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## Voice and Moral Accountability: Burlesque Narratives in Televised Hungarian Political Discourse<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The essay makes advances toward identifying the form and function of burlesque narrative as a discursive resource in broadcast interaction. It complements existing studies of burlesque in spoken discourse through the examination of situated interaction in a televised Hungarian political talk show (*Sajtóklub*). The study includes the analysis of a segment of interaction characterized as a bounded episode of interactionally managed burlesque narrative. Burlesque narratives are identified as narratives in which the speaker adopts a persona and performs imaginary actions in the ideological universe of an adversary that reveal the absurdity of that universe and the insidious motives of the adversary. The burlesque narrative emerges as a speech genre that speakers employ in the specific situational context of the political talk show and the discursive context of perceived political provocation (1) to render the adversary's stance to a public issue absurd, (2) to mitigate their own accountability for the norm violation that this rendering may constitute in the eye of the lampooned adversary, (3) to create opportunities for participant affiliation by means of humor. The analysis also shows that in the extended context of Hungarian political discourse the burlesque narrative functions as a counter-discourse in opposition to a perceived dominant political discourse.

### 1. Introduction

Of central concern in this essay is the demonstration of the use of burlesque narrative in burlesque interaction, primarily employed to mitigate participants' moral accountability. The data under consideration were derived from a Hungarian televised talk show, the *Press Club* (*Sajtóklub*), a program widely characterized as the mouthpiece of Hungarian radical right-wing politics (Vass 2003). To show the burlesque narrative at work I will first introduce and discuss Kenneth Burke's (1937/1959) definition of

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burlesque as a literary and rhetorical genre. Second, I will discuss issues of voicing using Silverstein's (2004) formulation of cultural concepts and the analytic framework of participation roles (Goffman 1981; Urban 1989; Irvine 1996). Third, I will analyze a bounded segment of situated interaction as narrative based on Labov's (1972, 2003) structural analytic framework. Following Bakhtin's (1986: 60) argument in 'The problem of speech genres,' I will make a case for the generic nature of the burlesque narrative by arguing that the form of these narratives is characterized by a constant theme, style, and mode of voicing. Burlesque narratives can be regarded as speech genres if they meet these criteria, that is, if they are characterized by common thematic contents, common evaluative stances and voicing techniques across speakers. Research covering a large amount of situated interactional data attests to the fact that regarding burlesque narratives speech genres constitutes a productive line of cultural interpretation. Since my aim is to trace the contours of a discursive genre I will defer evaluating the politically controversial contents of these narratives, and focus on the narratives' context, features and functions in spoken discourse.

A second concern of this essay is to demonstrate the rhetorical power of the burlesque narrative in action. As with any discursive genre, the burlesque narrative's rhetorical power or function derives not merely from its structural properties but from the way it is capable of mobilizing the conversational and cultural context of the interaction to generate meanings (Blum-Kulka 2005: 290). In general, performers of the burlesque narrative respond to a recurrent type of topic whose discussion sequentially precedes the narrative. The topic usually has to do with a public event that is construed by the participants of the *Press Club* as a "provocation" to sensible right-wing Hungarians. In the data I will present, the provocation participants refer to is the "hate law," a bill spearheaded by the Hungarian Socialist government and designed to constitute verbal incitement as criminal offense.<sup>2</sup> Participants employ the burlesque narrative form to deride the adversary for ideological hypercorrectness and oversensitivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Among Hungarian radical right-wing speakers, the initiative to criminalize "hate speech" is widely interpreted as the Hungarian Socialist Left's attempt to silence them by characterizing controversial elements of their speech as "hate speech" which would in turn constitute legal grounds for speakers' incarceration.

Speakers locally co-construct an implied definition of hate speech (the uncritical public display of Hitler's image, a Nazi slogan, or terms associated with Nazi ideology) and present it as absurd. I show that through the creative performance of the burlesque narrative the main speaker and the co-constructors of the narrative manage to perform the discursive practices referred to as hate speech by the speaker's perceived political adversary, the left.

A final concern is to place my findings in the extended context of Hungarian political discourse and show that in this larger context the burlesque narratives performed on the *Press Club* function as counter-discourses (Huspek 1993) vis-à-vis what participants conceive of as the dominant discourse of the ruling political ideology.

## 2. The Press Club

The corpus of data used for this study consists of audio recordings of 33 episodes from the 2003 season of the *Press Club* and audio recordings (2) and video recordings (41) of the 42 episodes from the 2004 season. The average length of one episode is approximately 55 minutes. The show was broadcast for three seasons (2001–2002, 2003, 2004) on the *ATV* and *Budapest TV* television channels. Each season of the program was discontinued when the producers had run out of funding.<sup>3</sup>

The show is a widely recognized, and perhaps the most known and infamous, representative of mass mediated radical right-wing discourse.<sup>4</sup> The pundits are well-known media personalities who are routinely cast as the representatives of Hungarian far-right activism by the Hungarian political left. The group of pundits that co-host the show varies, but some members give fairly regular appearances. The five major figures most widely associated with the *Press Club* are István Lovas (journalist, political scientist, university lecturer and translator educated at McGill, UCLA, and the Institute for Political Studies in Paris), Zsolt Bayer (writer, journalist,

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<sup>3</sup> The latest season of the show which started in January of 2005 is not being broadcast. It is made available on a weekly basis to subscribers on DVD by the Hungarian right-wing media initiative *DVTV* (Demokrata Videó Televízió).

<sup>4</sup> In Data Segment 1/1, line 14 below, "this political wing of ours" as a membership categorization makes sense to the show's audience because the speakers have previously contrasted their political agenda with that of the socialist-liberal left.

political activist, former high school history teacher), András Bencsik (journalist, the editor-in-chief of the right wing political weekly newsmagazine *Demokrata*), László Gy. Tóth (political scientist, journalist, poet), and Tamás Molnár (graphic artist, co-founder of the Hungarian underground political art movement known as the Inconnu Group). All five men characterize themselves as fiercely anti-Communist, anti-European Union, conservative activist intellectuals.

At the discursive level of topics and themes, their interaction is roughly organized into the following sequence: one of the pundits introduces a problematic topic from the domain of current events, he or she proffers some initial analytic and/or evaluative commentary, other participants proffer comments, the topic is concluded, and a new topic is introduced.

