The Netherlands: Party Specialists Taking the Floor

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The Netherlands

Party Specialists Taking the Floor

Simon Otjes and Tom Louwerse

Introduction

Extreme levels of parliamentary specialization characterize the lower house of the Dutch parliament (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*). MPs do not represent specific constituencies or communities. Instead, they represent their party on a specific issue. This has significant consequences for parliamentary speechmaking in the Dutch lower house. In general, only one MP per party participates in a debate: when there is a debate about healthcare, the healthcare spokespersons of all parliamentary party groups are present. Within their policy remit, MPs enjoy considerable autonomy. In essence, Members of Parliament are shopkeepers operating their own business on a specific issue within an overarching brand (Louwerse and Otjes 2015; Vos 2011, 37).

This means that the notion that per debate the party leadership attempts to block dissenting voices from being voiced is foreign to the functioning of the Dutch parliament (*pace* Laver this volume; Slapin and Proksch this volume). In every debate, there is only one spokesperson per party who voices the party line. The crucial decision of delegation does not occur per debate. Instead, it occurs at the beginning of the parliamentary term when the leadership decides which MP gets which portfolio. In larger parties, the portfolios can get quite small, and the competition over portfolios that are considered interesting or influential can be fierce. The party leadership only exerts direct control over individual contributions to debates on the most politically salient issues. Feedback by peers who have a closely related policy portfolio is more common. MPs of coalition parties are more constrained, as what they say and propose is coordinated within the coalition.

In the first, qualitative part of this chapter, we consider existing knowledge about how MPs function as spokespersons and how electoral, parliamentary, and party institutions shape plenary speeches.[1] The second, analytical part of the

[1] Little is known academically about the institutional setting in legislative debate in the Netherlands. We rely, in part, on autobiographies of Members of Parliament that touch upon the daily practice of politics, to understand who decides who speaks when. We have sought to aggregate information from

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chapter looks at how speaking time is distributed between MPs with different individual characteristics, leadership positions, and party positions, based on an original analysis of participation in parliamentary debates between 1998 and 2017.

Institutional and Party System Background

The most important institutional feature shaping parliamentary and party politics in the Netherlands is the electoral system. For the lower house elections, the Netherlands uses pure proportional representation in a single country district with a very low effective threshold (0.67 percent). In formal terms, the Netherlands has a quasi-open list system. Every vote is a preference vote and MPs with preference votes amounting to at least 25 percent of the electoral quota are elected. The remaining seats for a party are awarded based on list position. In practice, preference votes do not substantially affect which candidates are elected: most preference votes are cast for candidates who would also have been elected based on their list position. Out of the 900 MPs elected in elections, between 1998 and 2012, only eight were elected solely based on their preference votes. Preference votes elect only a handful of MPs. This means that, in practice, MPs hardly experience individual electoral incentives. As we show, the MPs who may be expected to experience the most significant electoral incentive (i.e., those elected by preference votes or with a low list placement) do not behave differently from other MPs (Louwerse and Otjes 2016). All in all, MPs do not represent specific geographic constituencies or societal groups with specific needs. Therefore, MPs are elected based on the party brand.

Due to the open electoral system, the Netherlands has a fractionalized parliament, and therefore coalition governments are necessary between two and four parties. There is a strong norm of majority government. The extent to which the executive dominates the legislative is the subject of lively debate in Dutch politics (Andeweg 2004, 2006, 2008; Holzhacker 2002; Lijphart 2012; Timmermans 2003). In formal terms, the Dutch parliament and the cabinet are separate. If a parliament member is appointed to the cabinet, they have to stand down from parliament (Andeweg 2008, 262). Ministers can attend and speak in parliamentary meetings when they are invited by the Speaker to do so. In the daily practice of coalition governance, there is strong coordination between the coalition parties in parliament on the one hand and the ministers on the other (Andeweg 2004). This starts at the beginning of a coalition when coalition parties sign a coalition agreement that includes compromises between the coalition parties and agreements not deal with certain issues during the terms (Timmermans 2003).

as many parties as possible. We have representatives from many parties: the VVD (Berckmoes 2017), D66 (Jeekel 1998), the PvdA (De Jong 1998; Middel 2003; Vos 2011), and GL (Rosenmöller 2003).

