Small stories and accountability of discursive action in mediated political discourse: Contextualisation and recontextualisation of ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants

Anita Fetzer*

University of Augsburg, Augsburg, Germany

This paper examines how participants in mediated political discourse use short narratives strategically to account for discursive action by contextualising and re-contextualising their discursive selves, particular discursive acts and their intended and unintended perlocutionary effects. The data analysed are pre-election data (2017) and non-election data (2018), comprising online news reports from British broadsheets, parliamentary debates, political speeches from leading British politicians, and their web-based comments' sections. The research is based on the differentiation between the generalised pragmatic premise and second-order theoretical construct of accountability$_2$ of communicative action and its discourse-community-based particularisation, the first-order participant construct of accountability$_1$. The discursive value of the latter is negotiated in context and in the political-discourse data further distinguished as regards accountability *of* and accountability *for* discursive acts. The analysis focuses on how ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants contextualise and recontextualise interfacing ordinary-life experience anchored in private domains and not-so-ordinary political action anchored in public and institutional domains. It considers (1) the production format comparing not-so-ordinary and ordinary story tellers; (2) stories with (a) not-so-ordinary, (b) ordinary, and (c) ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters; (3) ordinary settings and institutional settings; and (4) explicit and implicit evaluations by characters and tellers. The analysis shows that there is not only variation in the formatting of the short narratives with more-prototypical small stories and monolithic characters, settings and plot, and less-prototypical small stories with more dimensional characters, fuzzy settings and negotiated evaluations. There is also variation in the discursive function of the small stories: not-so-ordinary tellers and characters account for their discursive acts through life-world-experience-based accounts while at the same time implicating their leadership skills. They present themselves as listening to ordinary people, voicing their concerns in the public arena, initiating political action and acting on their behalf. Ordinary tellers and their ordinary characters tell their ordinary-life based stories, distancing themselves from the not-so-ordinary agents. In the mediated

data, not-so-ordinary participants' references to the private-public interface generally trigger conversational implicatures targeting sincerity, credibility and ideological coherence, while ordinary participants' references to the private-public interface are used to show the effects of political decision on their real-life experience.

Introduction

Political discourse in the media has become an important means for ordinary people to encounter politics (Lauerbach and Fetzer, 2007; Fetzer, 2018). This is particularly true for political discourse in social media outlets, in which it may reach participants directly on their phones, tablets and other digital devices (Gruber, 2019). The digital format of social media favours dialogue-anchored forms of interaction involving participants in more and less direct ways, albeit with different interactional rights and obligations. In digital media, the transmission of political information is supplemented with hyperlinked pictures and video-clips, and with other multimodal means allowing participants to become even more involved in their access and reception of political discourse. Political discourse has become some kind of media discourse.

Media discourse is public discourse by definition; it is institutional discourse and as such is more constrained than non-institutional discourse. Political discourse is thus public discourse, institutional discourse, and it is a more or less professional kind of discourse. In our mediated and mediatised societies, it undergoes journalistic mediation, different kinds of grassroot mediation and ordinary-citizen mediation in social media (cf. Kampf, 2013; Fetzer and Weizman, 2015, 2019; Fetzer, 2022). One of the formats used for the mediation – or from a participant's perspective: recontextualisation – of political information are small stories. These stories allow participants to narrate their discursive selves in the context of a particular event, in which the teller as the character may play an important part. If the small story is told in the media, more private-domain anchored moments of life go public. The affordances of social media allow participants not only to share those personal moments embedded in a small story, but also to share them with other participants, to follow up on them and to comment on them. Small stories generally fulfil an interpersonal function foregrounding emotive aspects of communication. By indexing emotional dispositions, e.g., happiness, anger, fear, sadness or distress, surprise or disgust, first-person story telling invites co-construction with the audience and alignment with the teller of the story (cf. Rühlemann, 2013; Xie and Tong, 2019).

The discursive format of a small story allows for the contextualisation of a singled-out event and for its interpretation and presentation from the perspective of the teller. Not-so-ordinary participants may present their discursive selves as doing ordinary things – or rather: as doing things in an ordinary manner – and ordinary participants may present their discursive selves as doing not-so-ordinary things. Conversational story telling may thus both contextualise and recontextualise a singled-out event. From a speech-act-theoretic perspective, the focus of telling small stories is not so much on the illocution, but rather on its perlocution. And this is the case when small stories are used strategically to create accountability in political discourse, this paper claims.

The focus of the present analysis is not on how participants bring accountability into media discourse, how they assign it the status of an object of talk, and how they voice their right as citizens to being accounted to by institutional bodies of society and their representatives, in particular the political elite, as in Weizman and Fetzer (2021). Instead, the analysis concentrates on the strategic use of the discursive format of a small story and how both ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants use it strategically to create accountability in mediated political discourse. Firmly anchored in discourse pragmatics, the paper shares its premises of the Gricean Cooperative Principle, its maxims and implicatures; Brown and Levinson's conceptualisation of a model person; the ethnomethodological conceptualisation of accountability, rationality and practical reasoning; and intentionality of discursive action. It further differentiates between second-order theoretical constructs and first-order participant concepts whose discourse-community-specific particularisations are negotiated in context. The data under investigation stem from a pre-election period (10 March – 07 June 2017) and a non-election period (01 April – 29 June 2018) in Britain.

The paper tackles the following questions:

- Which discursive function does the discursive format of a small story fulfil in the data?
- Do first-person and third-person stories fulfil different discursive functions?

- How do not-so-ordinary participants as tellers use the format to create accountability in context, and how do ordinary participants use it as tellers?
- Do ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants refer to the private-public interface when telling their small stories?

The paper is structured as follows: the next two sections present an analysis and discussion of second-order accountability and of the discursive format of a small story. Section Data and method introduces data and method, section Small stories and ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants presents an analysis of the function and distribution of small stories in mediated political discourse, and section Discussion presents the discussion.

Accountability of discursive action meets accountability for discursive action

Accountability of social action and accountability for communicative action has become an important topic in pragmatics and ethnomethodological conversation analysis. With a focus on the speaker as a producer of communicative meaning, accountability of social action has been a key concept in ethnomethodology, with participants being able to account for their actions as they know, at some level, what they say with their contributions and what they mean by them. In this retrospective-prospective outlook on communication with indexical and reflexive social actions and participants' meaning-making processes based on practical reasoning, accountability is perceived as a regular, daily, ordinary experience (Garfinkel, 1967). As such, it differs largely from the view of accounts as counteracts intended to repair undesirable situations, negatively loaded acts and their consequences, which may discredit the speaker or offend others (Scott and Stanford, 1968). From a socio-psychological perspective, accounts have been analysed as a means to deal with disruptions of the social order, such as breaches of conventions, challenges to peoples' reputation and threats to identities (Semin and Manstead, 1983).