The *Press Club* as speech event features five types of participant roles. The *pundits* and their occasional *guests* relate to one another as of equal status whose opinion is of equal value. They are arranged around a table in a U-shape that is open toward the audience and the cameras. One of the pundits acts as *moderator* whose functions are (1) to occasionally introduce new topics or to cue another pundit to introduce a new topic, and (2) to occasionally influence turn-taking in order to ensure the equal distribution of turns. The person performing the role of moderator may remain constant across a series of episodes, but may also change from episode to episode. Based on the data available I have not been able to discern a recognizable pattern for moderator selection. The *studio audience* is present in the studio at the time of recording. It is difficult to gauge the size of the audience because audience members are never shown, the camera is invariably directed at the pundits and their guests. The audience contributes to the show with occasional (and usually inaudible) remarks and comments that are not expressly solicited but are sometimes acknowledged by the pundits and their guests. The audience also contributes boos, cheers, and laughter. Finally, the *viewing audience* of the program functions as the ultimate recipient of the *Press Club*. The pundits' talk is often explicitly directed at this audience.

### 3. The Burkean concept of burlesque

In *Attitudes Toward History*, Kenneth Burke (1937/1959) characterizes burlesque in literature as an “external approach” (1937/1959: 53) to a critiqued other—external in the sense that the author of the burlesque mitigates the risk of being associated with the object of their criticism by critiquing superficially. Superficiality here, for Burke, means not analyzing the adversary’s argumentation and psychology in great detail but, instead, caricaturing them and their position. Deep analysis, Burke argues, may imply for the audience of the burlesque that the author is guilty of over-identification with the adversary, a positioning the author cannot afford. Burke defines burlesque as follows: “The writer of burlesque makes no attempt to get inside the psyche of his victim. Instead, he is content to *select the externals of behavior, driving them to a “logical conclusion” that becomes their “reduction to absurdity”*” [my emphasis] (1937/1959: 54). To achieve burlesque, then, the author must engage in the observation of the logic of the adversary’s behavior, and the exposition of the absurdity of that logic.

To what extent is Burke’s conception of burlesque, derived from studies of literature and rhetoric, applicable to burlesque narratives in broadcast interaction? My objective is not to undermine Burke’s argument but to expand it by arguing that the performer of burlesque narratives in a televised talk show must not only mitigate potential criticisms of being inappropriately associated with the adversary, but must also make sure that the powerful adversary cannot hold him or her accountable for the contents of the narrative.

Rhetorical scholars have used Burke’s conception of burlesque to analyze nineteenth century American feminist writers’ contestation of the model of “true womanhood” (Carlson 1988), Truman’s justification for the use of atomic weapons against Japan (Hubbard 1998), the rhetoric of William F. Buckley, Jr. (Appel 1996), and forms of public criticism against Dan Quayle (Moore 1992), US Secretary of Interior James Watt (Bostdorff 1987) and “White folk” in the speeches of civil rights leader Ralph David Abernathy (Selby 2005). Invariably, these studies use non-interactional texts (speeches, essays, cartoons) as their data. In contrast to these studies, Appel (2003) turns to broadcast data in his analysis of the rhetoric of Rush Limbaugh and applies Burke’s formulation of burlesque to mediated talk.

However, his findings are difficult to apply to spoken interaction because the units of his analysis are individual, isolated utterances from Limbaugh's broadcasts. Appel compiles these isolated instances into catalogues of rhetorical moves and thus the instances become detached from their discursive contexts. What is lost in such an analysis is the explanation of how a given speaker deploys these utterances "to produce socially meaningful action and to achieve (or fail to achieve) mutual understanding" (Fitch 2005: 461) with their interlocutor(s).

The analysis in this study proceeds in a different way. Burke's argument that a central feature of burlesque is the speaker's avoidance of potential criticisms of being inappropriately associated with the adversary can be framed as the expression of the desire on the speaker's part to mitigate moral accountability. In Burke's discussion, this type of speaker accountability is oriented toward a third party audience. I will expand Burke's analysis by addressing a different type of accountability, one that is oriented toward the lampooned adversary. In the analysis below I will show how a performer of a comparatively lengthy burlesque narrative mitigates his accountability for what he says for fear of being sanctioned by the adversary. First, I explore the nature and movement of the dual "I of discourse" (Urban 1989) through the burlesque narrative. The narrator and contributing speakers are shown to move in a symbolic space that they themselves create by combining cultural concepts, or concepts that index locally relevant sociocultural meanings beyond their referential meaning (Silverstein 2004: 621), and whose invocation in the context of the *Press Club* is usually attributed to the pundits' adversary, the political left. Second, I analyze how the dual "I" translates into a production format (Goffman 1981: 144) in which the responsibility for discourse is assigned to a fictitious principal that is distinct from the author and animator. This translation, as we will see, is achieved by means of the discursive creation of a hypothetical universe (see Shoaps 2007, for a different demonstration of this discursive device). Finally, I offer an explanation of how this production format warrants the decreased accountability of the performer of the burlesque narrative through controlling anticipated entextualizations, discursive strategies that create the semblance of quoting actual previous utterances (Silverstein and Urban 1996: 2) by the adversary. In conclusion, I analyze an example of how the burlesque narrative creates the possibility for rich, multi-layered shadow conversations (Irvine 1996), or invocations

of related utterances, in the face of the threat of entextualization that may bring social harm onto the performer of the burlesque narrative.

#### **4. Analysis: Burlesque in broadcast interaction**

The segment below features a conversation from the second season of the *Press Club*. Because the segment is fairly lengthy, it is useful to summarize the contents of Lovas's criticism against the Hungarian political left prior to the step-by-step analysis of his performance of the burlesque narrative, the form he employs to present his critique. Lovas posits that the creators and promoters of the "hate law" in the leftist Hungarian government claim that the new law derives legitimacy from the European Union's tough stance against all forms of hate speech. As we will see below, Lovas deploys a variety of rhetorical devices to show that, contrary to the claims of the Hungarian left, countries of the European Union are lenient toward what the Hungarian government regards as forms of hate speech. What follows from this, according to Lovas, is that the actual purpose of the "hate law" is to use the power of the law to silence radical right-wing voices, including the *Press Club*.

In the segment, all five main pundits (Lovas, Bencsik, Bayer, Tóth Gy., Molnár) are present. In this episode, Bencsik is acting as moderator. Prior to the segment, the participants were discussing two problematic issues. They discuss the left-wing media's smear campaign against the political right and the right's inability to mobilize media resources in its own defense. Immediately before the segment below, a participant begins to discuss that the existence of the *Demokrata*, a weekly magazine widely regarded as the prime representative of radical right-wing voices, will be jeopardized if the "hate law" is passed. Thus, the "provocation" mentioned by the speaker-protagonist of the narrative, Lovas, on line 10 indexes this dual threat against the lamentably passive right: first, the threat of the "hate law" championed by the political left, second, the smear campaign by the left-leaning media.

