start cEntres;
 39 the ↑CHILDren's cEntres;
 40 °h uhm the nURsery education and the extENsion of
 it and the in↑VESTment in prImary schools;
 41 (that) in time to ↑COME;
 42 °h that will stand us in ↑GOOD stead for the
 future in creating the responsible citizens we
 all want to SEE.

The PM's response begins with an indirect confirmation of the MP's request to agree with his claim (line 18), which is then qualified by a concession (lines 19–21). Next follows another concession (lines 22–28), which cancels the first and provides positive evidence for the confirmation initially performed. How can this double concessive structure be explained in functional terms? Note that in contrast to (4) above, where the PM shows similar agreement with the request of the MP, the PM and the MP are both members of the governmental party. By agreeing

with the MP on a positive achievement under his government, the PM would risk bragging, which is hedged by the double concessive structure.¹⁰ The analysis of the clause with *see* corresponds to this interpretation. On the one hand, the perceptual experience conveyed by the lexical verb is constructed as first-hand (indicated by the pronouns “i” and “my↑SELF”). Furthermore, the temporal clause and the past simple form of the semi-modal *be able to* link this perceptual experience to a concrete time and place. On the other hand, the modal qualification mitigates the thrust of the argument. It should be noted that the usage of this semi-modal and its equivalent modal auxiliary *can* appear to differ in conjunction with *see* in the data: While the semi-modal achieves an epistemic qualification of *see*, the modal assigns a state semantics to the verb. This example thus shows again that the evidence presented is designed to be as convincing and credible as possible in order to increase the force of the PM’s argument, while at the same time being reflexive of the contingencies of the specific constellation of PM and MP.

(7) illustrates an evidential move where the modal auxiliary *can* is used in conjunction with *see*, which is skillfully exploited to make reference to a current state of affairs. Again, the MP and PM are party allies and the PM uses a double concessive structure to avoid potential self-praise.

(7) PMQT 14 July 2010

- 1 S: ↑NICKy mOrgan;
 2 MP: (1.87) ↑WILL the prime minister join mE in
 congratulating the loughborough university
 student union rAg committee;
 3 °h which as ↑WELL as providing many volunteers to
 local grOUps;=
 4 =↑thIs year raised more than any other ↑RAG in the
 country;
 5 there were (over a) ↑MILLion pOUNds,
 6 °h including ↑thIrty-four thousand pounds in ↑ONE
 day for the royal british lEgion;
 7 °h and is this ↑NOT an example of a bIG society in
 Action.=
 8 MPs: =cc=
 9 PM: =can i ↑THANK the honourable lady for her
 quEstion;=

¹⁰ The production of “of course” (line 18) treats the PM’s question as morally problematic (cf. Stivers 2011: 104).

10 =and it's ↑ABsolutely right==
 11 =sometimes students can get a bAd ↑PRESS for whAt
 they dO;
 12 (.) but actually you can ↑SEE in [lOUghborough;
 13 MPs: [l[l1=
 14 PM: [ha (1.30) ha
 15 MPs: =l[l1
 16 [you can ↑SEE in ↑lOUghborough;
 17 (-)that they have been ↑FOcused on doing things
 for ↑Other people;=
 18 =<<all>RAIsing money for chARity>;=
 19 =<<all>and they should be conGRATulated>;

The PM's response is structured as follows: After expressing gratitude for the question of the MP (line 9), the PM makes a concessive move which confirms the negative image students may have (lines 10–11). This is, however, canceled by another concessive move which follows next (indicated by *but*, lines 12–17) in that perceptual evidence for the positive achievement of the students is provided. As in (1'), this double concessive structure constitutes a strategy to avoid self-praise in response to a helpful question. The further analysis shows that the makeup of the evidential move is also in concordance with this rhetoric: The pronoun “you” in subject position has generic reference including the PM's audience in general (i.e. all co-present parties in the House of Commons and the British Public). Reconstructing the MP's claim as a state of affairs generally perceived and shared by his audience, the PM extends his positive evaluation to all parties in the House. Leech (2004) observes that “[w]ith verbs of ‘inert perception’, the modal auxiliary *can* “lose[s] its distinctive modal meaning” and frames the perceptual experience as “a state rather than an event” (Leech 2004: 75) to the effect what is conveyed is not treated as single-event evidence. This shows that while the generic reference mitigates the risk of potential self-praise, the modal auxiliary constructs the achievement as something to last. This evidence forms the basis for the congratulation which follows next.