In the speech action paradigm and its focus on illocutionary and perlocutionary action, the speaker in their role as producer of communicative meaning and their responsibility for producing their speech actions in accordance with felicity conditions and appropriateness conditions has been at the centre of investigation (Sbisà, 2013), as for instance in the analysis of practises of praising and blaming and their moral implications (King and van Roojen, 2013). The Searlean *Making the Social World* further refines speech-act-based investigations of responsibility by focussing on "deontic powers" (Searle, 2010: 8) that carry "rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorizations, entitlements, and so on" (Searle, 2010: 9), including "both the positive deontic powers (e.g., when

I have a right) and the negative deontic powers (e.g., when I have an obligation)" (ibid.), which may be referred to when accounting for a communicative act[1]. Accountability of social action in general and of communicative action in particular not only entails a speaker's responsibility for the production of speech action in accordance with felicity conditions and their commitment to perlocutionary effects and deontic powers, but also their provision of reasons for social action.

Expanding the differentiation between the first-order and second-order concepts of (im)politeness (cf. Watts, 2003; Culpeper, 2011) to accountability, second-order accountability refers to the theoretical construct promoted in ethnomethodology, supplemented by speech-action-based responsibility and deontic powers. First-order accountability refers to a participant concept whose validity is negotiated in the discourse of a speech community with participants being accountable for their communicative actions to their co-participants. Participants' accounts provide reasons for the performance (or not-performance) of a particular action in order to make it acceptable, for instance with remedial action. First-order accountability may further be distinguished with regard to political accountability, journalistic accountability or administrative accountability. Participants are thus accountable for their actions and – at the same time – have the right to be accounted to by their co-participants.

The focus of this study lies on one particular context, online political discourse in the British-English discourse community, and one particular type of accountability, accountability of the political elite. It investigates how first-order accountability is negotiated and whether it undergoes context- and media-specific particularisation. While research on participants' references to accountability and metatalk about it have generally been anchored in their personal domains as described above, accountability for social action and for communicative action in online political discourse feeds on societal and institutional domains.

Small stories

Small stories have been investigated in sociolinguistics, interactional linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. All of the research paradigms have based their analyses on Labov (1972) original definition, according to which constitutive parts of a narrative are a reference to a single past event introduced by a verbal phrase realised in a past tense and a raison d'être. The past event should be anchored in a personal experience, which is seen as reportable and tellable, and the temporal sequence

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1 Accountability has also been examined in connection with commitment to speaker meaning which is grounded in the moral order (e.g., Haugh, 2013), and, in the context of political interview, with political agents' accountability to backstage prior talk (Chovanec, 2020).

of events should be realised with at least two narrative clauses. The linguistic formatting of small stories allows for variation as regards length and tense shift, but the core sequence needs to be in accordance with the constraints. Labov's definition has been further refined by Johnstone (2003) and others, who distinguish between stories with a point, and talk which narrates events in the past, shifting from texts to practises (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008) and directing the analytic focus at both the narrated event and the narrative event (Sarangi, 2008). This has paved the way for investigating the embeddedness of small stories in discourse not only as regards delimitation from discourse as a whole, but also as regards local and global functions.

The classic narrative is composed of an orientation section, in which context, time, place, characters and circumstances are described. With small stories, this section can be realised implicitly or by indexical expressions, which connect the small story with its embedding context, for instance a previously discussed topic. The next component is the story as such, narrating some complicating action. This section should not only "contain something unexpected" (Chafe, 1994: 128), but also a thematic development, a resolution stating what finally happened, and a coda marking the end, which may be realised as a metacomment. Furthermore, the narrative should contain an evaluation, which can be realised explicitly or implicitly (Labov, 1972). With these tools, "[w]e are able to analyze the way the referential world is constructed with characters in time and space as well as a function of the interactive engagement. In this sense, how the referential world is constructed points to how the teller wants to be understood, what sense of self they index" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 380).

Small stories provide a discursive format which may fulfil various social and interpersonal functions across discourse domains, for instance signifying solidarity, giving advice, or recontextualising the discursive identities of speaker, teller and others. By contextualising prior and upcoming discourse, small stories contribute to the negotiation of discourse coherence and to the joint construction of discourse common ground. Past-directed stories may recontextualise prior discourse, and future-directed stories may contextualise upcoming discourse. Referring to stories in general, Tan (1994) p. 165; points out that they "are universal. Whatever the context in which they appear, it would seem that what stories have in common is their affective impact." This also holds for small stories which – if told in a media context – bring personal private-sphere-based information into the mediated public arena. Searle (2010) p. 170; stresses the importance of the differentiation between the private and public spheres: "IN ORDER FOR A SOCIETY TO HAVE A POLITICAL REALITY IN OUR SENSE, IT NEEDS (…) A DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE SPHERE WITH THE POLITICAL AS PART OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE [original emphasis]".

Political discourse has been described above as a kind of media discourse, as public discourse, and as a more or less kind of professional discourse. If political agents tell small stories in the media, they bring their private spheres of life into the mediated arena and assign them the status of newsworthy information. If ordinary participants tell small stories in the media, it is not only their stories which are assigned the status of newsworthy information, but also their ordinary-life-based identities and their ordinary-life experience. The mass media coverage of ordinary persons' lives and of political agents' private lives blurs traditional private-public boundaries and makes the rights and obligations assigned to the public and private spheres of life fuzzy. In discourse, explicit and implicit references to the private-public interface may trigger a conversational implicature targeting participants' sincerity in the private spheres of life, their credibility in the public spheres of life, and their ideological coherence in their political lives (cf. Fetzer, 2002, 2010). The discursive format of a small story allows politicians to present themselves as an "ordinary citizen" (Duranti, 2006: 479), "constructing existential coherence through continuity" (Duranti, 2006: 486) while at the same time contextualising "any present decision (…) a 'natural extension' of some past experience" (ibid.). Small stories are good candidates to not only support the discursive construction of ordinariness in the mediated political arena, but also to bring accountability into the discourse and assign it the status of an object of talk.

Telling small stories in the context of political discourse is, however, not without communicative risks. First, the content of the story should be appropriate and connect well with the overall topic of the discourse as a whole. Second, the content should be of a personal nature, but only of a moderate personal nature to avoid instances of self-disclosure (Fetzer and Johansson, 2007). Moreover, the perlocutionary effects of the story should also be considered. If its evaluation or moral stance is not well balanced and there is too much polarisation between "us", for instance the political elite, and "them", the ordinary people, just a limited number of audience members may feel addressed and emotionally aroused while the majority may feel estranged. In that case, the story may trigger some kind of negatively loaded follow-up comments in and across the (social) media. These potential risks hold for both past- and future-directed stories. While the former are more frequent, the latter tend to occur in particularised contexts, for instance pre-election debates where hypothetical stories may provide answers to questions about what a politician would do if they were elected prime minister.

In the political-online data at hand, small stories are told by ordinary and not-so-ordinary tellers about ordinary characters, and about a mixed set of characters, generally taking place in an ordinary setting. Ordinary tellers and their ordinary characters tend to narrate their real-life experience, and not-so-ordinary tellers account for their actions through life-world-experience.