(1) *Data Segment 1/1*<sup>5</sup>*Press Club, September 3, 2003*

Part 2 / 9:21

1	Bencsik	<i>Pista bocsáss meg,</i>	Pista I'm sorry, [speaking
2		<i>gyűlölettvörvény.</i>	of the] hate law.
3	Lovas	<i>mhm</i>	mhm
4	Bencsik	<i>Ha bejön. te mit fogsz</i>	If it happens (i.e., is
5		<i>csinálni. ugye hát</i>	passed) what will you do.
6		<i>újságíró nem lehetsz mert</i>	I mean you won't be able
7		<i>ö ö</i>	to work as a journalist
			because
8	Lovas	<i>leszek ha-</i>	I will be if
9	Bencsik	<i>névre szól[óan]=</i>	individually
10	Lovas	<i>[ezt]-</i>	this
11	Bencsik	<i>fogják alkalmazni</i>	will they apply the
12		<i>[a pa ]sszusokat.</i>	measures
13	Lovas	<i>[ezt a]-</i>	this
14	Lovas	<i>Ezt a (.) mi oldalunkat</i>	This (political) wing of
15		<i>provokálni lehet</i>	ours <sup>6</sup> can be provoked
16		<i>végtelenségig</i>	endlessly (by e.g. the
			hate law)
17	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh]</i>	
18	Lovas	<i>[és hogyha a poli]tikusok</i>	and if the politicians
19		<i>megint nem veszik fel a</i>	refuse to face the
20		<i>kesztyűt akkor én e::: egy</i>	challenge again, then I
21		<i>új szakmát választok (0.6)</i>	will choose a new
22		<i>és bor nagykereskedő</i>	profession and become a
23		<i>leszek</i>	wholesale wine retailer

After an apology to the previous speaker for grabbing the floor and the introduction of a new topic of discussion by (line 1) the moderator gradually yields the floor to Lovas who succeeds in taking it after three attempts (lines 8, 10, 13) on line 14. On lines 14–16 and 18–20 Lovas constructs an image of the Hungarian political right (“this political wing of ours”) that is “provoked endlessly” by the Hungarian political left without any adequate defense (“facing the challenge”) from politicians on the right. On line 20, “e:::” marks the introduction of the “I” of the burlesque

<sup>5</sup> I am using transcription conventions listed in Fitch and Sanders (2005: xi–xiii). I adopted the symbol for vox (speaking the voice of another) from DuBois (2006).

<sup>6</sup> A reference to the immediately preceding discussion in which the pundits faulted politicians on the right for their inability to effectively counter the media campaign of the adversary, the socialist-liberal left.



narrative<sup>7</sup>: Lovas slips into the fantasy persona of a “wholesale wine retailer,” a new occupation that he will adopt after losing his job as a journalist in the wake of the “hate law” taking effect. To use a term introduced by Urban (1989: 36–37) for this type of “I,” Lovas here speaks from a theatrical “I.” We can also see that this persona is activated within the ideological universe of the left in which the “hate law” already holds sway. Subsequent data will demonstrate that this new persona will function as the position from which Lovas will stand in for inept right wing politicians and “face the challenge” from the political left from within its own ideological universe. The action of the speaker-protagonist is initiated on line 23 by means of a future tense verb (*leszek*, ‘will be’) and from this point onward, the narrative is projected into the future.<sup>8</sup>

In the following data segment, Lovas continues the narrative with the support of fellow participants and the audience, staying in his theatrical role throughout the segment. The protagonist (Lovas) faces the object of his moral quest (i.e. facing the political left that has just, hypothetically, revoked his license as a journalist).

(2) *Data Segment 1/2*

24	Bencsik	[ <i>Na az szép szép dolog. ]</i>	Well isn't that a nice thing to do.
25	Lovas	[ <i>Abban a pillanatban hogy]</i>	The moment
26		<i>az EU-ba belépünk (0.4)</i>	we join the EU
27		<i>kérlek szépen hhh EU.</i>	well I will import EU
28		<i>konform. borokat fogok</i>	standard wines
29		<i>hozni, Olaszországból?</i>	from Italy.
30		<i>(0.4) Itt van (2.0)</i>	Here is
31		<i>((general laughter as</i>	
32		<i>Lovas presumably presents</i>	
33		<i>bottle<sup>9</sup>))<sup>10</sup></i>	

<sup>7</sup> In the Hungarian original, the pronoun *I* is not used—the presence of a first person speaker is marked through verb inflection (‘választok’ *I [will] choose*).

<sup>8</sup> Not all burlesque narratives I have found point the audience to future actions of the speaker-protagonist. In a single exception I have been able to identify, the speaker-protagonist creates a hypothetical scenario with a narrative strand using present tense verbs in the subjunctive or conditional mood.

<sup>9</sup> The bottle is not a stage prop made for the occasion but an actual product that had been the subject of an international controversy (see for example Blumenthal [2004, July 26] and Schultz [2007, January 9]).

34	Lovas	<i>a legújabb ó::: Hitler</i>	the latest Hitler Adolf,
35		<i>Adolf (0.6) a (0.4)</i>	this wine comes from the
36		<i>Venezia Giulia</i>	Venezia Giulia province,
37		<i>tartományból jön ez a bor,</i>	it's a fine two thousand
38		<i>remek kétezer-kettes</i>	two Cabernet Sauvignon.
39		<i>Cabernet Sauvignon? Majd</i>	We can open it after the
40		<i>kinyitjuk utána</i>	show
41		<i>((general laughter))</i>	
42	Lovas	<i>((reads)) &lt;VOX&gt; Ein Volk,</i>	"Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein
43		<i>ein Reich, ein Führer</i>	Führer" <sup>11</sup>
44		<i>&lt;/VOX&gt;</i>	
45		<i>((general laughter))</i>	

As a member of Lovas's primary audience (the pundits), Bencsik lends support to Lovas's performance on line 24. Lovas moves on to specify what type of wine he will import on lines 27–29 ("EU standard wines from Italy") and 34 ("the latest Hitler Adolf [wine]"). Through this specification, two crucially important cultural concepts come into view. The reference to "EU standard" wine indexes the entire body of EU legislations and standardizations to which Hungary is required to conform following the country's EU accession. One of these requirements on the part of the EU is for Hungary to create a body of legislation regarding restrictions on the freedom of expression in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights. In Lovas's utterances on lines 25–29 the "hate law," the European Union, and Italy, an EU member country, are presented as symbolic clusters with overlapping components. Next, when Lovas presents the bottle with a label featuring the image of Hitler and the infamous Nazi slogan (lines 42–43) a new cultural concept is introduced in association with the ones mentioned previously.