Evidential moves may also anticipate or predict a future perceptual experience. This future reference is achieved by the use of the modal auxiliary *will*. (8) exemplifies such a case in the answer turn of the PM.

(8) PMQT 25 January 2006

1 LO: ((20 seconds omitted))
 2 °h now ↑WILL he make sUre,

- 3 that the ↑HOME secretary;;
 4 °h ↑THINKS again;
 5 and ↑DOESn't fOrce thrOUgh amalga↑mAtions.
 6 MPs: c
 7 PM: it it's ↑NOT a question of (.) forcing it thrOUgh;
 8 MPs: j[j=
 9 PM: [NO-
 10 MPs: =j[j
 11 PM: [(-) it's ↑NOT;
 12 (-) it's a ↑QUESTion-
 13 (.) of of ANSWering;
 14 the point ↑MADE by: (.) the inspectorate of
 constabulary,=
 15 =perhaps i could just rea' read it ↑OUT to the
 right honorable gEntleman,=
 16 =since he will ↑sEe (.) ↑WHY it is we em↑barked on
 this prOcess-
 17 °h the in↑STABulary uh con↑stAbulary report said
 thIs.
 18 (.) the ↑FORty three force structure is ↑nO longer
 fIt for pUrpose,
 19 °h in the ↑INterests of effIciency and
 effEctiveness of policing it should chAnge,
 20 (-) we now ↑FIRMLy believe that some
 reOrganisation of fOrces and rEconfiguration of
 °h protective sERvices is Inescapable.
 21 (-) sO?-
 22 °h it's ↑FAIRly obvious from that,
 23 that they're ↑NOT °h merely saying this is (.)
 accidental or incidental to better polIcing,
 24 they're saying it's funda↑MENTal to it. ((turn
 continues))

The PM responds to the challenge by the LO (lines 2–5) by ignoring it and making an alternative claim (lines 7–13). The pre-pre (Schegloff 2007) in line 15 opens up interactional space for the evidential move (a quotation) to substantiate his claim (lines 17–20). The pre-pre itself is accounted for by another evidential claim in line 16. The modal auxiliary *will* anticipates the perceptual effect which the piece of evidence displayed (i.e. the quotation from the constabulary report) will have on the LO. What is implied is a conditional scenario: If the LO had read the

constabulary report, he would have understood (seen) the reason for the government's policy.

Claims of evidence evoked by uses of the verb *see* may not only have a modal qualification but may also sometimes show an evaluative or affective framing (Du Bois 2007). Syntactic realisations include adjective complementation (e.g. "I was surprised to see") and *it*-extrapositions (cf. 9). Here they represent a resource for positioning (Du Bois 2007) with regard to the prior speaker and other parties. In (9) both the MP and PM are Labour.

(9) PMQT 19 March 2008

- 1 MP: ((18 sec omitted))
 2 ↑WHAT additional pOwers will the prime minister
 make avAILable to members of pArliament;=
 =°h to ↑fOrce tOry led local authOrities like [↑MINE;
 3 MPs: [c[c
 4 MP: [(-) to ↑BUILD
 more affordable hOmes;
 5 (-)
 6 MPs: c[c
 7 PM: [mi? mister ↑SPEAKER;
 8 there is a DESperate need for more houses in this
 cOUNtry.
 9 °h and it is ↑vERY important that (.) ↑ALL the
 different agencies that can make possible the
 building of housing;
 10 °h ↑DO so.
 11 °h ↑thERefore it is sad to see some conservative
 and liberal authorities ↑UNprepared to build the
 houses that are needed.
 12 (-)↑WE are prepared to make available additional
 funding as we have shown;
 13 (-)↑I hope that local authorities in ↑EVERY area
 of the country;
 14 (-) will resPOND to the urgent need;