Data and method

The analysis of the function of small stories in political discourse is part of a research project in contrastive discourse pragmatics which compares the construction of ordinariness in mediated public talk in two genres: (1) commenting on opinion editorials and articles in online newspapers, and (2) online commenting on politicians' talk in selected speeches on YouTube and in parliamentary debates. A dedicated corpus was compiled for the discourse communities under investigation[2]. This analysis of small stories and accountability of and for discursive action in mediated political discourse draws on the British English data from the GIF project and on three discourse domains: (a) articles and readers' comments compiled from the internet sites of the liberal quality paper *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com), the conservative quality paper *The Daily Telegraph* (https://www.telegraph.co.uk) and their users' commenting on the articles, (b) three online pre-election and three online non-election political speeches from YouTube by leading politicians: Jeremy Corbyn (Labour Party), Theresa May (Conservative Party), Tim Farron (pre-election) and Vince Cable (non-election – both Liberal Democrats) and users' commenting on the speeches, and (c) Online Prime Minister's Questions on UK Parliament's YouTube Channel and users' commenting on the debates. The data were collected in two 3-month periods: a pre-election period (10 March to 07 June 2017) and a non-election period (01 April to 29 June 2018)[3]. The overall number of tokens for the British data is 5,320,051 (390,769 for the speeches and comments; 307,978 for Prime Minister's Questions and comments; 4,621,304 for the newspaper articles and comments).

The study combines bottom-up corpus-based methods with discourse-pragmatic analysis utilising key-words, co-occurrence and context. The extracts embedding small stories were identified through a search for the most contextually relevant key-words employed in the datasets compiled for the GIF project on the construction of ordinariness in media discourse. They include the originally used key-words *average, common, everyday, folk, guy, mundane, normal, ordinary, people* and *simple*. To filter out small stories, contexts were selected which additionally contained verbs of communication (e.g., *say, tell*) which may signal the communicative act of quotation (cf. Fetzer and Bull, 2019; Fetzer, 2020). This is because both small stories and quotations bring contextual information into an ongoing discourse, recontextualise it by adapting it to the contextual constraints and requirements of the quoting

discourse – or small-story-telling discourse – and assign it the status of an object of talk. What is more, small stories may contain quotations, and quotations may be expanded into the discursive format of a small story. The obtained data set has been further refined by additionally considering the spatio-temporal context of a small story which is frequently signified with the adverbial construction *once in*. The final dataset and the extracts selected for the analysis of the function of small stories thus contained one of the key words above, at least once either in an article, speech and parliamentary contribution, or in a user's comment, or in both. These extracts were then compiled for verbs of communication and the spatio-temporal construction *once in* further narrowing down the data set. That sub-corpus was coded manually for small stories in the articles, speeches and debates and in their users' comments. As has been the case with the discursive construction of accountability for communicative action to citizens (Weizman and Fetzer, 2021), the number of small stories told in the data was low, and they were mainly told by not-so-ordinary participants.

The low number of small stories told in the mediated political arena favours a qualitative rather than quantitative analysis considering both linguistic formatting and functions. This allows for the detailed analysis of patterned co-occurrences and their function as inference triggers.

Small stories and ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants

This section presents an analysis of the distribution and discursive function of small stories in the mediated political arena considering not only their contribution to the contextualisation and recontextualisation of ordinary and not-so-ordinary participants in the mediated political arena, but also to their doing accountability. It examines first- and third-person stories told by not-so-ordinary tellers with a mixed set of ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters, and first- and third-person stories told by ordinary tellers and their characters. The differentiation between first- and third person stories is sometimes blurred with changes in the teller's perspective from first to third person within a story, and with a small story embedded in another narrative. Small stories are not very frequent in the data with only 14 small stories distributed across the data sets. The discursive format is, however, mentioned quite frequently, followed by a brief summary of its content, such as "sharing a funny story".

The following section presents the results of a quantity-based analysis of the distribution of small stories across the pre- and non-election data sets.

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3   For a key-word based analysis of citizen in the British and Hebrew data see Weizman and Fetzer (2021).

Distribution

In both data sets, the number of small stories is rather low with an overall of 14 small stories. The majority of small stories is told by not-so-ordinary politicians and journalists (six first- and four third-person stories), and there are only four stories told by ordinary participants (one first- and three third-person stories).

As for the 18 political speeches, there are four first-person and four third-person stories told by the not-so-ordinary politicians with mixed sets of characters. One of Theresa May's pre-election speeches contains two small stories, a first- and a third-person story; her non-election speeches do not contain any small stories. Jeremy Corbyn's pre-election speeches do not contain any small stories while one of his non-election speeches contains two third-person stories. One of Tim Farron's pre-election speeches contains one first-person story, another one first- and one third-person story, and one of Vince Cable's non-election speeches has one first-person story. As for the ordinary users' commenting, there is only one small story told by an ordinary teller featuring ordinary characters following up on one of Corbyn's pre-election speeches.

In the pre- and non-election parliamentary debates, neither not-so-ordinary politicians nor ordinary users tell small stories. However, there are a lot of quotations (cf. Fetzer and Bull, 2019), and a reference to "sharing her story" ("She was one of the first survivors (…) to share her story"; Prime Minister's Questions 13 June 2018).

In the liberal and conservative quality newspapers, small stories are also not very frequent, but there are quite a number of witness stories about accidents and terror attacks. In the users' comments there are no small stories in both data sets. As for the non-election data, there is one first-person story told by an ordinary teller featuring ordinary characters in *The Daily Telegraph*. In *The Guardian* there are two first-person stories told by a not-so-ordinary teller with mixed sets of characters and a first- and a third-person story told by ordinary tellers with ordinary characters.

In what follows, first-person stories are analysed, distinguishing between first-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants with ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters (section First-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants), and first-person stories told by ordinary participants with ordinary characters (section First-person stories told by ordinary participants).

First-person stories

The teller of first-person stories is usually its main character. This configuration allows tellers to format stories and their characters in accordance with their intended perlocutionary effects, foregrounding particular discursive identities, such as an emotionally involved participant, and backgrounding others, such as the looking-at-facts-only participant. Not-so-ordinary participants may thus recontextualise discursive actions and discursive identities and account for them accordingly. The recontextualisation of discursive action counts as evidence for the not-so-ordinary participants and is intended to demonstrate that there is more to them than just a monolithic identity. For instance, a politician may intend to foreground their emotional selves in their private spheres of life, or an ordinary participant may intend to foreground their professional experience, presenting themselves as professionals in the public domain.

First-person stories present a teller's personal experience in the past and of the past, generally with a higher degree of involvement than the discourse in which the story is embedded. The involvement of the teller is reflected in their use of a more informal and more emotive type of language and in expressions of subjectification. The story may also present a hypothetical future event, should the teller need to account for their future plans or future policies. In mediated political discourse, small stories target the private-public interface of the characters, allowing them to present themselves as ordinary participants with ordinary real-life emotions and ordinary real-life concerns, while at the same time implying that they are not-so-ordinary competent professionals.

In the following, first-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants are investigated in the mediated political speeches and quality newspapers. The focus of analysis lies on the linguistic realisation of references to the private-public interface and on doing accountability for discursive action to the mediated audience.