Audience laughter (lines 31, 41, 45) exhibits characteristics of what conversation analytic research had termed affiliative laughter as opposed to disaffiliative laughter (Clayman 1992) or 'laughing with' as opposed to 'laughing at' (Glenn 2003: 112). Clayman (1992: 43–46) shows that third-party affiliative audience laughter is likely to occur in rhetorical situations that involve utterances in which the speaker references an opponent,

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<sup>10</sup> Although I am working from a voice recording, I have three reasons to believe that at this point Lovas physically presents the bottle to his audience: (1) the use of the deictic *itt* ('here'), (2) the relatively long pause between the end of Lovas's turn on line 21 and the general laughter that follows, (3) Lovas's reading voice on lines 30–31.

<sup>11</sup> German for "One people, one empire, one leader."

criticizes that opponent, and marks the utterance as laughable by explicit or implicit means. On line 31, general laughter ensues when Lovas presents the wine bottle during a pause that disrupts his narrative and creates space for the audience to proffer an affiliative response. The bottle itself is also a source of humor: it features an incongruous juxtaposition between an alcoholic beverage and a Nazi dictator, which creates a comic frame for the subsequently voiced “hate speech” (lines 41–43). Earlier on line 17, Bayer also produces affiliative laughter, which, due to the lack of a particular ‘laughable’ in Lovas’s prior utterances, is probably done in anticipation of Lovas’s elaborate performance with the wine bottle.

At this point into the data we are in a good position to explicate what is “hate speech” about the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon Lovas is holding in his hand? My task here is not to measure Lovas’s interpretation of hate speech against a much more widely circulated definition of hate speech (i.e. derogatory public talk addressed to members of historically oppressed minority groups, or to their entire groups, based on ascribed identity markers such as race, nationality, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, or physical ability). I am interested in participants’ meanings and their emergence in the process of the burlesque narrative. In this ideological universe dominated by the “hate law,” Lovas’s implicit argument goes, a bottle that exhibits the image of Hitler next to a Nazi slogan performs hate speech. This argument is buttressed by the widely available, though not uniformly accepted, symbolic link in the West between public displays of the image of Hitler and Nazi sloganeering and performances of hate speech (e.g. at Neo-Nazi rallies). The bottle, in the projected ideology of the Hungarian political left, becomes sanctionable hate speech.

What is absurd and insidious about this? Lovas creates the absurd effect by creatively combining the above-mentioned cultural concepts. In his framing, the fact that a “European” (Italian), “EU standard” wine can legally exhibit hate speech reveals the Hungarian political left’s ideological hypercorrectness. From Lovas’s perspective, the adversary wants to criminalize hate speech under the pretext that it is one of the criteria of Hungary’s fast approaching EU membership. But the EU does not criminalize (all) hate speech—as the audience can see, a bottle that bears hate speech is available to anyone for purchase. Hence, Lovas’s argument goes, in its attempt to become “EU standard” regarding hate speech, the Hungarian left overshoots its mark on the one hand, and also enables him,

the wine-retailer, to import Hitler wine because it is a legitimate “EU standard” product. What is insidious about the “hate law” is that in the hands of the Hungarian left, the charge of hate speech is applied selectively—it applies to Hungarians but does not apply to Italians and EU citizens in general—and thus it cannot be seen as motivated by impartial judgment.<sup>12</sup>

In the following segment, Lovas’s theatrical “I” directly addresses a non-present addressee (Minister of Justice Péter Bárándy) and thereby transposes an imaginary conversation between the minister and the wine retailer in the signaling event (Shoaps 1999: 407) of the burlesque narrative performance.

(3) *Data Segment 1/3*

46	Lovas	A (.) Bárándy úr=	Mr. Bárándy
47	Bencsik	=Ez kapható? Olaszország=	Can you actually buy this? Italy
48	Lovas	=[hát persze, minden	well of course, at any
49		benzinkútnál ]	gas station
50	Bayer	=[persze mindenhol]	of course, everywhere
51	Molnár	ebből Sztálin is van?	Is there a Stalin one?
52	Lovas	tessék?	Pardon?
53	Molnár	Sztálin is van? Sztálin	A Stalin one? a Stalin
54		bor=	wine
55	Lovas	=persze!	of course!
56	Molnár	az is van. [nagyyszerű.]	They have that. Great.
57	Lovas	[ Kedves ]	Dear
58	Molnár	[Örülök ]	I’m so pleased
59	Lovas	[Bárándy] úr. Ahogy	Mr. Bárándy. The minute
60		belépünk az Európai	we join the European
61		Unióba folyamodni fogok	Union I will apply for
62		e::: borkereskedői.	wine retailing license
63		engedélyért? és én (0.5)	and I, from the moment
64		a gyűlölettvörvény	that the hate law is
65		(0.2)életbelépésének a	passed and from the
66		pillanatától és az EU-ba	moment of our EU
67		való csatlakozásunktól	accession I will bring
68		(0.2) ilyen borokat fogok	wines like this to
69		Magyarországra hozni.	Hungary.

<sup>12</sup> Ironically, two days after the date of the broadcast (September 5, 2003) it was reported (“Germany in Bid to Ban Hitler Wine,” 2003) that Germany’s government had issued a formal protest against the sale of this particular wine.

On line 47, Bencsik interrupts Lovas to ask for clarification regarding the wine. The clarification question then provides Lovas (lines 48–49) and Bayer (line 50) with an opportunity to elaborate on the wide availability of this particular brand of wine in Italy and thereby further amplify the absurdity of the adversary’s position. On lines 53–54, Molnár requests information about whether other wines bearing the images of dictators exist. Lovas responds with a forceful affirmation (line 55). Molnár, then, proceeds to heighten the sense of absurdity generated by Lovas’s narrative by proffering two remarks (“Great.” and “I’m so pleased.”) that appear to be clearly sarcastic in the light of the pundit’s fierce anti-communism. In sum, the other pundits make a communicative effort to drive Lovas’s burlesque narrative to its “logical conclusion.”