Having addressed the Speaker, the PM produces a display of agreement with the MP's question. This agreement is shown through two evaluative claims (line 8 and lines 9–10). There follows another evaluative claim (line 11), this time serving as an attack on the opposition party. It is constructed as a result ("therefore") of what was claimed in the prior talk. Syntactically, it contains a nonfinite clause

containing a *to*-infinitive of *see*. This non-finite clause is produced as part of an extraposition, which consists of an X-part “it is sad” and a nonfinite Y-part “to see some conservative and liberal authorities ↑UNprepared to build the houses that are needed” (cf. Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson 2006). The X-part displays a negative evaluative stance and positions the speaker towards the Y-part, whereas the Y-part – which is connected in a negative evidence relation to the prior claim in lines 8–10 – treats the assertion about the opposition parties as based on perceptual experience.¹¹ The evidential qualification mitigates the thrust of the attack launched on the opposition party and at the same time makes it less vulnerable to rebuttal. This move is thus subject to a double qualification, both evaluative and evidential. The turn concludes with an expression of intent (line 12) and a request (lines 13–14).

Nonfinite clauses with a *to*-infinitive of *see* are also deployed in evidential moves to express purpose. Consider Example (10).

(10) PMQT 30 March 2011

- 1 LO: ((36 sec omitted))
 2 °h now (.) now the: the ↑NEXT problem that he
 faces;
 3 in relation to this POLicy,
 4 is that it'll cOst the treasury more ↑MOnEy,
 5 °h to fund the LOANS;
 6 (-) can he guarantee ↑THAT money will nOt come
 from university bUdgets,
 7 °h or through a reDUction in student nUmbers;=
 8 MPs: =cc
 9 PM: <<all>well=↑first of all it Is worth reminding the
 house that university tuition fees> were first
 introduced by the party OPpo[site;
 10 MPs: [cc[c[c[c[c
 11 PM: [the the point i'd make ()
 12 [there are (---)
 13 [two ↑TWO important points;
 14 [(-)↑ON this threshold;

¹¹ The Oxford Dictionary of English defines negative evidence as “evidence for a theory provided by the non-occurrence or absence of something.” [<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/negative-evidence>]

15 °h ↑FIRST of all,
 16 Each university will have to spend ninehundred
 pounds pEr plAce on ↑ACcess requirements,=
 17 =that's
 18 °h THAT's the first point;
 19 °h the ↑sEcond point is it ↑IS the °h uh the office
 of Access that will decide whether or not they can
 ↑gO to that nine thousand threshold,
 20 °h and vERY tough °h uh:: very tough rules hAve
 been published
 °h and placed in this house for people °h to ↑SEE;
 ((turn continues))

The PM's response starts with a counterattack on the LO's party (line 9) before two claims are made (lines 15–19). These are authenticated and authorised by the evidential move (line 20) which presents the evidence in question (“very tough rules”) as something to be perceived first hand by the audience.

To summarise, when making past time references to perceptual experience, PMs format the verb *see* such that its relevance for the here and now of the ongoing argumentative interaction is highlighted. In responses to particularly challenging questions the argumentative thrust of evidential moves may be increased by the enactment of the perceptual experience in the here and now, whereas in response to questions promoting governmental achievements, it is mitigated by epistemic qualification. Modal auxiliaries may further be deployed to assign a state semantics to the verb or to anticipate first-hand evidence on the part of the MP. Finally, evidential moves may also be qualified by evaluative expressions.

5.2 Uses of *see* for evidential moves in questions by LOs and MPs

The evidential moves found in turns by LOs/MPs serve to justify their questions. Like in the PM's responses, verb phrases with *see* in the present perfect were found.

We begin with the analysis of the present perfect use of *see* in question turns. Although the semantics of the verb form leaves the time of the perceptual experience unspecified, it is capable of improving the persuasiveness of the evidential move to justify the subsequent question. In (11), the MP is a member of the opposition party. VSO stands for Voluntary Service Overseas.

