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**Summary**

The aim of this paper is to study the forms and functions of insults in the Croatian Parliament and compare them with recorded instances of insults found in the British and the Swedish parliaments. The corpus for analysis includes transcripts of two sessions of the 6th Parliamentary assembly and 5 randomly selected sessions from each of the previous assemblies. The corpus includes Aktualno prijepodne (i.e. Question time) as well. Levels of analysis are: forms of (un)parliamentary polarization, mitigation strategies and identification of convergence (between a group of like-minded politicians) and divergence (between opposing groups) by usage of insults and derogatory terms. Reactions to the insults were analyzed as part of the identification process, as it was noted that the Members of Parliament (MPs) were often offended by the insult and wanted to comment on it, even when the insult was not personally addressed to them.

The results show, as expected, that the MPs of the Croatian Parliament are polarized. The offensive expressions are based on *pathos* in first Assemblies, while later change to *ethos-oriented logos*, mainly trying to discredit the MPs credibility, with occurrences of *ad hominem* arguments. The preferred mitigation strategies are attribution transfer, followed by formulation of insults as questions rather than statements. Unification of politicians is purely along the party-line and is shown through forms of address, the procedures to respond to offensive phrases, labeling and stereotypes.

Key words: insults, insulting practices, Croatian parliament, mitigating strategies, logos, pathos and ethos

**The Analysis of Insulting Practices - Sticks and Stones in the Croatian Parliament**

“It’s interesting how people cling to insults or what they *think* is an insult. “ (House M.D., S07/E15)

1. **Introduction**

This paper provides an insight into the insulting practices found in the Croatian Parliament compared with the recorded instances of British and Swedish parliaments (Illie, 2001, 2004, 2010a, 2010b). It also offers some explanation to the underlying workings of the insult initiator and insult target.

In everyday life individuals sometimes tend to express their opinions of politicians in the form of insults. When speaking privately, people can say more or less whatever they want without any consequences, but what happens when one is using offensive, derogatory or disparaging terms publicly? More oppressive societies have insult laws (Walden, 2002: 207) which “regulate freedom of expression and enforce laws that punish the criticism of the government officials and institutions“. In their basis, these laws are very rigid, oppressive and prevent freedom of speech and opinion. On the other side, democratic societies take pride in the possibility of an individual to publicly say whatever s/he chooses. Nonetheless, even such societies have something to regulate offensive public discourse, and that is criminal defamation law (Walden, 2002) which protects a person when his/her reputation is threatened by falsely asserting a fact. Therefore, when speaking publicly, especially when one’s conversation is being broadcasted or documented, individuals need to think in advance of how and to whom they are going to address their insult, as there are consequences to their speech acts. However, what happens when an insult is done in the parliament by the Member of Parliament (MP)? Do the same rules apply? Is it normal to expect and assume that, beside the proscribed rules of conduct in the Parliament, working in such environment and at such distinguished position will immediately bring higher moral code and values of conduct of its elected officials?

**1.2. Rationale**

Studying insults, especially those done by the MPs can give an insight into “social and cultural systems of moral values“(Ilie, 2004: 45), ideology behind the insult, party affiliation, balance of power between the opposing sides/parties, power (not only power granted by “institutional status“(Ilie, 2001: 236), but power seen as “ ‘interactional skill and process’“(2001 :236), i.e. the power obtained through interaction with other MPs, and finally, language style of an individual MP. Diachronic analysis of unparliamentary discursive practices during different parliament sessions can reveal the possible change of institutionalized language as well as indicate the degree of development of a national parliamentary discourse and, implicitly, of democracy itself. Cross-cultural studies (Ilie, 2001, 2004, 2010a, 2010b), as is this one, show forms and functions of insults in different cultures, direction of parliamentary discourse in connection with the political/social climate and can serve as a possible guideline of conduct for the future elected government officials.

* 1. **Research questions**

How do MPs gain desired discursive power and implicitly, more influence with the wider audience? Do insults play important role in attention-getting? What is perceived as an insult by MPs and what triggers a response? Do the MPs respond to the insults? Are insults party –line, wing-line or individually oriented? Do and how insulting practices change during time? Which types of parliamentary insulting strategies are preferred and dispreferred in Croatian debates in comparison to British and Swedish ones? Does the change in insulting practice show development of parliamentary discourse, its participants and, implicitly, of democracy itself? These were some of the questions that this research has raised.

* 1. **Historical overview**

Croatian Parliament (*Hrvatski Sabor*), 22 years since its foundation, is significantly younger when compared with the other parliaments in similar studies. The modern British Parliament, one of the oldest continuous representative assemblies in the world, was formed in 1707 but has its traditions set way back into the 13th century[[1]](#footnote-1) and the Swedish one (*Riksdag*), established in 1917, has roots found in 1453[[2]](#footnote-2). Modern Croatian Parliament was formed in 1990 and although its origins can be traced back into the 13th century, geo-political changes in Croatia from that period onwards make this historical continuity irrelevant for this research. Although the representative body can be treated as a fairly new phenomenon in Croatia, the same cannot be said for the profession of politician. Specifically, a number of representatives in the Croatian Parliament had significant political functions in the political institutions of Yugoslavia and consequently more experience in public speaking than other MPs in the newly formed Croatian Parliament in the nineties. However, communism and democracy do not share the same political discourse practice. Therefore, possible in/experience of politicians in political discourse and its correlation with success of getting across ideas/views will be left for some future studies.