First-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants

The discursive format of a small story allows the teller to construct discourse coherence with a prior stretch of discourse, or to import context into an ongoing discourse, thus setting the stage for their self-presentation as a particular discourse identity, to foreground the self-presented character of the small story and to background other teller-based discourse identities.

First-person stories told by politicians are intended to recontextualise their public discourse identities and present their narrated selves as ordinary private-sphere-anchored identities, as in extract (1) from the pre-election data[4]. Here the then prime minister Theresa May tells a small story about her "grandmother" and her life as "a domestic servant". In the evaluation section she builds on the narrated past experience and promotes her own political ideology, the British dream, and her private-domain-anchored motivation, her "**purpose in politics**", which she relates to that of the Conservative Party ("*And it's why today at this conference, this Conservative Party must pledge to*

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4   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3l3hDo6y-s; all websites were last accessed 02 June 2022.

renew the British dream in this country once again") thereby not only implicating ideological, but also existential coherence[5]:

Extract (1):

> And in a way, **that dream is my story** too. Now I know that people think **I am not very emotional**. [laughter] **I'm not the kind of person who wears their heart on their sleeve, and I don't mind being called things like the ice-maiden**. [laughter] *Though perhaps George Osmo Osborne took the analogy a little too far.* [laughter] But let me tell you something, **my grandmother was a domestic servant** who worked as a ladies-maid below stairs. She worked hard and made sacrifices because she believed in a better future for **her family**. And that servant, that ladies-maid, among her **grandchildren boasts three professors and a prime minister**. [applause] *And, and that's why the British dream inspires me, (…) And it's why today at this conference, this Conservative Party must pledge to renew the British dream in this country once again.* **To renew that dream is my purpose in politics**, **my reasons for being, the thing that drives me on**.
>
> (Theresa May, 04 October 2017)

Theresa May sets the stage for her small story with a metacomment ("**that dream is my story** too") which frames the narrative ("*and that's why the British dream inspires me*") and evaluates it ("**To renew that dream is my purpose in politics**, **my reasons for (..) being, the thing that drives me on**"), relating her "**not very emotional**" and "**ice maiden**" discursive identity to that of the character of her story: her grandmother. The prime minister presents herself as an ordinary person with ordinary emotional dispositions, such as irritation ("*Though perhaps George Osmo Osborne took the analogy a little too far*"), while at the same time recontextualising that moment of ordinariness into being a not-so-ordinary grandchild, "**a prime minister**". The strategic manoeuvring between private spheres of life reflected in references to family life and personal feelings and public domains reflected in official positions and politics allows not-so-ordinary participants to align themselves with ordinary people's real-life experience, and it allows ordinary people to align with the not-so-ordinary elite. The perlocutionary effects triggered by the references to the private-public interface, that is the prime minister and her grandmother in an ordinary setting, and her private emotional disposition are intended to implicate a recontextualised, more reflective emotional self while at the same time accounting for her political self's sincerity, credibility and ideological coherence.

Extract (2) is also from the pre-election data. It contains a not quite so small story told by the Liberal Democrat Tim Farron in which he contextualises his stance on Brexit, accounting for

the policies of the Liberal Democrats on the one hand, and the not-so-ordinary politician's leadership qualities, in particular his responsiveness to ordinary people, on the other (cf. Fetzer and Bull, 2012). Some characters of the story are ordinary ("a group of people, set up for me who had voted leave"; "**one of the guys (…) was Scottish, a businessman**"), and at the same time not-so-ordinary as they take part in a BBC documentary. The setting is also both ordinary, that is a pub in Yorkshire, and not-so-ordinary, that is a mediated pub for "*a BBC Laura Kuenssberg documentary*"[6]

Extract (2):

> *Now, a few weeks ago I was a little further south than here, still in Yorkshire, in Doncaster filming for (…) a BBC Laura Kuenssberg documentary and they took me to a pub.* And, there I met a group of people, set up for me who had voted leave, and **I got talking to one of the guys there, eh he was Scottish, he was a businessman**, (…) a little bit older than me, pro uni, pro union, anti-Europe, **and we bonded initially over football**, he is a Glasgow Rangers fan, I **I'm a Blackburn Rovers fan**, **so we have Graeme Souness in common**, (…) **and colossal disappointment**, and [laughter] and, we eventually got on to Europe, *well, we kinda had to really, that was the point of the documentary*, and he had a bit of a go at me, for letting the side down in his words. He said, I should be backing Theresa May, we get a better deal if we were all on the same side. So, I asked him, how good are Celtic in Europe. *Now, for the non-football fans amongst you, the answer from him was not very.* [laughter] (…) **I eh, I said to him, you're right, there absolutely dreadful, and why is that, it's because they have got an absolutely dreadful opposition at home.** [laughter] [applause] There was a pause. [laughter] A tense pause. [laughs] *Because given Celtics opposition at home includes principally Glasgow Rangers, I thought he was about to lamp me for insulting his team, but he thought about it, he looked me in the eye and said, yeah, I see your point. Because whether you support Brexit or not, Britain needs a decent opposition.* [applause]
>
> (Tim Farron, 18 March 2017)

Tim Farron, the teller of the narrative, provides an orientation section describing place, time and ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters. He interrupts his telling with two metacomments: the first accounts for the topics to be discussed in the documentary ("*well, we kinda had to really, that was the point of the documentary*") and the second ("*Now, for the non-football fans amongst you, the answer from him was not very*") provides relevant background information on football, contributing to the joint construction of discourse common ground. The metacomments are used strategically to align with his face-to-face audience, as is reflected in their response to the

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5 The transcription presented here adheres to orthographical standards. References to the private-public interface are printed in bold and *relevant linguistic cues* in italics; the small story is underlined.

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6 https://www.facebook.com/libdems/videos/10155153887243270/

second metacomment: laughter. There is complicating action addressing the possible failure of the politician's argumentative strategy, and there are other references to real-life experience, that is him being an ordinary football fan ("**I'm a Blackburn Rovers fan**") and his communication partner "a Glasgow Rangers fan". The teller implicates his real-life experience by showing that he is able to relate to ordinary people ("**we bonded initially over football**") and to argue for his point *via* analogical reasoning, relating the concept of opposition in football to that of opposition in politics. These references to the private-public interface are not only used to imply the politician's non-alienation from ordinary real-life experience, but they also serve as inference triggers targeting his leadership qualities regarding competence ("we eventually got on to Europe") and responsiveness to ordinary people ("*he thought about it, he looked me in the eye and said, yeah, I see your point (…), Britain needs a decent opposition*"). The ordinary character's response counts as resolution and coda, evaluating the story by implicating Tim Farron's ordinariness on the one hand and his not-so-ordinary leadership skills on the other.