(11) PMQT 8 December 2010

1 S: mister Angus mac↑NEIL;=
 2 MP: =mister SPEAKER;
 3 °h ↑MANY cOLleagues on both sides of the hOUSE;=
 4 =in↑CLUDing myself have seen at first hAND;
 5 °h the GREAT work that Vso volunteEERS do worldwide;
 6 °hh cAN the prime minister as↑SURE the house;
 7 (-)that ↑HE will provide=-
 8 =and con↑TINue to provide=-
 9 =the ↑NECessary port (-)support and ex↑PECTed
 support-
 10 °hh fOr vso to continue to im↑PROVE the lives of
 twenty six million people.
 11 (-)AROUND the world.

After addressing the Speaker, the MP's account of his and co-present parties' first-hand experience expressed by the verb *see* (lines 3–5) constitutes the evidential basis which functions as a justification for the subsequent request for action (lines 6–12). The present perfect use of *see* leaves the time of event unspecified and “[implies] that the result of that event is still operative at the present time” (Leech 2004: 39). This unspecified timing may result from the speaker's claiming the first-hand experience for multiple parties (“many colleagues on both sides of the house including myself”), which may not have shared it at the same point in time but in an ongoing process up to the present. This increases the urgency and relevance of the question to follow.

Negative evidence may also serve as the evidential basis to justify a question:

(12) PMQT 1 December 2010

1 S: ↑STEVE (.) rOtheram;
 2 MP1: (--) THANK you mister speaker;
 3 WOULD the prime minister carry out an Urgent check;
 4 (-) into the SATellite navigation system Used in
 ministerial cArs;
 5 °h MY concern is thAt;
 6 just a few short MONTHS ago;=
 7 =the DEpPuty prime minister;
 8 °h couldn't be STOPPED from drIVING himself;
 9 °h from University ↑CAMPus;
 10 to uni[VERSity campus;
 11 MPs: [ll

12 MP1: but ↑SINCE he has got his () chauffeur-driven
 ministErial car;
 13 (-) he hAsn't been seen NEAR;;
 14 a student [Union;
 15 (-)
 16 MP2: ha ha [ha
 17 MP1: [is the sAt-nav ↑BROKE;
 18 (-) OR;;
 19 (-) has the DEPuty;
 20 (.) simply lost his political diREction;

The evidential move forms part of an account (lines 6–14) which justifies the request for action produced in lines 3–4 and recycled in terms of a request for information in lines 17–20. The account is constructed in terms of an antithetic construction coordinated by *but* (line 12). The passive construction in the thesis (lines 6–10) implicitly conveys the extreme case (Pomerantz 1986) that “nobody could stop him”. This contrasts with an antithesis (lines 12–14) which contains a negated present perfect passive form of *see*. Note that this use of the present perfect conveys “continuation up to the present” (Leech 2004: 40), that is, at the time of when MP1 was speaking, the referent concerned by the claim had still not been seen there. This constructs the request for information in what follows (lines 17–20) as specifically urgent and relevant. The antithesis is further based on the perception of third-party witnesses, who are, however, not specified, as the agent is omitted in the passive construction, which has a mitigating effect on what constitutes otherwise an attack on the PM and his government: To say that somebody has not been seen near a student union implies a weaker claim than saying that somebody has actually not been there. The not naming of the (eye) witnesses makes the claim less vulnerable to rebuttal. At the same time the claim is authorised by its experiential grounding.

The only instance of *see* where the lexical verb is qualified by the semi-modal *be able to* in a question turn is produced in an analogous environment and with the same function as in the PM’s response. The MP and the PM to whom the question is addressed are fellow party members in (13).

