

Speech-level Sentiment Identification on Hansard Parliamentary Transcripts: Annotation Guidelines V2

1 Introduction

The purpose of this annotation task is to identify the *sentiment polarity* of *motions* (proposals put to the assembly) towards the subjects discussed in Parliamentary debates, and to identify the sentiment polarity expressed by speakers in those debates towards these motions.

This task uses transcripts of debates from the the House of Commons of the UK Parliament. For each debate, a motion is proposed, and selected members of the assembly respond one or more times to the motion and to the *utterances* (speech segments) of their fellow speakers. For this task, annotators are presented with both the motion and all the utterances produced by individual speakers in a given debate. The combined utterances of a single speaker (between one and five utterances) are considered to form a *speech*.

The task of the annotator is twofold:

1. To categorize the motion of each debate as being either broadly *positive* or broadly *negative* towards the subject of debate.
2. To determine whether, overall, the stance towards the motion under debate of each speaker's speech is broadly *positive* (in support of the motion) or broadly *negative* (against the motion).

2 Annotation procedure

Each *unit* in this task consists of a debate motion and between one and five utterances that comprise a speaker's speech. Motions typically address subjects of parliamentary interest (e.g., Government policy in areas such as health or education), Papers, Bills or Acts, aspects of Parliamentary procedure (e.g., the amount of time to be dedicated to a particular debate), or amendments to legislation brought by the Government, an opposition party, or an individual Member.

1. The annotator should read the motion carefully, decide whether it is broadly *positive* or *negative* towards the subject of the debate, and assign it the corresponding label: ‘1’ for *positive*, ‘0’ for *negative*.
2. In many cases multiple units are extracted from the same debate and therefore have the same motion. The annotator should ensure that (s)he assigns all identical motions the same label.
3. For each unit, the annotator then reads the speaker’s speech comprised of one to five utterances. (S)he considers the overall sentiment polarity of the entire speech, and then assigns a sentiment polarity label to the speech in question. Again, the label ‘1’ signifies *positive* sentiment in support of the motion, while the label ‘0’ signifies *negative* sentiment and is against the motion.

3 Annotation guidelines for motion and speech sentiment polarity

Based on the sentiment expressed towards the motion in question, each speech is assigned either a *positive* or *negative* polarity label. For example:

3.1 Annotation examples

- i. **Motion:** *That this House approves the draft Agreement (Cm 9332), between the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation, which was laid before this House on 15 September 2016.*

(a) **Speech:**

Utterance 1: *Many Members have expressed the view that the BBC is indeed one of our most beloved cultural institutions. Each of us will have fond memories of the TV shows that made us laugh and cry, and those that educated and inspired us. To this very day, some of the world’s most famous TV programmes call the BBC their home, or can at least trace their roots back to it. The BBC also has a proud record of supporting and cultivating some of Britain’s most treasured personalities and actors. With the BBC’s global reach, all this goes a significant way towards promoting our place in the world. It is perhaps the largest exporter of our cultural values, and it is viewed by hundreds of millions of people. Some might even say it is our best soft power asset. However, domestic and global habits continue to change, and for the BBC’s importance to be maintained, it needs to change with them.*

Utt. 2: *Our BBC is not perfect, and it has long needed action to address governance issues and changing viewing habits. I was pleased*

that those issues were highlighted by all parties at the start of the 2015 negotiations. Now is the time to see them addressed and for solutions to be approved. Like many hon. Members, I have received a tremendous number of representations from constituents who are concerned about the BBC's future. Given that our constituents pay a licence fee, our communities have a rightful stake in this institution. I am pleased that the new royal charter has been taken seriously and dealt with positively by the Government.

Utt. 3: Under the draft agreement, I see a BBC that suits the modern broadcasting and digital environment that we know today. Much has been said about the new governance structure for the BBC. Since the publication of the White Paper, real progress has been made on the subject of appointments to the BBC board through discussion and consultation with the BBC. The fact that the BBC will appoint a large majority of its board members for the first time is indeed a positive measure that clearly maintains its independence.