Coalition parties will not deviate from the coalition agreement, at least not without further negotiations (Holzhacker 2002). The key players in the coalition meet every week to consult each other and coordinate the political initiatives. In practice, the critical division within parliament is, according to MPs, between the coalition and the opposition (Andeweg 2000, 2004, 2008). However, these agreements limit the freedom of both the executive and the legislative (Andeweg 2000, 2008).

The proportional electoral system has consistently resulted in a multiparty system with a comparatively high effective number of parties (an average of 5.3 between 1998 and 2017). There are three core parties, even though these have been losing electoral support. The Christian-Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA), the Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA), and the Liberal Party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD). Since 1977 every government has consisted of at least two of these, often joined by other parties. The CDA has center-right positions on economic, migration, and moral issues. Before 1994 the party had a pivotal position: it was always in government.[2] To its left on economic, migration, and moral matters, one can find the social-democratic PvdA. The market-liberal VVD has right-wing positions on economic and migration issues and liberal positions on moral issues. Between 1994 and 2002, the PvdA and the VVD governed together without the CDA. They were joined by the social-liberal Democrats 66 (*Democraten 66*, D66), which stands between the PvdA and VVD on economic matters and has a progressive outlook on moral and migration matters.

Since 2002 the Dutch parliament has had a sizeable radical right-wing populist party. Formerly, the List Pim Fortuyn occupied this niche (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, LPF), but in 2006 this position was occupied by the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV). These parties are more right-wing on issues of migration than they are on economic or moral issues. They have been close to the steering wheel of government. Between 2002 and 2003, the VVD and CDA governed together with the LPF. Between 2010 and 2012, the VVD and CDA governed as a minority government with a confidence and supply agreement with the PVV. The final party that has been in government is the Christian-social ChristianUnion (*ChristenUnie*, CU), which stands between the CDA and PvdA on economic and migration matters but is more conservative on moral matters than the CDA.

There have also been multiple permanent opposition parties. The most prominent are the two parties to the left of the PvdA, the GreenLeft (*GroenLinks*, GL)

[2] Between 1918 and 1977 this pivotal role was taken by the Catholic Party (RKSP/KVP).

and Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP). During this period, a conservative Christian party Political Reformed Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP), an animal advocacy party Party for the Animals (*Partij voor de Dieren*, PvdD), a pensioners' party (50PLUS) and a centrist populist party, Liveable Netherlands (*Leefbaar Nederland*, LN) have also been represented in parliament. Parliament operates in an inclusive way: positions in the presidium, chairpersonships of committees are divided proportionally among the parties. There are no parties that are treated as outsiders.

As we discussed above, the day-to-day operation of the Dutch parliament is governed by the principle of specialization (Andeweg 2000, 2011; De Jong 1998; Louwerse and Otjes 2015; Mickler 2017, 2018a; Van Schendelen 1976). Members of Parliaments operate relatively autonomously on issues relating to their policy portfolio, but they are not expected to voice opinions in parliament on other issues (Mickler 2017, 188–189). In trade for their silence on many issues, their voice is amplified by the number of their colleagues on the issue they are spokesperson on (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011; De Jong 1998, 332). This means that, in practice, party unity in the Netherlands is extreme: this is not the result of party leaders whipping their groups but instead of a division of labor within those groups (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011).