(13) PMQT 11 October 2006

1 S: russel ↑BROWN;
 2 (1.1)
 3 MP: thank you (.) very much mister ↑SPEAKER;
 4 (---)
 5 can i ↑SAY to the prime minister;=

6 =that ↑LAST month: i: actually vIsited;
 7 along with: my colleague the honorable member for
 GAINsborough;
 8 (--) the democratic republic of CONgo;
 9 °hh where: we were Able to see the Excellent
 work being undertaken by uh: the charity wAr
 child in respect of °h strEEt children a:nd child
 ↑SOLdiers;
 10 °hh ↑ONly todAy;
 11 amnesty internAtional has: °h expressed ↑GREAT
 concern;
 12 (---) about the number of chILD soldiers ↑STILL
 being held by wArlords.
 13 °hh ↑cAn the prIme minister (---) guaranTEE;
 14 that this gOVERnment will bring prEssure upon (-)
 the ↑NEW government in the dee ar cEE;
 15 °h to take im↑MEDiate action-
 16 to see these CHILD soldiers being relEAsed (-)
 from the hAnds of the wArlords.
 17 MPs: <<pp>c>

The turn, which serves to ask a helpful question, begins with the MP's answer (line 3) to the summons of the speaker (line 1). It continues with a pre-pre (line 5) and two evidential moves (lines 6–9, 10–12) to justify the request for action to follow (lines 13–16). In the first, the MP claims a first-hand perceptual experience (“we were Able to see”) in a specific time (“LAST month:”) and place (“the democratic republic of CONgo”) together with an eye-witness as it were, whose identity is also given (“my colleague the honorable member for GAINsborough”). This concrete first-hand construction of that state of affairs is qualified by the use of the semi-modal *be able to*. This epistemic modification is interpreted as a strategy to avoid self-praise, a strategy also observed in PM's answer turns to helpful questions.

Parallel to the PM's answers, simple present *see* is used to enact past events in the here and now in hostile exchanges. (14) is taken from a debate about the NHS. Lines 3–5 counter the PM's prior claim that patient waiting times have fallen (not shown here). The MPs' constant cheering and jeering, which accompanies the turn, is not shown in the transcript.

(14) PMQT 11 May 2011

- 1 S: [<<f>ed ↑MILLiband>;
 2 LO: (--)↑NO mister speaker-
 3 waiting
 4 waiting times
 5 (-) waiting times are ↑Rising;
 6 °h and i ↑NOTice;
 7 °h i ↑notice he ↑DIDn't even take the opportunity;
 8 °h to take responsi↑Bility for the health poli[cy.
 (--)
- 9 MPs: [c
 10 whe? where ↑IS the health secretary after All;
 11 (.) where
 12 (-) where ↑IS the health sEcretary;
 13 (--) and
 14 (-)and i have to ↑SAY to him;
 15 (-) i have to ↑SAY to him;
 16 it's beCOMming-
 17 it's becoming a ↑PATtern with this prime minister
 mister speaker;
 18 °h because this ↑MORning in the pApers,
 19 °h we see the univERSities minIster?
 20 (.) being DUMPED on;
 21 °h for his tuITION fees policy?
 22 °h we see the? ↑SCHOOL secretary?
 23 °h being DUMPED on for his free schools policy?=
 24 MPs: =c[c
 25 LO: [and the ↑POOR deputy prime mInister;
 26 °h hE just gets dumped on Every day of the [↑WEEK?
 27 MPs: [cc[cc
 28 [now?
 (-) now now;
 29 (.) now now he must he ↑must believe that ↑SOME-
 thing has gone wrong with his health policy.
 30 °h mister SPEAKER-
 31 because he's ↑LAUNCHED his sO called;
 32 (.) LISTening exercise;
 33 (-) NOW;
 34 (-)↑CAN he reassure,
 35 (-)↑DOCTors:.,

36 NURses and pAtients,
 37 (.) that it is a ↑GENuine exercise;

Lines 18–26 account for the claim in lines 16–17 which serves to attack the PM. We observe the use of *see* in the simple present form in lines 19 and 22 of the account where they represent an “event use” of the tense, authenticating and lending extra drama to the LO’s attack. This effect is heightened by the inclusive reference of the pronoun *we*, which constructs the audience as co-experiencers of the events referred to, and the parallel structure of the two clauses.

LOs and MPs may (like PMs) also anticipate the experience of a state of affairs and use this as a justification for their question (cf. 15).