After a failed attempt on line 46, Lovas initiates an utterance (line 57) directed at the non-present addressee, Bárándy, and thereby lends him an interactionally created presence as ratified hearer in the participation framework of the interaction. As a result, the interaction is framed as addressed directly to the Minister of Justice who is responsible for the “hate law.” This inclusion is, however, only one function of addressing Bárándy. The persona of the Minister of Justice also functions as an index of the Hungarian political left by virtue of Bárándy’s membership in the Socialist government of Hungary. The dual symbolism of Bárándy’s social persona equips Lovas with two ways of “facing the challenge,” exposing the absurdity of the “hate law” and thereby exposing the absurdity of the Hungarian political left.

The narrative does not end here. In the following segment Lovas introduces another orientation and complicating action in which he adopts yet another persona, a bathroom furniture importer.

(4) *Data Segment 1/4*

70	Lovas	<i>Sőt</i>	On top of that
71	Bayer	<i>((clears throat))</i>	My dear mother
72		<i>[van egy]</i>	
73	Lovas	<i>[ <u>sőt</u> ]</i>	On top of that
74	Bayer	<i>kis üzlethelysége</i>	owns a small retail space
75		<i>édesanyámnak följánlom.</i>	I can offer you.
76		<i>((general laughter))</i>	
77	Lovas	<i>Köszönöm. A másik amit</i>	Thank you. The other thing
78		<i>fogok csinálni (0.4)</i>	I will do, well, a few
79		<i>kérlek szépen a</i>	days ago I came across an

80		<i>Süddeutsche Zeitungnak a</i>	ad in one of the color
81		<i>napokban egy színes</i>	inserts of the Süddeutsche
82		<i>mellékletében találtam egy</i>	Zeitung.
83		<i>reklámot. Nem tudom</i>	I don't know if you <sup>13</sup>
84		<i>emlékeztek-e arra (0.4)</i>	remember when in a radio
85		<i>amikor (.) Orbán Viktor</i>	interview with Viktor
86		<i>egy rádió em interjúban</i>	Orbán
87		<i>(0.4) teljesen ártatlanul</i>	he innocently mentioned
88		<i>megemítette a ő</i>	the economic life space <sup>14</sup>
89		<i>Magyarország határain</i>	that stretches beyond
90		<i>túlnyúló magyarokat</i>	Hungary's borders,
91		<i>összekötő gazdasági</i>	connecting Hungarians.
92		<i>életteret. (0.6) Normális</i>	Normal people of course
93		<i>embernek természetesen nem</i>	don't think about
94		<i>jut eszébe hogy ezt</i>	immediately translating
95		<i>azonnal Lebensraumra</i>	this into Lebensraum <sup>15</sup> and
96		<i>fordítsa és (0.2)</i>	there was a insane
97		<i>ő::rületos botrány volt</i>	scandal,
98		<i>emlékeztek ezzel</i>	remember, we talked about
99		<i>[foglal]koztunk</i>	this on the show
100	Bencsik	<i>[ igen ]</i>	yes
101	Lovas	<i>a Sajtóklubba és mondtuk</i>	in the Press Club and we
102		<i>hogy (0.2) hát kérem a</i>	said, well,
103		<i>másik oldal is használta</i>	the other side used life-
104		<i>az életteret, az nem baj.</i>	space but that's not a
105		<i>(0.8) Na most, nem az</i>	problem. Well in this case
106		<i>élettér hanem maga a</i>	it's not life-space but
107		<i>Lebensraum felbukkant ezen</i>	Lebensraum itself that
108		<i>a reklámon ((paper</i>	appears in this ad
109		<i>rustle))</i>	
110	Bayer	<i>hhhhhh</i>	
111	Lovas	<i>((reads)) &lt;VOX&gt; Lebensraum</i>	Lebensraum Bad,
112		<i>Bad &lt;/VOX&gt; vagyis</i>	that is
113	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhh]</i>	
114	Lovas	<i>[ez a cég]</i>	this firm
115	Lovas	<i>ez hirdet a Süddeutsche</i>	this places an ad in the
116		<i>Zeitungban. a Bundestagban</i>	Süddeutsche Zeitung <sup>16</sup> . and

<sup>13</sup> Lovas uses the informal first person singular address form when addressing other participants.

<sup>14</sup> "life space": the English term used in the transcript here stands for the Hungarian term 'élettér'. The word is the semantic equivalent of the German term 'Lebensraum'.

<sup>15</sup> "Lebensraum": a key concept in Nazi ideology, denoting the geographical space into which a thriving race (like the Aryan/German) can spread by biological necessity. Hitler viewed Eastern Europe as part of the German Lebensraum. Lovas's point here is that those who thought Orbán was invoking Nazi ideology through his word choice were reading a meaning into Orbán's use of the term that was not meant to be there. "Normal people" adhere to a more referential interpretation of the term: "élettér" or "life space" is a space where the (economic) business of everyday life is conducted.

<sup>16</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung: prominent German daily newspaper.

117	<i>nem szólal fel senki,</i>	nobody speaks up in the
118	<i>(0.4) a::: úgylátszik a</i>	Bundestag <sup>17</sup> . It seems that
119	<i>Mazsihisz lobbinak ott</i>	the Mazsihisz <sup>18</sup> lobby has
120	<i>nincsenek emberei</i>	no people in there
121	Bayer <i>hhhhhhh</i>	
122	<i>((inaudible audience</i>	
123	<i>comment))</i>	

On lines 72 and 74–75, Bayer affirms Lovas’s previous narrative by adding an instance of humorous complicating action to it. The audience and other pundits respond with affiliative laughter (line 76). On line 77 Lovas acknowledges and legitimates Bayer’s contribution (“Thank you”) and launches the next strand of his narrative in which he mobilizes the cultural concept of “Lebensraum” (line 95). This cultural concept indexes a number of other concepts in the context of this narrative: (1) the Hungarian term *élettér* (‘life space’) meaning a territory where the everyday business of life is conducted, (2) the German word *Lebensraum* (‘life space’) meaning a space where people live, (3) Nazi uses of the German word *Lebensraum* to indicate the territory of the expanding Aryan race, (4) the Hungarian word *élettér* functioning as the Hungarian translation of the Nazi term, and (5) the brand name of a product sold in Germany.

Starting on line 105 (and ending on line 120), Lovas creatively combines these meanings in a way that, once again, exposes the absurdity of the left’s take on hate speech. Lovas implies that in the ideological universe of the leftist agenda fostered by the “hate law,” the public mention of *élettér* (‘life space’) by a prominent politician on the right (ex-PM Orbán) constitutes hate speech because of its semantic relation to the symbolic German term *Lebensraum* which, in turn, invokes Nazi ideology. It is “not a problem” (line 104), i.e., it is not hate speech, if the “other side” (the left) or German manufacturers use the same term.