Utt. 4: It is right that all the nations that make up the United Kingdom are represented on the BBC board and that these individuals are subject to the public appointments process. It is also right that those appointments should not be subject to undue political influence. However, it is right, too, that the Government retain a role in appointing non-executive directors to the board of a body that spends £3.7 billion of public money each year. We are talking about huge sums that have to be justified. We cannot allow waste or a lack of openness when it is the public who have such a sizeable stake, yet with the expanded role of the National Audit Office and Ofcom as overseers of the BBC's financial and content scrutiny arrangements, I am certain that we will maintain the credibility expected of our public service broadcaster.

Utt. 5: The BBC is a huge part of our past, our present and our future. The new charter and agreement will enable improvements that will ultimately address the important issues of governance and modernisation while ensuring the BBC's independence and enhancing the distinctiveness of its content. I am therefore pleased to support the motion and agreement, which will guarantee the BBC's important place in our society for many years to come.

Assigned motion sentiment polarity label = 1 (positive)

Assigned speech sentiment polarity label = 1 (positive)

- ii. **Motion:** *That this House regrets the impact of school funding cuts on the ability of children to reach their full potential; and calls on the Government to ensure that all schools have the funding that they need to provide an excellent education for every child.*

(a) **Speech:**

Utt. 1: *I thank my hon. Friend for letting me get in at last. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is grossly unfair that the pupils of Somerset*

have had, on average, £2,000 per pupil less than the national average? We are very grateful to the Government for increasing funding to Taunton Deane by 4.5%. This will make it fair, when historically things have been grossly unfair.

Utt. 2: My hon. Friend is making a very valid point about early-years. Does she agree that this is not just about a new fairer funding formula? This Government are putting much money into education, particularly for the new 30 hours of free childcare. Neroche pre-school in my constituency is having a brand-new building built on the back of that money and it is only too grateful to the Government.

Utt. 3: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of our rural schools in Somerset and Dorset have been doing so well with the funding they have had? This extra funding might enable them to put in place some of the things that they have not been able to have because there simply has not been enough money to go around.

Assigned motion sentiment polarity label = 0 (negative)

Assigned speech sentiment polarity label = 0 (negative)

- iii. **Motion:** Proceedings on consideration shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table and shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) at the times specified in the second column.

TABLE

<i>Proceedings.</i>	<i>Time for conclusion of proceedings</i>
<i>New Clauses relating to the purposes and scope of registration and identity cards.</i>	<i>2.45 p.m. on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.</i>
<i>New Clauses relating to the National Identity Scheme Commissioner, Amendments relating to Clauses 24 and 25.</i>	<i>3.45 p.m. on that day.</i>
<i>Remaining new Clauses, Amendments relating to Clauses 1 to 23, Amendments relating to Clause 26, Amendments relating to Clauses 33 to 45, new Schedules, Amendments relating to Schedules 1 and 2.</i>	<i>4.30 p.m. on that day.</i>
<i>Amendments relating to Clauses 27 to 32 and any remaining proceedings on consideration.</i>	<i>5.00 p.m. on that day.</i>

- (a) **Speech:**

Utt. 1: As someone who has made it clear that I am not in favour of the Government's proposals, having written a minority report for

the Home Affairs Committee and voted against the Bill on Second Reading, may I put it to the hon. Gentleman that, whatever the Government's failure to provide time, we are where we are? If the purpose of the main Opposition party is to utilise all the time allowed to debate the programme motion, that would effectively result in less time to debate the matters of substance before us. It would be most unfortunate if that were its tactic, because it would aggravate a situation in which the Government have not provided the time that we would like.

Assigned motion stance polarity label = 1 (positive)

Assigned stance polarity label = 1 (positive)

(b) **Speech:**

Utt. 1: *I very much agree with my hon. Friend, but I hope that he accepts that because many Conservative Members take such comments seriously, we need a constant reminder that when we are returned to Government automatic guillotining will stop. That has not been stated with sufficient strength, and until my hon. Friend does so his comments lack moral authority.*

Utt. 2: *Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the other problem is that there are disagreements within parties about such Bills? I happen to be very much in favour of the principle of the Bill, while others in my party take a different view. This is the only opportunity that we all have to show what parts we agree with and where we might want alteration, so that there can be greater consensus. With a Bill of this sort and of this importance, that consensus becomes very important.*

Assigned motion sentiment polarity label = 1 (positive)

Assigned sentiment polarity label = 0 (negative)

3.2 Explanation of label assignments

- i. Motion i is assigned the positive label, 1, as it asks the House to ‘approve’ a piece of legislation.