After the Croatian War of Independence and the formation of modern Croatian Parliament in 1990, the predominant numbers of seats were mostly won by the moderate right-wing party HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union). According to Čular (2001) Croatian party system consists of 7 larger parties: HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), SDP (Social Democratic Party), HNS (Croatian Peoples Party), HSLS (Croatian Social Liberal Party), HSS (Croatian Peasant Party), IDS (Istrian Democratic Assembly) and HSP (Croatian Party of the Right). Although the number of parties has changed during time, the two most influential parties from that time onwards are the already mentioned HDZ and SDP (Social Democratic Party), which is a moderate left-wing party. Although both parties place themselves around the centre, Croatian people perceive them as more predominantly left and right (Banković –Mandić, 2007).

1. **Theoretical background**
	1. **Insults and culture**

Different cultures use abusive language in a variety of ways and in different areas of life. Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that politeness is a universal concept, but also that some cultures may be characterized as negative politeness cultures and others as positive politeness cultures. Although Spencer-Oatey (2002 qtd. in Hickey and Stewart 2005) disputes this approach saying it is susceptible to ethnocentrism, everyone who is familiar with the situation in Croatia can confirm that Croatian society is quite ethnocentric, especially because of the Croatian War of Independence that made Croatians quite sensitive to their own national identity. Even though tradition makes important part of Croatian everyday life, polite forms of address have changed as they have been much more rigid in the past then they are nowadays (Marot, 2005). This could be the result of a merger between previously strictly separated forms of written and spoken politeness, or “multifunctionality“[[3]](#footnote-3) (Silić, 2006:36) of language in different contexts of public communication, and which is shaped by different functional styles (Silić, 2006). The same dichotomy has been noted in Italian political language (Galli de’ Paratesi, 2009; Held, 2005). As in Italy, written politeness in Croatia is still much more formal and rigid that the more spoken-oriented style, characterized by more simplified syntactic patterns, less complex vocabulary and direct language, all “with the aim of realizing spontaneity“ (Galli de’ Paratesi, 2009: 138). As a result, the public “has learned not to be surprised any more at expressions that were once confined to dialect and lower registers, typical of extremely familiar and highly informal situations“[[4]](#footnote-4) (Galli de’ Paratesi, 2009: 140). With this gradual erosion of respect for institutional conduct, it is only natural to expect the common usage of verbal transgressions in the Croatian Parliament, as they represent one of the basic expressions of linguistic substandard.

* 1. **Insults as unparliamentary language**

The unparliamentary language was defined and described extensively in the work of Ilie (2001, 2004) who says that those are “subversive transgressions of the institutional boundaries of parliamentary language use and practices“(2001: 259). One is immediately aware that the context of argumentation (Tindale, 2007), beside being multi-layered, varied and complex, is extremely important for the analysis of these transgressions. Richards (1938 qtd. in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 2008:124) stresses that “it is always the context that gives a word its meaning, and it is only through the context that we can discover what the word does“. Irvine (1993: 110) specifies that “insult is a communicative effect constructed in interaction“, which presupposes a context of some kind. On the other hand, whether or not something is going to be perceived as an insult and bring about any kind of response relies heavily on the affective characteristics of the insult target. This is what J. L. Austin (1975) calls illocutionary force of an utterance, where in order to properly understand the message the listener needs to understand the intention of the speaker and what he meant, how the words spoken were used, or how the utterance was to be taken or ought to have been taken. As Ilie (2001: 237-238) says “words are not insulting in themselves, but rather that it is their underlying conceptualisations which are perceived as offensive“. These underlying conceptualizations mostly derive from linguistic base, but we believe that insult categorization also strongly relies on extralinguistic base, i.e. paralinguistic cues. Thus, it is both the emotional characteristic of the insult target/s, as well as the emotionality of the insult initiator that are indispensable for understanding of an utterance. “The more emotional an utterance is, the more significant the role of the intonation, while at the same time the importance of lexical (linguistic) material diminishes“[[5]](#footnote-5) (Vuletić, 1980: 35). Finally, we can conclude that insults are defined through both linguistic and paralinguistic cues.

When used in Parliament, insults represent deviations from the norm in a highly normative context where MPs’ conduct is controlled by the speaker and the proscribed rules, i.e. Standing Orders of the Croatian Parliament, Code of Conduct, and Code of Ethics for Civil Servants[[6]](#footnote-6). Parliament sessions provide a highly competitive context and political discourse “involves cooperation as well as conflict“(Chilton, 2004: 198). These parlamentary divergences quite often turn into debates which can be defined as “institutionalised deliberation ritual that starts with a basic assumption on the part of the debators concerning the desirability of deliberating and taking action in order to bring about certain agreed upon changes in society“ (Ilie, 2001:242). Debates that are held in the parliament are commonly known to be adversarial, and MPs try to show their power by attacking and counter-attacking each other, so it is of no surprise that they will use unparliamentary language. Face – threatening acts include requesting, advising, refusing or criticizing and reflect “social-power structures“(Held, 2005: 294) and quite often evolve into insults or are perceived as insults. Insults serve to undermine MPs’ credibility or party’s institutional trustworthiness and consequentially, serve to enhance *ethos* of the insult initiator and shatter the opposing party reliability. *Ethos* is seen in the Aristotelian tradition (Habinek, 2005), where proofs, in this case insults, are based on some feature of the insult target character.