Again, what is absurd and insidious about this? The absurdity arises from the fact that, by the international extension of the leftist ideological universe, a bathtub can perform hate speech by virtue of its name. Here, the prestigious *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the German Bundestag function as the measures of correct judgment in contrast with what, according to Lovas, the misguided Hungarian left would do if the “hate law” were passed: read

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<sup>17</sup> Bundestag: the German parliament.

<sup>18</sup> Mazsihisz: the Federation of Jewish Communities of Hungary.

the term *Lebensraum* as Nazi propaganda. Thus, the left, applying the label hate speech in a knee-jerk fashion, displays signs of oversensitivity by crying wolf at the smallest potential sign of hate speech, and hypercorrectness by wanting to outdo the Germans (and the EU by extension) in sanctioning hate speech. The insidious nature of the left's ideological universe is, once again, inherent in the selective evaluation of public speech as hate speech.

Lovas on lines 119–120 alludes to the common assumption fostered by members of the Hungarian radical right that the chief Jewish political body in Hungary, MAZSIHISZ, is in cahoots with the political left by virtue of their activism aiming for the criminalization of hate speech. As we will see, on line 141 Bayer will respond to this utterance by building on it in a turn that functions as joint fantasizing (Kotthoff 2006) and, topically, as the further characterization of the adversary in racial terms.

In the following sub-segment, Lovas works his way to the marked end of his narrative of his narrative with the help of the other pundits.

(5) *Data Segment 1/5*

124	Lovas	<i>és (0.4) kérlek szépen én</i>	and, well, I decided to
125		<i>elhatároztam hogy írok a</i>	write to the (COC)and I
126		<i>(COC)nak? é:::s én is be</i>	will also exhibit
127		<i>fogok mutatni Lebensraum ó::</i>	Lebensraum
128		<i>fürdőkádat, ó:: esetleg a</i>	bathtubs, perhaps I could
129		<i>kád szélére helyezek egy</i>	place on the edge of the
130		<i>ilyen</i>	tub
131	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhhhhhhh]</i>	
132		<i>[kedves Adolf!] bort! -</i>	a nice Adolf wine, let's
133		<i>mondjuk egy jacuzzit! és</i>	say a Jacuzzi, and then
134		<i>akkor ott reggel pezsegsz</i>	there you are bubbling
135		<i>közben [iszol ebből a]=</i>	away drinking
136	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhhhhhhh]=</i>	
137	Lovas	<i>[borból, kis Mussolini]=</i>	this wine, a bit of Mussolini
138	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh]=</i>	
139	Lovas	<i>[cabernet sauvignon]</i>	cabernet sauvignon
140	Bayer	<i>[hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh] és</i>	and we invite Guszti <sup>19</sup>
141		<i>meghívjuk a Zoltai Gusztit.</i>	Zoltai <sup>20</sup> .
142	Lovas	<i>Igen.</i>	yes
143		<i>((general laughter))</i>	
144	Lovas	<i>és (0.8) és akkor hogyha</i>	and then if

<sup>19</sup> Diminutive form of the first name “Gusztáv.”

<sup>20</sup> Gusztáv Zoltai: the president of Mazsihisz.



145	Bayer	[egy ingyenes	a free promotional
146		termékbemutató!]	display!
147	Lovas	[a gyűlölettvörvény a	
148		gyűlölet]tervény rám	the hate law applies to me
149		vonatkozik akkor én meg	I will
150		fogom kérdezni Lévai	ask Katalin Lévai
151		Katalint mint	as Minister of Equal
152		<u>esélyegyenlőségi</u>	Opportunity
153		miniszterasszonyt, hogy ő az	why the same law
154		olaszokra miért nem	doesn't apply to the
155		vonatkozik ugyanez. Vagy a	Italians. Or the Germans.
156		németekre. Hát ennyit a	Well, so much about the
157		gyűlölettvörvényről	hate law.
158		[És mindenki kedves	And cheers everyone!
159		egészségre!]	
160	Bencsik	[Nagyon szépen köszönjük a]	We thank you very much for
161		bemutatót.	the display.

The narrative action in this segment (lines 124–128) shows the theatrical “I” (*fogok* ‘I will’) orienting to the *Lebensraum* cultural concept discussed above. In a similar manner to the wine retailer, the bathtub-importer Lovas stands the left’s hypercorrectness on its head and pokes fun at the Socialist government by “importing” a product whose name invokes Nazi ideology, the ideology he, as a radical right-wing intellectual, is often accused of embracing. He proposes that the moment his importer persona enters the Hungarian market with a bathtub called *Lebensraum* the name of the product and he himself are protected from the criticism of the Hungarian left since the name of the product did not cause any scandals in Germany. Lovas the pundit/importer’s imaginary action constitutes a discursive jab at the adversary: he can say/do all this and there is nothing the adversary can say because even though it might appear as if Lovas were invoking Nazi ideology through his utterances/action, the product itself meets EU standards, in the name of which the adversary wants to accuse him of hate speech. Again, the persona allows Lovas to expose the self-contradiction the Hungarian left sets itself up for by steadfastly adhering to EU standards and by fostering a misguided interpretation and application of hate speech as a label for public talk.

The image of the “promotional display” (line 146) co-constructed by Lovas and Bayer, and ratified by Bencsik (lines 160–161) marks a narrative confluence between the two threads of this narrative, the protagonist-speaker’s discursive actions as wine-retailer and as bathtub-importer. Bayer’s proposal to invite “Zoltai Guszti” (line 141) to the display extends

the burlesque to a new, secondary adversary (the “MAZSIHISZ lobby,” lines 119–120). In the speaker-protagonist’s treatment this group was not included in the burlesque narrative as a character but Bayer weaves the group into the narrative action itself. The audience responds to Bayer’s utterance with affiliative laughter (line 143) Arguably, besides the criticism of the new adversary they are responding to the juxtaposition of a Jewish community leader and objects representing “hate speech” in an imaginary situation. Finally, as the last act of the theatrical “I,” on lines 149–155 Lovas indirectly addresses Minister of Equal Opportunity Katalin Lévai and points out the insidious nature of the absurd antics of her government, namely the partial application of the “hate law” and the hate speech label to himself, and, by implication, the political wing he associates himself with. Lovas terminates the narrative on lines 158–159 and the moderator affirms the termination on the following two lines.