The small story in extract (3)[7] is introduced with the teller's reference to truth ("*I tell you this tale and it's true*") paving the way for the orientation section, in which temporal and local setting ("on the eve of poll in 2005"; "*my office in Kent*") and its ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters are presented. The narrated event adheres to chronological order and culminates in complicating action closed by a resolution, coda and evaluation:

Extract (3):

> *I tell you this tale and it's true.* Pretty much on this point, on the eve of poll in 2005, I got back to my office in Kent after a hard day **doing what you've been doing today, delivering leaflets, knocking on doors**, and there, standing almost as a rebuke to eh, eh in my face, on the table were the thousand leaflets, good morning leaflets for my biggest, and most Liberal Democrat friendly village in the north end of my constituency. They stared at **my, and my friend could see what I was thinking**. I was [unintelligble] and I thought, that could cost us the election. **She looked at me and said, do you wanna win, I said, yes. She said, pick the flipping phone up and get those things delivered in the morning.** I rang up five people, the youngest of whom was 72, and they all, [laughter] and I asked them the question, I said would you get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and deliver a couple a hundred leaflets. Do you know what, they all said yes. **And the night after that, Westmorland and Lonsdale fell out of Tory hands into Liberal Democrat hands for the first time since *1906,* [cheers] and every one of those, and every one of those, every one of those volunteers now knows that with the majority that we had at that night of 267 that they**

> **single-handedly changed the course of history.** *That is in your hands tomorrow.*

> (Tim Farron, 07 June 2017)

The not-so-ordinary politician presents himself as an ordinary person, doing ordinary stuff ("**doing what you've been doing today, delivering leaflets, knocking on doors**"), as his face-to-face audience would do. The complicating action, that is "the thousand leaflets" to be distributed, is addressed in the story, and resolved by his friend's suggestion to ring up people and ask for help ("**She looked at me and said, do you wanna win, I said, yes. She said, pick the flipping phone up and get those things delivered in the morning**"). The resolution is presented as a dialogue in which the politician listens to the ordinary character and follows her advice. The coda is marked explicitly ("**And the night after that, Westmorland and Lonsdale fell out of Tory hands into Liberal Democrat hands**") and leads over to the evaluation ("**and every one of those, and every one of those, every one of those volunteers now knows that with the majority that we had at that night of 267 that they single-handedly changed the course of history**"). A metacomment building on the narrative ("*That is in your hands tomorrow*") connects it with the speech as a whole. The politician's references to the private-public interface allow him to present himself as an ordinary person who may not always be in full control of his life, that is his election campaign and the delivering of leaflets, while at the same time implicating his leadership skills as regards responsiveness and listening to ordinary people thereby scoring on sincerity and credibility.

Extract (4) is from the non-election data[8]. It contains a very small story in which the not-so-ordinary politician Vince Cable discloses personal information. The orientation section indexes a topic of the speech, the characters are ordinary and not-so-ordinary, the complicating action is straight forward as is the resolution, coda and evaluation:

Extract (4):

> *And I don't accept the idea that it is some form of racism to want immigration to be managed like other parts of the economy.* I mean - I should say - **I mean I had personal experience** of racism. I embarked on a mixed marriage in this country when racism was rife, and **my wife and children** were being denounced as people whose very presence here would lead to rivers firming with blood, and **I was thrown out of the parental home**. **So, I will myself never waver in my commitment to call out and stand up to racism in all its forms**. [Applause] But we- we must understand that to dismiss all Brexit voters as racists is simply wrong and completely counterproductive.

> (Vince Cable, 18 August 2018)

In his speech, Vince Cable connects immigration, racism and the economy, and supports his argument with a small story about his private life ("**I mean I had personal experience** of racism"). He narrates the complicating action referring to his wife and children's discrimination, and him being "**thrown out of the parental home**". The latter counts as coda, and resolution. The small story implicates the politician's sincerity and credibility, and by making his "personal experience" public, he accounts for his political ideology and his political actions, evaluating the perlocutionary effects as follows: "**So, I will myself never waver in my commitment to call out and stand up to racism in all its forms**".

Small stories have also been told in the quality press data. (5) is from the non-election set from *The Guardian* (09 April 2018). In her article ***Don't let Brexit undermine Ireland's peace***[9], not-so-ordinary Hillary Clinton tells two small stories about a mixed set of characters. The first narrates the lighting of a Christmas tree in Belfast in 1995 with ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters, and the second her encounter with ordinary women who played "**vital role in the [Good Friday] agreement**":

Extract (5):

> *Don't let Brexit undermine Ireland's peace*
>
> As the world celebrates this significant anniversary, we must also remain vigilant in *protecting the agreement* (…) from (…) *that day in April 1998. Even now*, I can picture clearly *my husband*'s first trip to Northern Ireland *as president. On a cold winter night in 1995,* **Bill and I joined thousands of people at Belfast city hall for the lighting of the Christmas tree**. As Catholics and Protestants alike came to that spot from their deeply divided neighbourhoods, there was no guarantee that violence wouldn't break out; yet they came with a sense of hope, after so many seasons of darkness. *The Belfast agreement is a shining example of what's possible when citizens come together to demand peace. It was on that same trip that* **I first met some of the women whose names are too often forgotten, despite their vital role in the agreement.** One of those women was Joyce McCartan, a Catholic mother whose 17-year-old son had been shot dead by a Protestant gunman. **Joyce invited me to join women from both traditions at the safe house she had set up in a local fish and chip shop. We sat around a small table, drinking tea out of an old aluminium teapot,** while the women told me (…) **they discovered that the deep-rooted causes of the violence (…) touched all of their lives**. In the end, for them and for so many women across Northern Ireland, **love of family** ran deeper than calls to hatred. *Though they may not have made the headlines or the history books,* **those kitchen-table conversations were essential to the peace process. So were all the women who**

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9   https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/09/brexit-ireland-peace-good-friday-agreement-irish-border

came together to form a coalition and claim a formal seat at the table – women like Avila Kilmurray, Monica McWilliams, Pearl Sagar, May Blood and **so many more who moved mountains to help negotiate the Good Fri*day* agreement years ago at Stormont.** *There are some who argue that the agreement has outlived its usefulness. They are wrong. Countless people in Northern Ireland are alive today, rather than in early graves, because of it.*

In the first story, not-so-ordinary characters join ordinary characters, but there is no report of the two groups communicating with each other. Yet the complicating action and resolution of the not-so-ordinary gathering is described as "there was no guarantee that violence wouldn't break out; yet they [the ordinary characters] came with a sense of hope". The teller relates the narrated past with the actual present of her writing the newspaper article ("*Even now*, I can picture clearly *my husband*'s first trip to Northern Ireland *as president*"), stressing the relevance of that "first trip", but also the status of the two not-so-ordinary characters. The metacomment "*The Belfast agreement is a shining example of what's possible when citizens come together to demand peace*" counts as the evaluation of the first story and paves the way for the second story in which Hilary Clinton, the not-so-ordinary character, meets ordinary women doing politics: "**I first met some of the women whose names are too often forgotten, despite their vital role in the agreement**". The orientation section is described as "*that same trip*", the complicating action as the political background of "**the deep-rooted causes of the violence**", and its resolution as finding common ground between the opposing parties: their "**love of family** ran deeper than calls to hatred". The small story contains numerous references to the private-public interface anchored to the ordinary characters, and some of them including the not-so-ordinary politician signalled with collective **we**. Details of real-life experience and their relevance to not-so-ordinary politics are made manifest in "**those kitchen-table conversations were essential to the peace process. So were all the women who came together to form a coalition and claim a formal seat at the table**", and in references to "**the safe house**", "**a local fish and chip shop**", "**Joyce invited me** [Hilary Clinton]" and "**We sat around a small table, drinking tea out of an old aluminium teapot**". These references are used strategically to implicate the sincerity and credibility of the politician as well as her – as a female politician – being able to show solidarity with ordinary women, support them and their goals, and make their achievements public. This is reflected in the description of sitting at a small table in the local fish and chip shop, expanding the private domain to the public domain in "**claim**[ing] **a formal seat at the table**", and in the coda that these women "**moved mountains to help negotiate the Good Fri*day* agreement years ago at Stormont**". The metacomment "*There are some who argue that the agreement has outlived its usefulness. They are wrong. Countless people in Northern Ireland are alive today (…) because of it*" evaluates