1. **Methodology**
	1. **Corpus**

The examined corpus consists of transcripts of two sessions of the 6th Parliamentary term and 5 randomly selected sessions from each of the previous Parliamentary terms as well as Question time (*Aktualno prijepodne*), randomly chosen from 1992-2011 period. The sessions were: fourth session in the Second Term (November 1992), 22nd session from the Third Term (November 1997), 36th session from the Fourth Term (September, 2003), 17th Session form the Fifth Term (November, 2005), 23rd and 24th session from the Sixth Term (April, October 2011). One session, i.e. debates about different proceedings, lasts on average 12-14 hours, so altogether about 70 hours of material have been analyzed.

* 1. **Criteria**

Criteria that was used for insult selection was either content-based or response-type based, because as previously discussed, context and illocutionary force of an utterance play important role in defining what can be perceived as an insult. If the insult was response-based, it was observed whether it was by addressee, party-member or the speaker or whether paralinguistic cues were used. No response to an insult was signaled by the MP going back to the content.

* 1. **Procedure**

The corpus was analyzed in the following way. First, the recorded sessions were watched and then the part of MPs’ speech or debate evaluated as an insult was transcribed. The analysis of data was based on Ilie's (2004) framework of interface between rhetoric, discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics. Firstly, discourse theory perspective with foundations in Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980 qtd. in Ilie 2004) cognitive schemata theory was applied. It explains that human process of understanding is done through image-schematic structures which are “rooted in preconceptual embodiment patterns“ (2004: 49) and which thus reveal “inferential processes and implied meanings that are derived in the course of institutional confrontation“(2004: 49). Secondly, parliamentary transgressions were analyzed based on classical Aristotelian rhetorical framework (Habinek, 2005) where the insults, insult initiator/s and insult target/s are observed through types of categories the orator uses in his discourse (in our case insulting strategy) for his insult to come through. *Logos oriented* insultsfocus on rational use of language and the reasoning stems from the language itself. *Ethos oriented* insults appeal to insult initiator or insult target character or moral qualities, and *pathos oriented* are those that are based on the emotion, feelings of the audience “that can change the ways that people affect their judgments“(Jaffe, 2010: 338).

Levels of analysis included, on the one hand direct insulting strategies mostly done through fallacies like *ad hominem, antiphrasis*, *guilt by association* types of arguments and which serve to establish either in-group identity or polarization. On the other hand, indirect insulting strategies were analyzed, which were achieved through rhetorical (rhetorical questions, sarcasm, irony) or pragmatic (juxtaposition of opposite notions, insults formed as questions, attribution transfer strategy) devices. All the aforementioned levels of analysis were then placed according to Ilie’s (2004) division into layers of (un)parliamentary polarization 4.1., (un)parliamentary mitigation strategies 4.2., and interplay between in-group identity and inter-group dissent 4.3., expanded by diachronic aspect of parliamentary discourse.

Furthermore, we have compared insults in the Croatian Parliament with the recorded instances of British and Swedish Parliaments (Ilie, 2004, 2009, 2010a) to see whether they vary in forms and functions and to identify culture-specific correlations between them.

Finally, to get a deeper insight of the possible temporal change of parliamentary discourse in Croatia, we have observed different sessions through a period of time in order to get a diachronic perspective which would show the possible development in the *deliberative* genre (Habinek 2005, Ilie, 2004).

1. **Results and Discussion**

 Results show that Croatian MPs use different insulting strategies to establish the trustworthiness of their party and their own credibility i.e. their “(rhetorical *ethos*), primarily by displaying consistency between their statements and their actions“(Ilie, 2009:72) as opposed to other MPs, representing other parties.

In spite of political and organizational differences between Swedish, British and Croatian Parliament, we can say that they display some common features, such as tendency of MPs to exchange rude remarks in heated debates which are then kept under control by the Speaker. The possibility of comparison lies in the fact that “rudeness seems to be a universally occurring phenomenon“(Ilie, 2004: 51) and that basic rhetoric patterns and insulting strategies are shared by the MPs of the previously mentioned institutions.

* 1. **Direct insulting strategies: (un)parliamentary polarization**

Croatian MPs show similar strategies in debates to British MPs in sense that they both show “confrontation-seeking tendency“ (Ilie, 2004: 54) and are not that keen on trying to minimize disagreement as is the case with the Swedish MPs. The political polarization is based on party membership, which can be supported by the fact that no instance of an MP insulting another MP that belongs to his/her party has been documented. However, polarization in terms of political orientation is quite common and depends solely on the coalition formed during a particular term. Direct insults, even in the forms of address are quite frequent and the etiquette sometimes presents a good opportunity for a direct insult, as the following examples will show[[7]](#footnote-7):

1. B, A. (SDP): Moje pitanje će biti upućeno *predsjednici Vlade RH, predsjednici HDZ-a, bivšoj potpredsjednici Vlade i ministrici branitelja, bivšoj potpredsjednici Hrvatskog sabora, bivšoj predsjednici HDZ-a Grada Zagreba i bivšoj najbližoj suradnici i prijateljici gospodina Ive Sanadera* gospođi Jadranki Kosor. A ono glasi: znate li koliko radnika u Hrvatskoj radi, a ne prima plaću? (6 saziv/23 sjednica, Aktualno prijepodne, 6. travnja 2011.)

ui

 A. B. (SocDem) I will address my question to *Croatian Prime Minister, the president of CDU, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Veteran Affairs, former Deputy Speaker, former President of HDZ’s Zagreb Branch, and former closest associate and friend of Mr. I. Sanader:* Mrs. Jadranka Kosor. And the question is: do you know how many workers in Croatia do not receive a salary? (Term 6/ session 23, Question time, 6 April, 2011)

This example precisely shows how insults are context-based, as it seems like there is no harm in an MP enumerating all of the ex-Prime Minister's (PM) titles. The context in which these forms of address were perceived and interpreted as insulting was instigated by the Prime Minister’s reaction during the Question time in which she often warned other MPs who spoke before A. B. to use the proper forms to address her, for instance when they forgot to say Prime Minister before her name. This example shows how irony and playful tone can disguise the MP's hostile and scornful attitude, but also how paralinguistic cues can be essential for insult recognition, since the whole form of address is purely ironic. It also displays *guilt by association* type of *ad hominem* (Tindale, 2007), with the attempt to discredit the PM by closely associating her in the penultimate and the last form of address to the ex-prime minister, who was at the time awaiting trial for corruption scandal. The insult assumes that any ‘guilt’ that characterizes the former PM can be transferred to the insult target (PM at the time) as well.