## **5. Voice and moral accountability in the burlesque narrative**

To summarize what has been said above about Lovas’s discursive “I” we can say that it is clearly distinct from the indexical-referential “I” that stands for Lovas the political pundit speaking in the moment of the speech event. This “I” is a theatrical one which is, as Urban (1989) points out, fundamentally social since no-one in Lovas’s audience has any doubt that he is in fact neither a wine-retailer, nor a bathroom furniture importer. I will argue that the use of the theatrical “I” occasions a split within Lovas’s role as speaker. Based on Goffman’s (1981) formulation of the production format (144) it can be said that Lovas the animator (who produces utterances) and author (who combines the cultural concepts of the political left into a burlesque narrative) becomes detached from the principle of his performance. This production format implies that it is not Lovas the pundit who is responsible for uttering a widely recognized Nazi slogan or playfully invoking Nazi ideology and thus provoke accusations of hate speech, and it is not Lovas the pundit who makes fun of the establishment’s anticipated alarm over the Lebensraum bathtubs, but Lovas the wine retailer and the furniture importer, respectively.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Shoaps (1999) makes a similar argument about Rush Limbaugh’s discursive strategies.

The above analysis shows that the burlesque narrative is characterized by particular discursive strategies realized through the manipulation of the production format. The production format employed in the burlesque narrative places constraints both on the performer (Lovas) and the adversary (the left and, to a certain extent, the “Jewish lobby”), the object of the burlesque. The performer mobilizes cultural concepts made available to them by the adversary to achieve the impression of absurdity. The performer can recombine these elements as they see fit, but the range of their choice of elements is limited by the adversary’s discourse. The adversary’s potential subsequent response is also shaped by the production format. On the one hand, before they can rebuke the performer they must address the contradiction that emerged from the performer’s burlesque. More importantly, in their rebuke they will not be able to entextualize the performer’s speech as proof of their use of hate speech because (a) the performer has delegated the responsibility for his utterances to a projected principal, and (b) he is conducting himself within the comic frame of burlesque in which every utterance can be referred to as “just a joke.”

To illustrate the complexity of voicing (or multivocality) it is useful to return to the moment in the interaction when Lovas is reading the label on the bottle (lines 42–44). This interactional moment captures all shadow conversations (Irvine 1996) that murmur in the background of the speaker’s utterances. As Irvine puts it, “[e]choes of the speech of others appear in one’s discourse not only in overtly marked constructions (the overt representation of their talk, whether in direct or indirect quotation, or even “free indirect style”), but in many covert forms as well—forms that imitate, stylize, or parody the stylistic features associated with other persons, genres, times, and places” (151).<sup>22</sup> The roles within the production format

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<sup>22</sup> In ‘The problem of speech genres’ Bakhtin (1986) writes: “The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself—philosophical, scientific, and artistic—is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well” (92, Bakhtin’s emphasis). Even though Bakhtin served as my point of departure toward the discussion of voice in burlesque narratives at the beginning of this essay I chose to invoke Irvine’s concept of shadow conversations here instead of Bakhtin’s ‘dialogic overtones’ because Irvine’s formulation creates a useful distinction between overt and covert forms of bringing the voices of others into discourse.

of the burlesque narrative are important voices in these conversations, but we can also infer the presence of others. When Lovas utters the words “Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer,” the following voices constitute the full meaning of his utterance:

- the voice of the winemaker (producer of EU standard wine);
- the voice of Nazism, the symbolic embodiment of hate speech;
- the voice of the speaker (Lovas<sub>1</sub>);
- the voice of the wine retailer (Lovas<sub>2</sub>);
- the voice of the alleged Neo-Nazi (Lovas<sub>3</sub>);
- the (anticipated) voice of the adversary who will accuse Lovas<sub>1</sub> of being a Neo-Nazi by quoting this very utterance—and thereby expose their absurdity since they accuse an EU standard object of being non-EU standard, i.e. hateful.

The multiplicity of voices that are present constitute a discursive maze in which the performer of the burlesque narrative can hide their discursive persona from critical entextualizations.<sup>23</sup> If the performer is accused of speaking from one voice he has the option of claiming that he was in fact speaking from another. Then, as I have mentioned above, if this strategy of mitigating accountability fails, the burlesque narrative equips the performer with the option of claiming: “All of that was said in good fun.” And finally, the speaker can also claim to have dispersed accountability among his co-participants and his entire audience. Since his invocation of cultural symbols happen in the form of allusions, “the responsibility for the interpretation is shifted onto the [audience]” (Wodak 2002: 239). In effect, the performer of burlesque narrative uses this genre partly because it provides him with plausible deniability in case he is held accountable for his speech. Complex voicing practices create future opportunities for the speaker-protagonist of the burlesque narrative to mitigate the negative consequences of the adversary’s subsequent critical entextualizations (Silverstein and Urban 1996: 2) of controversial elements of the burlesque narrative.

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<sup>23</sup> A similar claim can be made about the utterance on lines 111–112.

## 6. The narrative element of burlesque

Although the above data do not fully fit Labov's (1972: 369) canonical characterization of the structure of narratives of personal experience, in agreement with Goodwin (1990/1991) I maintain that in the burlesque narrative (or any other type of narrative) "the primary organization of the descriptions is to be found not in properties of the past events being described but rather in the structure of present interaction" (275).

The burlesque narrative is a type of narrative in which the speaker adopts a persona and performs imaginary actions in the ideological universe of an adversary that reveal the absurdity of that universe and the insidious motives of the adversary. The speaker's symbolic quest highlights and reorganizes familiar cultural concepts (Silverstein 2004) in absurd ways. The burlesque narrative differs, both structurally and topically, from Labov's formulation of the basic structure of narratives of personal experience. First, the data set I have isolated in *Press Club* transcripts as representatives of burlesque narrative indicate that these narrative sequences create imaginary scenarios in which the speaker-protagonist functions through the use of the future tense (or present tense to indicate future events), modals, and imperatives. The past tense therefore has a marginal, if any, role in the telling of these narratives. Second, burlesque narratives cannot be characterized as narratives of personal experience because due to the markedly absurd character of these narratives the speaker did not and will never live through the experiences he describes as his own. Third, although the burlesque narrative features a main speaker-protagonist, other participants (pundits, audience) are entitled to jointly move the story forward. The burlesque narrative offers two types of opportunities for co-participants of the speaker-protagonist. They can engage in joint fantasizing (Kotthoff 2006: 17–23) or the joint elaboration of the imaginary situation with the speaker (cf. lines 141 and 145–146). They can also respond to utterances that the speaker-protagonist marks as humorous with affiliative laughter (Clayman 1992) and thereby align themselves with the main speaker.