Each parliamentary party group (PPG) has a board that usually includes the PPG leader, the deputy PPG leader, and the PPG secretary. Except for the PPG leader, membership of the PPG board does not have an external role (De Jong 1998, 337; Mickler 2017, 210; Vos 2011). Most PPG leaders are considered to be the leader of their party, except when the party leader is a government minister (i.e., the prime minister). The board coordinates financial, organizational, and personnel matters and liaises with the central party office (De Jong 1998, 337; Mickler 2017, 210). The PPG board "tries to talk content as little as possible. The content belongs to the PPG" (MP interviewed in Mickler 2018b, 458). The leader of a large PPG often does not have a portfolio of their own; the leader of a small PPG tends to have a smaller portfolio. Within coalition parties, the PPG leader has a vital role in the coalition meetings where they formulate compromises between the coalition parties. In larger groups, the deputy PPG leader often acts as the "human resource manager," who coordinates portfolio assignment (Berckmoes 2017, 35). The PPG secretaries form the linking pin with the parliament's presidium: secretaries of larger PPGs are members of the presidium. Committee chairs are often experienced non-specialists who serve as technical chairs of committee meetings. Their role is not political and they have no "political" control over the agenda. There is no distinction between a party frontbench and a party backbench in a political sense: all MPs are spokespersons and usually, there are no MPs without a portfolio. The scope and importance of an MP's portfolio usually reflect their standing within the group.

The Institutional Setting of Legislative Debate

Unlike most parliaments, the plenary agenda of the Dutch parliament is set by parliament in a public meeting instead of in a closed meeting of parliamentary leadership (Otjes 2019). The five most common kinds of debates are legislative debates, majority debates, minority debates, reports on committee meetings, and the question hour (see Table 29.1). The planning of legislative debates is seldom contested in plenary meetings. This allows the government to pursue its legislative agenda. Legislative debates account for more than half of the number of words spoken in parliamentary debates. In addition to these debates, there are non-legislative debates that follow societal incidents or precede political events such as European Council meetings. These debates allow MPs to table motions,

Table 29.1 Parliamentary debate types in the Netherlands

Name (English)	Goal	Rules
Legislative debate[a] *(Wetgevings debat)*	To discuss the proposed legislation, amendments, and related motions after a committee has reviewed it.	No limits to the speaking time of MPs (except for budget debates); requires a majority of the plenary to set (not a majority of the committee).
(Majority) debate[b] *(Meerderheids) debat*	To discuss policy.	The Speaker sets time limits; requires a parliamentary majority.
Report of a general committee meeting[c] *(Verslag Algemeen Overleg/ Tweeminutendebat)*	To submit and discuss motions after a committee meeting.	Every party group has two minutes of speaking time; a single MP can request it after a committee meeting (which requires a majority in the committee).
Minority debate[d] *(Dertigleden debat)*	To discuss policy.	The Speaker sets time limits; only 30 out of 150 MPs required. All other debates have priority when it comes to the planning of the agenda.
Question time[e] *(Vragenuur)*	To scrutinize the government.	Held every week, the parliament is in session. MPs can submit questions to the Speaker who selects a limited number of questions using their criteria.

[a] Debates on budgets and bills (nearly all debates concern government bills); [b] All debates and debates on letters; [c] General Reports of Committee Meetings and General Reports of Written Committee Meetings; [d] Thirty-member debates and urgency debates; [e] Every individual question (often three to four per session) is treated as a separate debate; [f] includes interpellations, votes, swearing, valediction and remembrance ceremonies, and regularly occurring debates such as the general political debate.

which often request that the government make policy changes. These non-legislative debates require a parliamentary majority, which allows the governing coalition to block debates. These account for about a quarter of the words spoken in parliament. Since 2004, non-legislative debates can also be held at the request of at least thirty members. In planning the agenda, legislative debates have priority over majority debates and these, in turn, have priority over minority debates. In total, they account for a twenty-fifth of the words spoken. Another category is reports of committee meetings. These debates are specifically meant to allow MPs to table motions, which they cannot do in committee. These are relatively short debates, since 2021 called 'two minute debates' after the alotted speaking time per party group. They are fifth of all debates but account for less than 10 percent of the words spoken in parliament. All these four debates are only scheduled when a debate is requested. One of the few types of plenary meetings scheduled regularly is the question hour, which is held every Tuesday. Here MPs can ask oral questions to ministers on urgent matters. The Speaker exerts considerable control over this meeting: MPs send in questions to them before the debate and the Speaker decides which (three or four sets of) questions can be asked.