1. J, Ž. (SDP): Moje pitanje je namijenjeno *osobno odabranoj nasljednici Ive Sanadera na mjesto predsjednice Vlade*, gospođi Kosor. Gospođo Kosor možete li nam reći kako se u Hrvatskoj može preživjeti sa 2 tisuće kuna plaće ili mirovine? (6/23, Aktualno prijepodne, 6.travanj 2011)
2. K, J. (Premijerka): Gospodine predsjedniče, budući da ovo nije pitanje *nego samo nastojanje da se uvrijedi*, ja, naravno, to je poznato javnosti koja poznaje Ustav Republike Hrvatske i hrvatske zakone da ja nisam nasljednica jer ovo nije monarhija, pa onda ja ne mogu biti nasljednica. (...) Ja ću vam *na ovo pitanje koje to nije* odgovoriti, objasnite vi meni gospodine Jovanoviću *kako se može ljetovati za 7 kuna i je li se pri tom platio ili se nije pri tom platio PDV*? (6/23, Aktualno prijepodne 6.travnja 2011.)

Ž. J. (SocDem): My question is for the *personally selected successor of Ivo Sanader in the place of Prime Minister*, Mrs. Kosor. Mrs. Kosor can you tell us: how can you survive with a two thousand kuna salary or pension in Croatia? (6/23, Question time, 6 April, 2011)

J.K. (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, since this is *not a question as it is an attempt to insult*, I, of course, it is known to the public who knows the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and Croatian laws, that I am not the successor, because this is not a monarchy, and then I cannot be the successor. (...) I will give an answer to this question, although it is actually not a question at all, please explain, Mr. Jovanović, *how can one spend their holidays paying for it 7 kuna and in doing so, has one paid or has one not paid VAT*? (6/23, Question time, 6 April, 2011)

 In the example (2) we can again see the same ironical form and *guilt by association* type of *ad hominem* in the form of address as in the example (1). Prime Minister Kosor’s answer to the question, which she clearly perceives as an insult, is an example of *circumstantial ad hominem attack*, also known as *tu quoque* (you too) (Krabbe and Walton, 1993; Walton, 1998; Tindale, 2007) type of argument, which Croatian MPs use quite often. It represents a case where the critic replies to a previous *ad hominem* attack by saying that the insult initiator is the same as the insult target and therefore cannot be accountable for delivering the criticism in the first place. It can also, according to Krabbe and Walton (1993: 82), serve as “a sign of a shift to a quarrel’, which is what the Prime Minister (3) tried to achieve, as she promptly reacted to an accusation with a counter-accusation. At the same time, in her counter attack, instead of you she is using indefinite pronoun *one*, which is marked for non-specificity. This strategy is called *defocalization* (Haverkate, 1992: 516) which is “a distancing technique applied by the speaker in order to minimize his/her own role or that of the hearer in the state of affairs described“ and is often found in the Croatian parliament when MPs try to mitigate assertive force of their accusations or insults.

Like their British colleagues, Croatian MPs demonstrate constant parliamentary transgressions directed towards opposite political parties i.e. *political* rather than *rhetorical polarization* (Ilie, 2004: 56). This type of polarization is based solely on party membership, and not on the ideology. The relationship between political camps shifts according to the coalition formed and according to the power-shift.

**4.1.1. Diachronic aspect of (un)parliamentary polarization**

As for the types of polarization, Croatian unparliamentary language has undergone a significant diachronic change. In the Second Term (1992-1995), insulting acts were primarily *pathos-oriented*, just like the British ones (Ilie, 2004), which in the Croatian case can be explained with the political and social situation (Croatian sovereignty, homeland security, neighboring country at war, war and post-war situation in Croatia, refugees etc.) at the time. Chilton (2004) claims that political discourse has specific connections to the emotional centers of the brain and that “some politically relevant feelings, such as territorial belonging and identity (‘home’), love of family, fear of intruders and unknown people (...) might have an innate basis and be stimulated automatically in the political use of language“ (2004: 204), which was especially perceptible in the terms following the Croatian independence. The dominant party at the time was CDU, right-wing party, with the predominant number of seats won (85, as compared to the second largest, 14 won by CSLP) and most of the insults at the time were *pathos-oriented*, group-identity oriented, with colorful metaphors, *ad personam* attacks and rhetorical questions, meaning you are either with us (Croats) or against us, i.e. pro-Serbian, which is a typical example of *non sequitur*. A lot of insults were generally addressed towards decisions done by the government, and only isolated instances were personally drawn. Most of the MPs used *pathos* to construct their insult by appealing to the general public, emphasizing what the wider audience was thinking and/or wanting to hear. The example that follows shows the usage of *ad hominem* arguments and rhetorical questions for *pathos-oriented* strategy:

1. Đ, Š. (HDZ): I dalje, predlažem da se ukine smiješni zakon o oprostu *četnicima*! To je *smiješni* zakon! Gospodo, cijela se Europa smije Hrvatskoj da je oprostila *nekakovim* snagama *koje vrše genocid, etnocid, memoricid* nad hrvatskim narodom jednako katoličke i muslimanske vjeroispovijesti, a da ovaj Sabor nije imao hrabrosti, *a ja bih rekao ni pameti*, da kaže s kim je to Hrvatska u ratu. Ja se pitam tko vodi pregovore sa državom koja nije pristala niti na primirje?! Pa, što smo mi, *jesmo li mi dječji vrtić ili smo Hrvatski parlament*? (...) I, nemojte se ljutiti na mene vi, moji stranački kolege, jer *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* je stvorena *da oslobodi hrvatski narod, a ne da se cjenka sa cincarima*! (2/4, 4. studeni 1992.)