In spite of features that are not included in the canonical formulation, Labov's analytic approach helps point out the central structural properties of the burlesque narrative. On the one hand, the burlesque narrative does exhibit similarities with oral narratives of personal experience. The above

narrative begins with an abstract supplied by the moderator (lines 4–7, 9, 10–11). The speaker/protagonist supplies the orientation (lines 14–16, 18–20, 25–26). The first of the two strands of the (minimal) complicating action are supplied by the speaker (lines 20–23, 27–29). The second strand, after a lengthy orientation (lines 77–120), is jointly supplied by the speaker and another participant (lines 124–156). The narrative is concluded with an evaluation (lines 156–157) and a coda (lines 158–159) that returns listeners into the non-fictional present.

## **7. The functions of burlesque narratives**

I have established that the burlesque narrative as a speech genre (Bakhtin 1986) is characterized by a distinctive theme (60), namely the representation of the absurdity of an adversary's point of view from an imaginary persona and from within the adversary's ideological universe. It is also characterized by a style, or an evaluative orientation to the referentially semantic content (humorously negative evaluation) which is accomplished through complex and artful voicing practices activating moral stances. The analysis has also shown that the function of evaluation is fulfilled by means of a discursive strategy, the presentation of absurdity in a burlesque frame that mitigates the speaker's accountability for the norm violation that rendering the adversary's perspective may constitute in the eye of that lampooned adversary.

To tie the discussion back to Burke's (1937/1959: 54) description of burlesque, the burlesque narrative fulfills the one major function of burlesque that Burke identifies: it reduces the adversary's position to absurdity. However, my analysis of situated interaction departs to a certain extent from Burke's analysis of literary burlesque on the account of the other function he names. This function is avoiding accusations of over-identification with the adversary by means of attending only to the "external," superficial elements of the adversary's position. I agree with Burke that the speaker-protagonist of the burlesque narrative must clearly mark his or her own position as opposed to the adversary. Arguably, this is especially so in the context of a televised, radically conservative talk show where careful analysis of the other's position is much less interesting and entertaining for the target audience as caricature. However, a complete account of the mitigation of moral accountability in the burlesque narrative

must point out that the speaker-protagonist shapes his utterances in anticipation of potential moral criticism and/or social sanctioning both by a third-party audience and the adversary. I would add to Burke's observation about burlesque that the speaker-protagonist must also keep a wary eye on the powerful adversary which has at its discretion, or may have in the future, laws like the "hate law" that could later be brought to bear in a critique of the speaker-protagonist's present speech.

Finally, the burlesque narrative also functions to provide opportunities of affiliation to present and, arguably, non-present participants of the broadcast. This affiliation is accomplished by the humor inherent in burlesque narrative performances, and by the fact that the audience is 'in' on the jokes. Pundits and audience members alike are familiar with the cultural concepts that are reorganized into absurd constellations by the speaker-protagonist, and understand why the constellations are absurd. Thus, burlesque narrative as an oral genre of humor (Kotthoff 2006) forges a sense of inclusiveness and belonging among members of the participation framework of its telling.

One way to fathom the larger social significance of burlesque narratives beyond the immediate context of its performance, in the context of Hungarian political discourse, is to regard burlesque narratives as counter-discourses (Huspek 1993) in the socio-cultural context of Hungarian political discourse. Huspek argues that speakers do not operate in any single discursive structure but rather they can combine elements (sounds, words, meanings) of multiple structures in their discourse. Regarding the central question that he poses at the beginning of his essay (What is the relationship between discourse and power?), Huspek says that any speaker in any situation involving a power imbalance has a minimum of two choices: to defer to the discourse of the powerful, or to adopt a counter-discourse which involves the creation and cultivation of an antilanguage that flaunts breaking the rules of the dominant discourse.

Burlesque narratives function as counter-discourses in the Hungarian public sphere. Performers of burlesque narratives in the *Press Club* discourse who position themselves as oppressed by the dominant discourse of the political left "face the challenge" (to use a term from Lovas) in the face of "provocation" by taking cultural concepts from the dominant

discourse and combining them into discourses of resistance.<sup>24</sup> The burlesque narrative, as antilanguage or antidiscourse, is inevitably parasitic on the dominant discourse whose absurdity it sets out to expose. This resistance is carried out concurrently with the discursive creation of plausible deniability. As a result of these discursive strategies, speakers accomplish the symbolic act of “facing the challenge,” an act that consists of (a) the presentation of self as the representative of reasonable views who is (b) provoked by political adversaries for representing those views, and (c) the presentation of reasonable views (or the absurdity of the adversary’s views), by the means of burlesque narratives.

## 8. Conclusion

In the context of Hungarian political discourse, the burlesque narrative emerges as a speech genre. This type of narrative constitutes a speech event that features a television studio as setting, and a speaker-protagonist, his fellow pundits, a non-present (but sometimes directly addressed) adversary, and present and non-present audiences. The objective of the speaker-protagonist of the narrative and the fellow pundits who participate in its construction is to lampoon the adversary and render its position ludicrous. The lampooning is done in a way that does not carefully consider the minutiae of the adversary’s position, but instead presents that position as completely worthless and laughable, criticizing the position in a way that maintains plausible deniability for the participants of the burlesque performance. The style of presentation is humorous and sarcastic.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Burlesque as counter-discourse had been used in similar rhetorical situations by nineteenth century French intellectuals castigating the moral complacency of the increasingly dominant bourgeoisie (Terdiman 1990: 153), by civil rights activist Ralph David Abernathy to mark and ridicule racist White attitudes (Selby 2005) and by nineteenth century American feminists rejecting the dominant stereotypical social role of the “true woman” (Carlson 1988).

<sup>25</sup> As Ed Appel (personal communication) pointed out to me, Burke saw burlesque as slapstick comedy. Although the present analysis of the burlesque narrative may create the impression that its comprehension requires above average cognitive effort from the audience, as a native Hungarian I would argue that anyone with a high school education, a vague familiarity with Hungarian current events, and a matching political agenda can easily appreciate this kind of humor.



Structurally, the burlesque narrative genre relies on a specific kind of narrative structure and multilayered voicing achieved via the rearrangement of the adversary's cultural concepts in a way that they are still recognizable as such. Used by speakers who see themselves under threat from an adversary of greater means and power, the burlesque narrative is a resource that serves the dual purpose of discursive resistance and affiliation.

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