the characters' political actions and the importance of not-so-ordinary politicians to account not only for their political actions to ordinary people, but also to make public the impact of the ordinary participants' political actions and account for them publicly.

First-person stories told by ordinary participants

In the data, stories with ordinary characters are generally told by not-so-ordinary tellers. The comments' sections do not seem to have been considered a good outlet for ordinary participants to tell personal stories. In the non-election data, there is a hybrid story combining a third- and a first-person story analysed in extract (11), and one first-person story told by an ordinary teller, even though their status as ordinary is controversial. This is because the story is formatted as a lengthy direct quotation by the author of a quality-press article on hitchhiking. Unlike the first-person stories told in the political speeches, which were used strategically to account for political actions and do ordinariness at the same time, the first-person story in extract (6) is used to contextualise Mr Villarino, author of *Hitchhiking in the Axis of Evil*, and teller of his personal experience when hitchhiking. The private-public interface is only addressed in a very indirect manner, as the story was published by *The Daily Telegraph*. The teller's argument and evaluation are supported by a quotation from a local driver:
Extract (6):

> ***17 things I learned hitchhiking around the world***[10]
> (…)
>
> 1. *Syrians are the friendliest people in the world*
>
> "In places like Iraq or Syria I wouldn't wait longer than anywhere between seven and 10 min before hitching a ride, which was a revelation to me as I expected those countries to be more suspicious of Westerners because of the ongoing tensions," Mr Villarino recalls. "Instead, in Syria people would give me a ride – even on motorcycles that were already full with two people on. *Once in a village near Aleppo*, two locals had argued over who had seen me first and had the right to put me up. Street vendors would run behind me mumbling phrases in Arabic and present me with an orange, attempting to say something to me in the very little English they knew: '*Welcome to Syria*'.
> One of Mr Villarino's local drivers in Syria "One Ismaili family (a liberal sect of Islam) insisted that I was already part of their family only after having shared one lunch with them, even though they would never see me again."

The teller sets the stage by providing an orientation section for his story describing relevant sociocultural context and narrowing it down to one place and time: "*Once in a village near Aleppo*". The complicating action is described as ordinary people arguing, and the coda, resolution and evaluation in their greeting the stranger ("*Welcome to Syria*"). The teller's argument that "*Syrians are the friendliest people in the world*" is strengthened with a quotation from a local driver.

The following section examines small stories told from the perspective of a third person. They are considered to be less subjective as the teller is less personally involved.

Third person stories

Third person stories bring a different perspective into an ongoing discourse with the teller narrating a tale from the perspective of a character, voicing their personal experience and their concerns. It is thus not the teller's viewpoint and their tales, which are at issue, but that of the third-person whose tale is relevant to the teller's communicative goals and intended perlocutionary effects. In spite of discursive-format-based similarities, it seems plausible that third person stories fulfil other discursive functions.

In what follows, third-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants are investigated in the mediated political speeches and the quality newspapers. As above, the focus of analysis lies on the linguistic realisation of references to the private-public interface and on doing accountability for discursive action to the mediated audience.

Third-person stories told by not-so-ordinary participants

In the mediated political arena, third-person stories with ordinary characters are mainly told by politicians, as is the case with the then prime minister Theresa May in extract (7) and the Liberal Democrat Tim Farron in extract (8); both extracts come from the pre-election data. Extract (9) is from the then leader of the opposition, Jeremy Corbyn; the extract is from the non-election data.

By telling third-person stories with ordinary characters, not-so-ordinary tellers may not only contextualise a third person's real-life experience in accordance with their public-domain-based perlocutionary goals, but also recontextualise the impact of the story in line with their political ideology. What is more, politicians may also account for their leadership qualities by showing that they do not only listen to ordinary people represented by the third-person character, but also make political decisions on their behalf:
Extract (7)[11]

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10   https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/activity-and-adventure/
hitchhiking-trips-around-the-world/

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11   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3l3hDo6y-s

Now, on the long road to the truth. **That's what I'm in this for. Like Alexander Paul**, a young man who came to this conference three years ago, **to tell his story**. The story of a young black boy growing up in modern Britain, who without causing any trouble, without doing anything wrong, found himself being stopped and searched by people in authority time and time and time again. *Alexander spoke so eloquently about this experience, and how he came to mistrust those in positions of power as a result.*

So, inspired by his example we took action, we shook up the system and the number of black people being stopped and searched has fallen by over two thirds. I'm [applause] **I'm sad to have to tell you**, that last year, Alexander (…) passed away.

(Theresa May, 04 October 2017)

The pre-election speech has already been analysed above for a first-person narrative. In the speech, Theresa May also tells a third-person story about an ordinary character introduced with his full name ("**Alexander Paul**"), with whom she aligns ("**That's what I'm in this for. Like Alexander Paul**"). The orientation section sets the stage and introduces the character ("a young black boy growing up in modern Britain"). The complicating action, coda and resolution ("who without causing any trouble (…) found himself being stopped and searched by people in authority time and time and time again") target the private-public interface. A metacomment provides the evaluation ("*Alexander spoke so eloquently about this experience, and how he came to mistrust those in positions of power as a result*") and paves the way for the teller talking about the perlocutionary effects of the small story and about her government undertaking political action ("**we took action, we shook up the system and the number of black people being stopped and searched has fallen by over two thirds**").

Theresa May uses the third-person story strategically to refer to the private-public interface, intending implicatures which target her leadership skills, in particular her being a responsive leader who listens to ordinary people and their reasoning, who voices their concerns in public and undertakes political action on their behalf. There is less emotional involvement in the third-person story than in May's first-person story. However, the metacomment "**I'm sad to have to tell you**" informing the audience about the ordinary character's death is intended to arouse emotional involvement.