Đ, Š. (CDU): I propose to abolish the ridiculous Amnesty Act for *Chetniks*! This law is *ridiculous*! Gentlemen, the whole Europe is laughing at Croatia for forgiving *so called* forces *which perform genocide, ethnocide, memorycide* against the Croatian people, equally those of Catholic and Muslim faith, and that this Parliament has not had the courage, and I would say neither brains, to say who is it that Croatia is in war with. I wonder who is negotiating with the state that has agreed not even to a treaty?! Well, what are we, *are we a nursery school* *or Croatian Parliament*? (...) And, do not get mad at me, you, my party colleagues, because I believe that *Croatian Democratic Union* was created *to liberate Croatian people, not to bargain with cheapskates*! (2/4, November 4, 1992)

Almost 20 year later, MPs in the Sixth Term (2008 - 2011) made a radical shift and started using strategies closer to their Swedish colleagues, having much more “*ethos-oriented logos*“ (Ilie, 2004:56), especially since the debates in the 24th session preceded election time. These insults are based on the argumentation that lies on common presumption “that the quality of an act reveals the quality of the person responsible for it“(Perelman and Olbrechts – Tyteca, 2008:70). Insults directed towards the target's *ethos* try to discredit the MP's personal qualities, gaining attention of multiple audience (Ilie, 2010b) and stirring an emotional reaction out of the political adversary (Ilie, 2004). These insults try to show that as a public person, an MP represents particular party and ideology, and is also responsible for implementing its policies in a particular constituency and for promoting and acting in accordance with particular moral values and social norms. “At the same time, an MP is also a citizen and a private person. On account of these multiple roles, all of which can be made public to a certain extent, the institutional targets of insults are often more vulnerable, and consequently much easier to harm“(Ilie, 2001: 348).

The following example covers exactly these two roles of one MP, his multiple roles, taken as possible grounds for insulting his incompetence in entrepreneurial and managerial skills as an ex and future Minister.

1. S, Đ. (HDZ): O čemu se radi, gospodine ministre Popijač vas ću pitati. Naime, *radi se o jednom bivšem ministru* iz *hvala Bogu* bivše koalicijske vlasti od 2000. do 2003. koji se obilato koristio svojim ministarskim mandatom i sklapao poslove u vrijednosti od 132 milijuna. No *nije pitanje vezano uz to*, pitanje je vezano nedavno *on* na radiju, televiziji *grmi, grmi, grmi, borit ćemo se, mi kad dođemo mi ćemo radnicima, plaće se ne isplaćuju*, a što se dešava? *Upravo njegovih* 17 tvrtki za koje je on *interesno vezan*, ne papirnato nego su *one njegove*, prenesao je, *ne isplaćuju plaću* svojim radnicima. Ovdje je 1000 radnika u igri koji ne primaju plaću, a on *licemjerno laže ljudima u oči i kaže da će se boriti protiv toga*. *Borit će se za nešto drugo, to je istina*. Gospodine ministre, lijepo vas molim, što ćete učiniti i sa ostalim radnicima koje ovakvi tajkuni izrabljuju na razini robova ih drže, ne isplaćuju im plaću? (6/23, Aktualno prijepodne, 6. travnja 2011.)

S, Đ. (CDU): I will ask you, Minister Popijač, what is it all about. The question is *about a former Minister* who was part of*, thank God,* *the former* Coalition Government from 2000 to 2003, who had liberally used his ministerial mandate and mantled jobs valued at 132 million kunas. *My question does not address that issue,* but is related to his recent media appearance, where he *shouts and storms,* *we will fight, when we come* (to power) *the workers will be paid*. *Wages are not paid, and what is happening*? *His* 17 companies for which *he is bound by interest*, not only on paper, *do not pay wages* to their workers. We are talking about 1000 workers who do not receive a salary, while he is *being a hypocrite and blatantly lying to their faces and saying he will fight against it*. *He will fight for something else, that is for sure*. Minister, I kindly ask you, what will you do with other workers who are being exploited in a slave-like manner, and who are not being paid?(6/23, Question time, April 6, 2011)

Here, we have several strategies being intertwined to use this *ethos- oriented logos*. The MP is using *antonomasia*, in order to avoid revealing the proper name of the insult target, but anyone who was even remotely familiar with the situation knew who s/he was referring to. Another strategy the MP chose to use was *praeteritio*, by actually first incriminating the insult target and then asserting that this is not part of the question and that it is not relevant. We can say that it makes a subversive *ad personam* attack. Also, we see some rhetorical questions which are again answered by the MP herself. Finally, juxtaposition of opposite notions, such as *corruption, lying* vs. *morals*, is constantly emphasized throughout the question.