The Rules of Procedure guarantee floor time for every PPG in every debate, but not to individual MPs (Andeweg 2000, 98). The lower house of parliament, on the Speaker's proposal, decides how much time is allotted to each parliamentary party in every debate. In many debates, every PPG is given the same amount of time or the time allotted is regressively proportional to size: larger groups are assigned more time, but the marginal time per MP decreases. There are a few special rules: where it comes to plenary debates following a committee debate, the rules of procedure already limit every PPG to two minutes. Where it comes to budget debates, parliamentary parties can decide for themselves how to distribute the total time allotted for all budget debates over each specific budget. For debates on legislation, usually, no maximum time per party is set. However, a few recent attempts at filibustering have been curtailed by extending the days on which the parliament sits and, in one case, by eventually guillotining the debate. Leadership positions within parties or parliament do not guarantee floor access, at least not according to the formal rules of procedure.

With minor exceptions, MPs of the same party do not participate in parliamentary debates on the same issue (Louwerse and Otjes 2015; Mickler 2017, 188). Only the MP who is the spokesperson on that issue speaks for that party. If multiple participants of the same party sign up for a debate, they will have to share the time allotted to their party between them. Exceptions include budget debates, debates on private member legislation, question hour, and explanations of votes. During budget debates, large parties may have multiple spokespersons speaking on different subjects (say primary and higher education). During debates on private member bills, the MPs that submit the bill defend their proposal and a representative of every parliamentary party speaks, including the party or parties that submitted the legislation. During question hour, two MPs of the same party

may ask questions on different subjects. Making an individual contribution, outside of one's specialization, is exceptional. If they do so, MPs use the option of explaining their vote rather than participating in the plenary debate. Between 2008 and 2012, in only fifteen cases did an MP take a minority position in an explanation of their vote (Okhuijsen 2012).

Debates in the Dutch parliament almost always have the same structure. First, the MPs speak. The MP who requested the debate speaks first and then MPs follow in the order they signed up.[3] The government then responds, after which MPs have an opportunity to speak again and table motions. The ministers have the final say and can respond to the motions tabled. Legislative debates might have a third term to resolve issues between the government and parliament. MPs can interrupt their colleagues or the ministers to ask questions if the Speaker allows it. For the sake of time, the Speaker can limit the number of interruptions per debate per MP, but interruptions are frequent. Usually, a set of interruption consists of multiple exchanges. Ministers cannot interrupt MPs.

Parties have internal regulations and procedures for preparing debates. All parties have weekly group meetings where major debates are prepared. The plenary agenda is far too long to allow all items on the agenda to be discussed in detail in the group meetings (Jeekel 1998, 9; Mickler 2017, 201). An MP of a large government party, interviewed by Mickler (2017, 202), estimated that only one in ten debates require discussion in the group meeting. Larger parties have internal committees where debates are discussed before they go to the group meeting (Mickler 2017, 191–193). These are the most critical decision-making venues (Andeweg 2000, 102). In this way, most of the decision-making about positioning occurs outside of the direct oversight of the party leadership. In smaller parties, where MPs often juggle an extensive portfolio that covers multiple committees, the plenary committee meetings also serve to decide which of the possible committee or plenary debates MPs will choose to focus on.

During the internal committee meetings, MPs prepare their contributions in debates and the political initiatives (motions, amendments) they intend to pursue. Other MPs provide feedback about the substance or political strategy (Mickler 2018b, 454). In this way, spokespersons can ensure that what they say reflects the consensus within the party (Mickler 2017, 193, 204; Middel 2003, 45). MPs are relatively free to decide how to deal with this feedback (De Jong 1998, 337). If the discussion comes to a head, the wish of the party leadership or the majority of the PPG can overrule an individual MP (Middel 2003; Van Gesthuizen 2017, 99–101). Strategically operating MPs may try to avoid these formal decision-making bodies

[3] An exception is the major debates following the presentation of a new cabinet or the budget. Then party leaders speak, first the leader of the largest opposition party, then the leader of the larger coalition parties, the rest of the MPs alternating by coalition/opposition and within that alternation ordered by size.