(15) PMQT 16 June 2010

1 S: david LAMmy.
 2 MP: (1.02) mi’ mister SPEAKER;
 3 ↑CAN i: invItE the prime minister next sEASON;=
 4 =to °h take a TRIP with me from seven sisters tube
 station up to spurs;
 5 °h uh at white hart LANE;
 6 (.)↑ON that journey;
 7 °h ↑HE will see a proliferation of bEtting shops.
 8 °h ↑WILL he give local authorities;=
 9 =the ↑POWER;=
 10 = to ↑DEAL with the saturation of betting shops;
 11 which are PREYing on working (-) and poor people.

The use of the verb phrase “will see” in the evidential move in lines 6–7 must be interpreted in light of the prior invitation (lines 3–5) which prepares the ground for an implicit conditional construction: “If the PM takes that trip with the MP, then he will perceive a proliferation of betting shops”. It thus anticipates the PM’s perceptual experience in the event of their joint trip, with the evidential move justifying the request for action to follow in lines 8–11.

Finally, let us turn to a deviant case in our collection (16). Here *see* is produced in the simple past tense and the meaning conveyed is not “perception” but it can be paraphrased by “was characterised by” (line 5).

(16) PMQT 19 January 2011

1 S: Anne MAIN;
 2 MP: (-) thAnk you mister ↑SPEAKER;

- 3 °h se↑VERE disruptions to trAIn services in the
winter of two thousand and nIne;
- 4 °h led to david quArmby carrying out an urgent
service and severe ↑WEATHer audit.
- 5 °h ↑thIs winter saw ↑MASsive disruption of services
with nEtwork rail leaving trains strAnded sOUth of
the rIver;
- 6 °h causing a ↑SEventy five percent cUT;
- 7 (.) in ↑pEAK services over christmas for MY
constituents;
- 8 (-) so ↑WHAT steps now are the government going to
take to shAke up nEtwork rAIl;
- 9 °h and bring about a radical improvement to our
TRAIN services;

Line 5 comes in one of the slots prior to the subsequent request where normally evidential moves are produced. Contrary to the previous examples, the local semantics of *see* does not, however, provide the perceptual and/or epistemological basis of the claim. Nevertheless, it is argued that the speaker exploits the position of this interactional move and the underlying core meaning of *see* to construct a “pseudo” evidential reference, which is further substantiated by another evidential move (lines 6–7).¹² The linking adverbial *so* (Biber et al. 2009, line 8) finally constructs the following question as something to be concluded from what was claimed in the speaker’s previous talk (cf. Reber 2012).

6 Summary and conclusion

The study attempted to show the strength of an integrated approach taking into account the context-specific semantics, grammatical formatting, and situated embeddedness of verb phrases with *see* in local sequences of actions. In the ritualised interaction at PMQT, *see* is used to refer to the first-hand perceptual experience of the speaker (potentially including further members of their group). This contrasts with other sources of knowledge claimed, e.g. quotations, where the speech of the political opponent is also reconstructed in order to provide the

¹² Note that the source of the statistics named in lines 6–7 is not provided either. It seems a socio-culturally accepted practice in PMQT that figures and statistics “carry their authority within themselves” (Du Bois 1986: 323) to the effect that their source does not have to be indicated for them to qualify as evidence.

basis of an evidential move, a finding, which has interesting implications for what kind of evidence is treated as more reliable and thus lends more authority to the speaker. It was found that both questioning and responding participants largely use the same practices to achieve reciprocal communicative goals, supporting the rhetorical project in a way that fits the contingencies of the local question-answer sequence. For instance, both parties upgrade the perceptual experience by enacting it in the here and now with the simple present and downgrade it by qualifying it through epistemic marking.

The positioning of evidential moves is further tightly connected with their local functions. They generally evidence claims or declarations of intent in responding turns, while justifying the relevance (and sometimes urgent need) of requests in question turns. The latter are always positioned prior to the request, preparing for the actual business of the turn, with the former being pre- or post-positioned in responding moves.

Finally, future research could include a detailed prosodic analysis, offering a truly holistic account of evidentiality in interaction.

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Bionote

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