* 1. **(Un)parliamentary mitigation strategies in the Croatian parliament**

Every MP knows that there are rules of conduct that should be obeyed in the Parliament. In order to avoid institutional sanctions Croatian MPs often resort to mitigation strategies. Fraser (1980 qtd. in Haverkate 1992: 505) says that mitigation serves to disguise the intention of the speaker for the purpose of reducing “unwelcome effects of his/her performing a certain kind of speech act“. The most common mitigation strategies are very similar to those found in both British and Swedish parliaments (Ilie, 2004) such as a) attribution transfer strategy, b) juxtaposition of opposite notions and c) the formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements.

* + 1. **Attribution transfer strategy**

Ilie (2004: 59) defines it as usage of “indirect attribution strategies in order to avoid taking direct responsibility for using derogatory qualifiers to characterise someone“. Basically, what the MPs do is that they transfer the negative qualifier to the target’s acts or statements rather than directly insulting the person. The following examples show how Croatian MPs transfer the insult to some *abstract notion* (procedure) instead of directly insulting another MP or his/her party:

1. N, D. (HSLS): (...) Ukoliko zakonom propisani postupak procjene utjecaja na okoliš nije zadovoljavajući, (...) potrebno ga je dopuniti, a ne propisivati paralelan *postupak* koji će kao i postojeći *prvenstveno služiti za pranje novca* (...). ( 4/36, 3. rujna 2003.)

N, D. (SocLib): (...) If legally prescribed procedure on the environmental impact assessment is not satisfactory, (...), it is necessary to supplement it, and not to prescribe a parallel *procedure* that will, as the existing one, *primarily serve for money laundering* (...). (4/36, September 3, 2003)

It is obvious that it is not the procedure, but the people behind it (and implicitly, the ruling party) that the MP is trying to disqualify. Another instance of attribution transfer strategy, commonly used by the Croatian MPs, is *non- specific reference to the insult target* (also see example (5)). Unlike the former example, where the insult initiator is trying to mitigate his/her insult through insulting target’s acts or statements or some abstract notion, in the following example the initiator avoids to directly mention the insult target’s name, and instead uses description of his actions. It is more than clear who the MP is referring to, but nowhere in the whole process does s/he name-calls the person in question and therefore can distance her/himself from the direct derogatory attribution:

1. B, D. (HSLS): Dame i gospodo, *ako ste osoba* protiv koje je *podnijeto desetak kaznenih prijava, ako sami u svojim intervjuima dajete izjave* koje ukazuju da ste i sami počinili, osim tih prijava kaznena djela, *što je vama učiniti*? Otići *na jahtu, predsjednika države, to je inovacija*. Ili na topovnjaču. *Ispovjediti se bez pokore, dobiti razrješenje*. *I ne samo to, nego još i sklopiti posao i još sklopiti posao u drugoj zemlji*, a hrvatska politika šuti, političke stranke šute, mediji o tome govore, ali Ministarstvo pravosuđa se ne očituje o toj strani s etičkog i političkog gledišta (...). (4/36, 4. rujna 2003.)

B, D. (SocLib): Ladies and gentlemen, *if you are a person* against whom a dozen *criminal charges have been filed*, if *you* alone *in your interviews give statements* indicating that *you have committed those crimes*, apart for those criminal charges, *what would you do*? *Go to the President’s yacht*, well, *that’s a new one*. Or on the gunboat. *Confess without repentance, get* absolution. Not only that, but *still be able to make a deal and do business in another country*, and all the while, Croatian politics is silent, the political parties are silent, the media talk about it, but the Ministry of Justice does not give any statements about this from either ethical or political standpoint (...). (4/36, September 4, 2003)

* + 1. **The formulation of insults as questions rather than as statements**

Another recurring mitigation strategy of Croatian MPs is to use questions rather than statements. They serve to introduce “ready-made assumptions and prejudicial ideas“ (Ilie, 2004:59). Quite often they are in the form of repetitious Wh-questions, which are often rhetorical because the answer is obvious, insulting or incriminating.

1. K, M. (HSLS): *Hoće li temeljem* ovoga zakona kazneno odgovarati primjerice Brodogradilište Viktor Lenac i donedavni predsjednik uprave gospodin Vrhovnik zbog obmanjivanja Vlade o poslovnim rezultatima te tvrtke? Pa je onda *obmanuta Vlada* toj tvrtki izdala 60 milijuna ili 60-tak milijuna dolara državnih jamstava. *Hoće li odgovarati* Riječka banka? *Hoće li primjerice odgovarati* Hrvatski fond za privatizaciju koji je evidentno zlouporabom ovlasti recimo gospodinu Štroku omogućio vlasništvo nad Otokom života? *Ili će pak ovaj zakon pogoditi neke sitnije ribe i ribice koje ne plivaju u onom pravcu koji se vladajućima sviđa* (4/36, 4. rujna 2003)

K, M. (SocLib): Will, for example shipyard Viktor Lenac and its, till recent CEO Mr. Vrhovnik, *be held criminally liable* due to misleading the Government about the business results of the company? And then that misled government issued 60 million, or 60-odd million dollars of government loan guarantees to that company. *Will Riječka banka be held accountable*? *Will*, for instance, Croatian Privatisation Fund, *also be accountable*, which by abuse of authority enabled Mr. Štrok to become a proprietor of Island of Life? Or *will this legislation catch some smaller fish and fishes that do not swim in the direction suitable to the ruling party*? (4/36, September 4, 2003)

This is an example of an insult in the form of multiple, multi-layered wh-questions. We can argue that they are fallacious, as they contain more questions piled together in an apparently single question (Ilie, 2004), which could be read as an attempt to show the corruption and lack of good judgment of the ruling party. Moreover, they function more as rhetorical questions than the real ones, as the MP provides a scornful answer to them at the end. Questions in the example contain *repetition* (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008), precisely *anaphora* (will be held accountable), which serves to accentuate a point and increase the “feeling of presence“(2008: 175) of arguments. Repetition is one of the surest and easiest ways to make arguments more pronounced and less surprising, and this is exactly what the MP tried to achieve.

