Equivocation and Challenge to Equivocation in the Proceedings of a Special Parliamentary Commission at the Lithuanian Parliament

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Abstract. The present article generally falls within the domain of problem-oriented sociolinguistics (Janicki, 1990, 1999) with the basic target of a sociolinguistic problem of equivocation in political contexts. Bavelas et al (1990) theory of equivocal communication has been taken as a framework for the present analysis of equivocation. The study is a qualitative analysis of two extracts from the official transcripts of the proceedings of a special parliamentary commission on the issue of the possible threats to Lithuanian national security. The work of the commission was in progress in November, 2003. By applying principles of conversation analysis (Hutchby and Drew, 1995), the study examines the respondents’ attempts to evade the given questions in their turns. It concomitantly considers the questioners’ turns, where they challenge the equivocation of their opponents trying to elicit the necessary information. The study results in outlining the means of equivocation and the ways of challenge to equivocation used by the participants, as, for instance, appealing to the failure of memory, attacking the question, etc. in the category of equivocation as well as specifying the question, reminding the respondents of their responsibility, etc. in the category challenge.