Extract (8) is from one of Tim Farron's pre-election speeches[12]. The context of the small story is referred to indexically as it has already been addressed in the speech ("*Now, course, Brexit is the cloud hanging over Britain*"). The teller describes the setting and the ordinary and not-so-ordinary

characters ("I was talking to a senior board member of a firm in Westmorland, last week"). The politician evaluates the small story explicitly with the metacomment '**That is a brilliant correct, and thoroughly British attitude**':

Extract (8):

Now, course, Brexit is the cloud hanging over Britain. I was talking to a senior board member of a firm in Westmorland, last week. Brexit is a disaster, he said, but we're positive about the future. In our history, **he told me**, we've got through two huge fires, dozens of floods, and two world wars. We'll survive Brexit as it happens, and we'll do it with a smile on our face. **That is a brilliant correct, and thoroughly British attitude**. (Tim Farron, 18 March 2017)

The character, "a senior board member of a firm in Westmorland", speaks on behalf of the British people referred to with collective "we" thereby including himself in the set of ordinary British people. The complicating action is Brexit and its impact on society, and the resolution and coda are that they will survive with "a smile on our face". The teller accounts for the resolution by quoting the character saying that ordinary citizens survived "two huge fires, dozens of floods, and two world wars", thereby relating private spheres of life to public spheres, that is the British as a nation. The evaluation is offered by the teller: "**a brilliant correct, and thoroughly British attitude**". The small story told from the perspective of a senior business person contextualises the effects of Brexit on ordinary life in Britain and recontextualises the "cloud hanging over Britain" as "We'll survive Brexit", with collective "we" including both ordinary people and not-so-ordinary politicians.

Unlike the previous two extracts, (9) comes from the non-election data. Jeremy Corbyn, the then leader of the opposition, narrates two small stories from ordinary people: one is introduced with her first name ("**Angela**"), the other in a more generic manner ("**People like Richard**")[13]. Jeremy Corbyn has already brought ordinary people into elite political discourse in the context of Prime Minister's Questions where he quoted them, reading out their questions to the Prime Minister and asking the questions on their behalf (cf. Fetzer and Weizman, 2018; Fetzer and Bull, 2019):

Extract (9)

And, as *we were discussing earlier, there is a mental health crisis too, causing real pain and anguish.* A woman named **Angela wrote to me recently**, and she said, **my mentally ill daughter** was told she would have to wait twelve months to get an appointment with an appropriate therapist. **As a mother, I'm at my wit's end** to know how to help her anymore. **I would hate her to become another suicide statistic**. *This has to stop. And under Labour it*

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will. We will deliver real parity of esteem for mental health services **to protect people like Angela's daughter**.

(…)

The Tories have created a hostile environment for disabled people. **Hundreds of people from all over the country write to me about it every week. People like Richard** who says this, <u>my wife</u> was diagnosed with <u>progressive multiple sclerosis twenty years ago. A few months ago, **we** were told she needed to reapply for personal independence payments. She had assessment by somebody who was not medically trained. **We've now been told** that all her benefit will be stopped</u>. *And he adds*, **I have tried to be, I have tried to be her rock. But the stress and suffering I can see my wife going through is so very cruel and I've had to put myself on anti-depressants**. *These are human consequences of a Tory government that puts tax cuts for the wealthy ahead of care for the disabled people of our society. But, Labour is ready to put fairness and humanity back at the heart of our public*. (Jeremy Corbyn 26 September 2018)

The characters of the two small stories are ordinary people who tell narratives about their families. Both stories have an orientation section. In the first story, the politician in his role as teller sets the stage referring to "*a mental health crisis (…) causing real pain and anguish*" and introducing the ordinary character Angela who tells an embedded story about her mentally ill daughter, and in the second story, it is the "*hostile environment for disabled people*" which has been brought to the teller's attention by "**[h]undreds of people (…). People like Richard**". The complicating action of the embedded stories is the lack of appropriate therapists, and a reapplication for personal independence payments which was stopped. The resolution and coda refer to the embedded tellers' emotional dispositions "**I would hate her to become another suicide statistic**", and "**I have tried to be (…) her rock. But the stress and suffering I can see my wife going through is so very cruel**'. The evaluations are a straightforward "*This has to stop*" in the first story, and a "**I've had to put myself on anti-depressants**" in the second. The third person's evaluation is taken up by the not-so-ordinary teller and recontextualised as "*And under Labour it will* [change]" substantiating it with a reference to the daughter of the third person ("**to protect people like Angela's daughter**") and other ordinary people in a similar situation. With the second story, the not-so-ordinary teller evaluates the scenario by recontextualising it and concluding that "[t]*hese are human consequences of a Tory government that puts tax cuts for the wealthy ahead of care for the disabled people*" and – as with Angela's story – promising that Labour "*is ready to put fairness and humanity back at the heart of our public*".

In the third-person stories, there is some hybrid formatting of personal pronouns, shifting from third-person pronouns to embedded tellers' use of first-person pronouns and their references to private spheres of life ('**my mentally ill daughter**'; '**As a mother**'; '**my wife**'; '**we've now been told**'). While references to the private-public interface in first-person stories have been used as inference triggers implicating a contextualisation and recontextualisation of political selves and their ideologies, references to the private-public interface in third-person stories are used to contextualise elite political decisions and their effects on the lives of ordinary characters, and to recontextualise the policies of the opposition.

Third-person stories told by ordinary participants

In the mediated political arena, the main, if not only outlet for ordinary tellers to tell their stories is the comments section. In the data at hand there is one third-person story told by an ordinary participant in extract (10), a small story told by a parent of a 35-year-old teacher from the pre-election data commenting on the then leader of the opposition's speeches[14], and another hybrid story from the non-election data from a *Guardian* newspaper article in the section *The Guardian view*, in which a teller narrates a third-person story about an ordinary character. It is different from extract (6), a first-person story told by an ordinary participant. In extract (11) the third person ("**Cindy**") is named and introduced as the teller of the story:

Extract (10):

teachers working 90 h a week to survive **my daughter is a teacher age 35** <u>she works from 8 am till 10.30 everyday except Sunday which she rests</u> **she will be burnt out by the time she is forty** good teachers dedicated who are leaving in droves class sizes of 37 age 5 and 6 how the hell are they supposed to manage this with no teaching assistants again depending on parents to help *it's not right* <u>she went to uni several degrees and tells me she loves teaching but is considering leaving 5 teachers from a small school walked out because of stress every schol holiday my daughter goes into schol to do work whilst kids are not there.</u>

(16 May 2017)

The orientation section is indexically referred to in the ordinary participant's comment on "*teachers working 90 h a week to survive*". The ordinary teller introduces the character of the third-person story as a sibling ("**my daughter**"), but does not name her. The complicating action is the daughter's mundane routine. The coda and resolution are that the daughter "**will be burnt out by the time she is forty**".

This is followed by the teller's evaluation that good teachers are leaving and that "*it's not right*". After the evaluation, the teller takes up the small story again and elaborates on the very brief orientation section in order to account for their evaluation that that the situation for teacher is not right.