1. K, D. (IDS): *Da li ste* tome *pritvoreniku iz Salzburga, da ne kažem kriminalcu, kako ga predstavljaju mediji*, ijednom rekli gospodine Sanaderu, *prijatelju, druže, kamaradu, gospodine, ekscelencijo,* pretjerali ste, dosta toga. Nije valjda da niste mogli naslutiti kamo ide njegova samovolja. (...) ali ministri znali su u 90% slučajeva što se zapravo zbiva u Vladi, *kod čovjeka koji je, tako mediji govore,* 90% radio mimo zakona, a svega 10% *valjda* u skladu sa zakonom. (6/24, 28. rujna 2011.)

K, D. (IstrianDem): *Have you ever* said to this *detainee from Salzburg, I will not use the word criminal, as the media call him*, Mr. Sanader, *friend, comrade, compadre, Sir, Your Excellency, you have gone too far, it’s enough*. *Is it possible* that you could not have guessed where his autocracy was leading. (...) but the ministers knew in 90% of the cases what was actually going on in the government, with the man who was, *as the media claim,* 90% of the time working on the other side of the law, and only 10%, *I suppose*, in accordance with the law. (6/24, September 28, 2011)

This example shows *ad hominem* attacks and irony in the form of rhetorical question, but it also displays a brilliant usage of deictic device called *hedge* (Lakoff, 1972). The MP first uses *hominem* attack to say that the former Prime Minister is a criminal, but then uses the mitigating effect of the hedge, in this case the media, to avoid making the impression that he is personally responsible for the assessment, and thus modifies the force of the insult so that he cannot be accountable for something someone else said. This example also displays the usage of etiquette and forms of address as an opportunity to insult (see also example (1)). Rhetorical figure of *irony* stems from ridicule that is, according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2008: 207), “often achieved through clever deductions drawn from what one is trying to criticize“. Here, the MP is criticizing and trying to insult the leading party members, by accusing them of knowing what was going on at the time.

* + 1. **Juxtaposition of opposite notions: Democracy, morality vs. communism, corruption, lying**

Croatian MPs use juxtapositions of opposite notions as a possible mitigation strategy. This is usually done by using the rhetorical figure of *antithesis* which has two contrasting ideas intentionally juxtaposed. Demetrius (Dean Anderson Jr., 2000: 21) says that “the use of antithesis makes the speaker both *gravis* and *ornatus*“, i.e. important, serious, and his speech elegant and ornate.

Diachronically, during the 90’s (2nd and 3rd Term), the notion that was used as a way of mitigating insulting strategy was *democracy* vs. *communism/old habits.* In the terms that followed, these notions were mainly used by the right-wing parties when they wanted to accuse the Left of preferring the previous system more. Later on, *morality* vs. *corruption* came up in face-threatening acts. It is of no surprise, since MPs vulnerability can easily be enhanced by attacking the MPs’ *ethos* through his/her wrongdoings, i.e. lying, cheating and corruption. These notions at first seem different from *respect* vs. *contempt* used by British and Swedish MPs (Ilie, 2004), but implicitly they are the same, since it is known that people who are corrupt and lie deserve contempt, as opposed to those who are honorable, fair and deserve respect. The following example shows the constant juxtaposition of these notions:

1. C, Z. ( HDZ): Kako ćete postaviti tu *moralnu dvojbu* i prozivati ljude koji nisu htjeli stati [na vašu stranu] na temelju tih vaših *nemoralnih postupaka* u politici jer *jedno* govorite *drugo* radite, a s druge strane optužite Hrvatsku demokratsku zajednicu da bi trebala biti u takvim situacijama *moralna* i prepustiti vama političku vlast (...). Pa prema tome, budimo realni, vi koji stvarate jednu *areolu tobožnje demokratičnosti*. Tko bi u tom slučaju trebao dobiti mjesto predsjednika skupštine ili gradonačelnika? (3/22 5. studenoga 1997.)

C, Z. (CDU): How do you plan to set up this *moral dilemma* and single out people who would not choose [your side] on the basis of these *immoral actions* in politics, because you say *one* thing and do *another*, and on the other hand, you accuse Croatian Democratic Union and say that in such situations it should behave *morally* and give you the political power (...). Therefore, let's be realistic, you who try to create a halo of the *so-called democracy*. In that case, who should be made a president of the assembly or a mayor? (3/22, November 5, 1997)

According to Aristotle (qtd. in Demetrius 1902: 267) “the merit of an antithetical style is that it brings contraries into emphatic juxtaposition“. These notions are paired in order to create, in this case, ethical dilemma between two moral imperatives out of which only one is preferable. The opposition serves to emphasise and further accentuate the difference between these two notions. The example carries an underlying message that a party that is immoral does not deserve to be in power. MPs use corruption, cheating, lying, and immoral actions to discredit and insult the opposing MPs or their parties.

* 1. **In-group identity and inter-group dissent**

Croatian group identification depends solely on the party or coalition formed and is not based on the similarities or differences in the interpretation of socio-political events. It also purely depends on the individual’s political identity and how much does s/he feel like a part of the group. The goal of these insults is to weaken the authority of the adversaries, weather be it an individual MP or his/her party, as “individuals influence our impression of the group to which they belong, and, conversely, what we think of the group predisposes us to a particular impression of those who form it“(Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008: 322).