The speech in example $i(a)$ is also judged to be positive and assigned the label 1. Extracts that display a positive stance towards the motion include:

- *I am pleased that the new royal charter has been taken seriously and dealt with positively by the Government.*
- *Under the draft agreement, I see a BBC that suits the modern broadcasting and digital environment that we know today.*
- *I am therefore pleased to support the motion and agreement, which will guarantee the BBC's important place in our society for many years to come.*

- ii. Motion *ii* is assigned the negative label, 0, as use of the word ‘regret’ expresses dissatisfaction with Government education policy.

Speech *ii(a)* is judged to be negative and assigned the label 0. As the motion itself is negative towards actions of the Government (school funding cuts), speeches with a positive stance towards the motion take the opposite position to that of the Government. This speech is supportive of the Government, and therefore exhibits negative sentiment towards the motion. Extracts that display negative sentiment towards the motion include:

- *We are very grateful to the Government for increasing funding to Taunton Deane by 4.5%.*
- *Neroche pre-school in my constituency is having a brand-new building built on the back of that money and it is only too grateful to the Government.*

- iii. Motion *iii* is assigned the label 1, as it proposes that an activity take place (the timetable of a debate).

Many motions, such as this one, concern procedural matters related to the discussion of a piece of legislation. In such cases the sentiment of a speech towards the motion may be in contradiction to the sentiment it displays towards the legislation or wider topic in question. In speech *iii(a)*, the speaker is opposed to the amendments that are to be discussed:

- *I am not in favour of the Government’s proposals.*
- *(I) voted against the Bill.*

However, the speaker accepts the timetable for the debate proposed in the motion:

- *whatever the Government’s failure to provide time, we are where we are.*
- *to utilise all the time allowed to debate the programme motion ... would aggravate a situation in which the Government have not provided the time that we would like.*

This speech is therefore assigned a positive label (1).

The sentiment of speech *iii(a)*, however, is in favour of the legislation in question:

- *I happen to be very much in favour of the principle of the Bill.*

But it exhibits negative sentiment towards the motion (which the speaker considers to be ‘guillotining’ of the debate¹):

¹Guillotine: ‘a procedure used to prevent delay in the discussion of a legislative bill by fixing times at which various parts of it must be voted on.’ OED

- *when we are returned to Government automatic guillotining will stop.*
- *This is the only opportunity that we all have to show what parts we agree with and where we might want alteration.*

It is therefore assigned a negative label (0).

3.3 Dealing with ambiguity in motion stance

Motions may contain both positive and negative language. It is often the case that a motion expresses disapproval of a situation or policy (negative), yet calls for some form of action (positive). Additionally, motions may include praise and/or condemnation of various people, groups, organisations etc. further complicating the task.

The following examples illustrate correct sentiment polarity labelling for such motions:

- i. **Motion:** *That this House regrets the impact of school funding cuts on the ability of children to reach their full potential; and calls on the Government to ensure that all schools have the funding that they need to provide an excellent education for every child.*

Assigned motion sentiment polarity label = 0 (*negative*)

- ii. **Motion:** *That this House recognises the contribution of student nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and other healthcare staff; has serious concerns about the potential impact of removing NHS bursaries on the recruitment and retention of staff; and calls on the Government to drop their plans to remove NHS bursaries and instead to consult on how they can best fund and support the future healthcare workforce.*

Assigned motion sentiment polarity label = 0 (*negative*)

Explanation: In both these cases, the motion requests action from the Government (positive action in *i*, negative in *ii*). However, the overall tone of both motions is negative towards the Government's policies, and they should therefore be labelled as expressing negative sentiment.