Extract (11):

> ***A YouTube inspired prank ruined my daughter's life***[15]
> *Last year, my teenage daughter was blasted with an air horn to get her to put her phone down. She is now in pain every second of every day. Here's how Cindy tells the story*: dinner was an hour away. *Cindy* was at *her* friend's house, sitting alone at the kitchen table, chatting on *her* phone. *Her* friend's ex-stepfather entered the kitchen for a beer. *Her* friend and *her* friend's sister entered the room; the stepfather told them to leave. They did, giggling. *Cindy wasn't paying attention, because she didn't know her life was about to be ruined.* The stepfather told *her*, twice, to hang up. As *she* did, he blasted the air horn at *her* head. **My daughter** was blasted with an air horn to get her to put her phone down. She is now in pain every second of every day. The next day, Cindy didn't feel well, so she texted me from her English class. I took her home. She was never able to return to school. She was in eighth grade. **We** made the rounds of doctors, none of whom had heard of ear pain caused by acoustic trauma.
>
> (*The Guardian* 17 April 2018)

In the orientation section the setting ("*Last year, my teenage daughter was blasted with an air horn*") and other relevant contextual information are described, paving the way for Cindy to tell her story. As with the third person stories told in the context of political speeches, the small story is embedded in another narrative told by Cindy's parent. This is different to the non-embedded story told in extract (10). Cindy tells her story in a third-person narrative using the corresponding pronouns. Cindy's storytelling is in accordance with the prototypical telling of small stories with an orientation section referring to local and temporal embeddedness ("dinner was an hour away. *Cindy* was (…) sitting alone at the kitchen table, chatting on *her* phone"), a complicating action ("*Her* friend's ex-stepfather entered the kitchen (…) *Her* friend and *her* friend's sister entered the room; the stepfather told them to leave. They did, giggling. (…) The stepfather told *her* [Cindy], twice, to hang up"), a coda and resolution ("he blasted the air horn at *her* head"). The third-person telling is interrupted by the first-person teller summarising the daughter's story ("**My daughter** *was blasted with an air horn to get her to put her phone down*"), evaluating the consequences and informing the audience that "*[s]he is now in pain every second of every day*". The parent tells another first-

15 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/17/a-youtube-inspired-prank-ruined-my-daughters-life

person follow-up story with an orientation section ("The next day, Cindy didn't feel well"), a complicating action ("so she texted me from her English class. I took her home"), a resolution and coda ("She was never able to return to school. She was in eighth grade"), and an evaluation with the parent and daughter referred by collective "**we**" ("**We made the rounds of doctors, none** of whom had heard of ear pain caused by acoustic trauma").

In the mediated political arena, third-person stories told by ordinary tellers may occur in the comments section, as that is the space offered to ordinary people in media discourse, but they can also be found in the online quality papers. In online news, small stories generally have a teller, that is the teller of the small narrative, and some kind of meta-teller who introduces the third person and their story. Hybrid story telling is not only reflected in pronominal shifts from first- to third-person pronouns, but also in first-person tellers' metacomments which summarise the embedded story. References to the private spheres of life do not generally index the private-public interface, but rather foreground the ordinariness of the small story.

Discussion

The linguistic formatting of small stories and the discursive function of the discursive format in the mediated political arena has been examined in three different genres and their comments sections, and in two different sociocultural contexts: pre- and non-election periods in Britain. Special attention has been given to ordinary and not-so-ordinary tellers' and ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters' references to the private-public interface in the context of storytelling, to the function of these references for the contextualisation and recontextualisation of discursive identities and discursive action, and to their implementing accountability.

The genres under investigation include the more monologic types of political speech and news article, which nevertheless contain dialogic sequences, and the more dialogic genres of political debate and commenting. In the more monologic genres, the speaker (and their ghost writers) have more control over content and its linguistic – and multimodal – realisation: they select the intertextual formats to be included, for instance small stories or quotations, and they select the stage where they are to be included and told. The discursive format of small story gives the teller control over its content and how the content is to be narrated. For this reason, it seems plausible that there are more small stories in the speeches and online newspapers, as has been the case in the data sets at hand with 13 small stories in the more monologic data, one small story in the commenting sections, and none in the political debates. But it is not only their distribution which differs across genres and discourse communities, it is also their discursive

functions and the contextualisation and recontextualisation of tellers and characters.

In the political speeches and online news, the discursive function of small stories told by not-so-ordinary tellers with ordinary and not-so-ordinary characters and their references to the private-public interface depends on the status of the teller. For a Prime Minister, it is not so much the implication of leadership qualities triggering inferences about the teller's competence, but rather those of responsiveness, that is caring for people, listening to people and their concerns, and not being arrogant, thereby implicating ideological and existential coherence, as has been the case with the first- and third-person stories told by Theresa May (extracts 1 and 3). For leading politicians of the Oppositions, it is not so much the recontextualisation of their discursive identities, but rather the contextualisation and thus foregrounding of their leadership qualities implicating competence, that is presenting themselves as decisive and principled leaders, as with the first-person stories told by Tim Farron and Vince Cable (extracts 2, 3, 4). In both scenarios, small stories index leadership qualities and implicate tellers' accounts showing them as competent and responsive politicians, which is also reflected in their use of a more informal and emotive style thereby accommodating to their ordinary communication partners. As regards the two sociocultural contexts, the pre- and non-election periods, not-so-ordinary tellers narrate first-person stories more frequently in the pre-election period, which suggests that they are good discursive formats for doing accountability in election campaigns. In the context of newspaper articles, first-person stories are used strategically to demonstrate the not-so-ordinary teller's doing ordinariness in the private spheres of life as well as demonstrating their political competence, as with Hilary Clinton (extract 5).

First-person stories with ordinary tellers and ordinary characters are not very frequent in the data. The one story from the non-election data is firmly anchored in an ordinary setting with ordinary characters without references to the private-public interface targeting the teller's social status or leadership qualities. Instead, the story is used strategically to underline the teller's argument in their newspaper story (extract 6). The other first-person story is a follow-up to a third-person story (extract 11) and used to underline the evaluation of the former, again without any explicit references to the private-public interface.

Third-person stories are told by not-so-ordinary and ordinary tellers with ordinary characters and with a mixed set of characters. They may display a kind of hybrid formatting which is mainly due to the third-person stories containing other embedded narratives. Telling stories with ordinary characters in ordinary settings allows not-so-ordinary tellers to present themselves as responsive leaders, while at the same time implicating that they are not members of the so-called alienated political elite. This applies both to leading politicians from the government, as with Theresa May (extract 7), and from

the opposition, as with Tim Farron (extract 8) and Jeremy Corbyn (extract 9). As has been the case with first-person stories, third-person stories with ordinary characters or a mixed set of characters are more frequent in the pre-election data.

Third-person stories told by ordinary tellers are not very frequent in either set of data. As has been the case with the corresponding first-person stories, setting and characters are ordinary. However, ordinary tellers do refer to the private-public interface to imply social injustice and trigger implicatures about the lack of competence and professionalism on the side of the institution, as in extract 11, and a lack of social accountability to the ordinary person, as in extract 10. Small stories are good candidates for doing accountability in the mediated political arena: not-so-ordinary tellers use them to align themselves with ordinary people and real-life experience, while ordinary tellers use them to illustrate social injustice and incompetence on the side of the institution.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study involving human subjects in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent to feature in this study was not required from the subjects in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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