Insults to show in-group identity are often expressed by using *irony* (see also examples (1), (2), (7), (9)). It is a rhetorical figure where “one seeks to convey the opposite of what one actually says“ (Dumarsais qtd. in Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008: 207) and the application of the same device is *antiphrasis,* which is a deliberate ironic use of inadequate illustration by reference to qualifications. These qualifications are assigned to a person and represent generally accepted statement illustrated by someone’s behaviour (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2008). The following example shows how an MP is displaying her/his in-group membership by using a deliberately inadequate illustration to ironically insult the other group (ruling party):

1. H, M. (SDP): *Samo je vama uspjelo poći za rukom da broj za nezaposlenost raste i* *ljeti*. To *zaista treba znati i to je zaista odlična realizacija* programa gospodarskog oporavka. I tako danas imamo 300 tisuća nezaposlenih *upravo zahvaljujući vašoj sposobnosti*. Vjerujemo da će građani tu vašu sposobnost nagraditi na sljedećim izborima (6 /24, 28. rujna 2011.)

H. M. (SocDem): *Only you have succeeded in having unemployment rates increasing even during the summer. It is really not easy to pull it off* and that’s a *really great realization* of the economic recovery program. And so today we have 300 thousand unemployed *thanks to your competence*. We believe that the citizens will reward *this competence* in the next election (6/24, September 28, 2011)

1. **Conclusion**

The line between criticisms, accusations, and disparaging, derogatory terms perceived as insults is very fuzzy and sometimes difficult to establish. Insults are achieved via both linguistic and extralingusitic cues and are contextually defined. Most of the time, insults made by the Croatian MPs serve to interact with other interlocutors and reaffirm the party position represented by a particular MP, at the same time undermining the insult target and consequentially the party represented by this particular MP. They also serve as attention-getters, in which case the insult is “usually directed for the benefit of an on-looking audience and with the intent to strengthen the silencer’s own position“ (Tindale, 2007:90). The audience that the insult initiator has in mind is often wider than the one in the session hall and we could define it as “a *third* party consisting of the spectators“ (Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: 178) i.e. reporters, journalists, and constituency members (Ilie, 2010b).

There are various cues for insult recognition, usually *ad hominem/ad personam* attacks, notions such as *corruption, lies, morale*, irony and sarcasm, forms of address, rhetorical questions, together with the expressive force of the insult instigator and the conception of what an insult is by the MP her/himself. Many of the insults are done in the form of rectifying the incorrect statement, when MPs have a right to correct a statement previously discussed. Responses to insults are individual, sometimes it is the addressee that responds and sometimes someone else (Speaker, other MP of the same party). MPs often use the respond to an insult to make an insult themselves or shift the topic of discussion.

MPs position themselves only along the party lines. This shows that the possible common ideology behind the same-wing parties does not play any significant role in the Croatian Parliament. The frequency of insult initiators is purely individual and there are certain MPs who use unparliamentary language more often than others, which basically serves to promote their own image in a highly competitive environment. There is no gender–dependent difference between insult initiator/s or target/s, which can be linked to Kišiček’s (2008) research, which showed that there were no significant differences between female and male rhetoric in politics.

Preferred insulting strategies are *pathos* and *ethos-oriented* insults to show political polarization, juxtaposition of opposite notions such as *democracy* vs. *communism*, *morality* vs. *corruption*/*lies*; insults as (rhetorical) questions, attribution transfer strategy, defocalization, irony and sarcasm.

During time, insulting practices in the Croatian Parliament have changed from *pathos-oriented* *logos* to *ethos-oriented logos.* Notions used for mitigation strategies have also changed from more abstract (*democracy*) to more specific (*corruption, bribe, lies*) ones. The usage of unparliamentary language was prompted by the introduction of spoken and lower registers into a highly institutionalized place, which opened up new possibilities for linguistic expression.

Croatian MPs show similar insulting and mitigation strategies as both British and Swedish colleagues. Still, we must conclude that, when compared in closer detail, they behave more like the British MPs, i.e. they display “confrontation-seeking tendency“ (Ilie, 2004:54), polarization which is more political than rhetorical, balance between terms of respect and contempt, irony and direct insults. Diachronically, in the 2nd and 3rd Terms Croatian MPs behave more like the British MPs using *pathos-oriented* insults and in later terms more like their Swedish counterparts, using *ethos-oriented* insults(Ilie, 2004), by attacking the other MPs’ personal values and acts and discrediting their credibility.

On many occasions, there have been instances of very harsh and rude insults by the Croatian MPs that have been discussed even in the news (e.g. that women are known to be good in bed, but not in places where intelligence is necessary), but they were not part of our randomly selected corpus. Still, it is inevitable to conclude that the insults are becoming more and more direct and used with less constraints than before. Whether the common usage of insults promotes democracy and shows development of parliamentary discourse remains open. We believe that is important to beverbally polite “in order to maintain harmonious, efficient interaction“ (Held, 2005: 303) which, we think, is a sign of democracy, more than insults will ever be.

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1. http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/originsofparliament/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/4140 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Originally in Croatian, translated by Vančura [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Originally in Italian, translated by Vančura [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Originally in Croatian, translated by Vančura [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?sec=714 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The examples show MPs' initials followed by his/her political party. We believe that party allegiances are important for better understanding of the examples. Italicized is the part of the example that best represents the category under discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)