to have more freedom (De Jong 1998, 336; Jeekel 1998, 15). Others may pre-empt conflicts by anticipating opposing ideas and strategies in their proposed contribution (Mickler 2018b, 456–457). There are no detailed minutes of these meetings, granting MPs independence in their interpretation of what has been decided (De Jong 1998, 336–337). However, MPs who continually "lose" debates within their party groups about the issues they are spokesperson on, erode their position (Middel 2003, 45). Smaller parties operate in a modified way: in some, coordination can be even more informal (Mickler 2017, 207–209; Rosenmöller 2003); in others, the PPG meeting is a more critical venue (Van Gesthuizen 2017, 99–100, 113).

Here it is essential to distinguish between speeches and political initiatives, such as tabling motions, amendments, or private member bills. PPG boards, in particular in larger and coalition parties, exert more *ex ante* control over the use of these parliamentary tools compared to parliamentary speech (Andeweg 2000, 99; Berckmoes 2017, 43). Where political initiatives have financial implications in all groups, the financial spokesperson can veto proposals if the party has no plan to pay for them (Mickler 2017, 198).

Before a debate, coalition party spokespersons tend to coordinate with each other and with the government ministers on what they will say and what they will do (Andeweg 2000; Holzacker 2002; Mickler 2017, 213–215). MPs of opposition parties have more freedom to operate (Mickler 2017, 207). MPs have a great deal of autonomy to decide whether or not to participate in a debate in their policy area. MPs from smaller parties, in particular, face this dilemma because for them plenary and committee debates may be planned at the same time. Smaller government parties will try to participate in as many debates as possible to defend their position. Smaller opposition parties have to balance parliamentary debates and participation in events outside of parliament that may boost their visibility.

The direct control that the PPG leadership exerts over the contributions of MPs is limited. There are many debates and these are mostly prepared in a decentralized fashion. The PPG leadership cannot screen all contributions *ex ante*. Instead, if an MP performs poorly, the leadership can exert its oversight *ex post* (Van Gesthuizen 2017, 199).[4] If the party leadership is very unhappy with the performance of an MP, they can reshuffle the portfolios between MPs (Andeweg 2000, 99; Middel 2003, 45). The notion of dissenting MPs speaking out against party line is utterly incompatible with the Dutch system (*pace* Laver this volume; Slapin and Proksch this volume). MPs only speak on issues they are spokespeople on and are expected to voice (and often set) party policy on that issue. Internal differences within the party about the party line are debated behind closed doors in the group

[4] A prominent example of such *ex post* oversight was televised in 2003 in a documentary of the *Tweede Kamer*'s work, where the SP PPG leader critically reviewed the debate contribution of one of his MPs. Roelofs, R. (2003) "Dokwerk: De Tweede Kamer" 8/9/2003.

meeting, not in plenary (Andeweg 2000).[5] Only in rare situations does the party leadership take over a portfolio. Party leaders do not have a (large) substantive portfolio themselves and have the option of "scaling up" a debate by declaring them *Chefsache* (Mickler 2017, 189).

In the Netherlands, the process of delegation that Proksch and Slapin (2015) argue is crucial in understanding parliamentary speech, does not happen per debate, but rather when the policy portfolios are assigned. The party leadership assigns policy portfolios at the beginning of the term.[6] Therefore an MP must get a "good" policy portfolio (Jeekel 1998, 14; Middel 2003, 71; Vos 2011, 39). This determines how often MPs can speak: the spokesperson on education speaks more often than the spokesperson on "freshwater fishery" (Middel 2003, 45). An extensive legislative portfolio is not necessarily attractive because it requires much work, but a portfolio that allows one to speak in parliament on issues that get media attention is attractive (Mickler 2017, 108; Middel 2003, 71). Research about committee assignment by Mickler (2017, 108) indicates the party leaders have to solve an intricate puzzle of ensuring that MPs get portfolios that fit their preferences, their expertise, seniority, and the needs of their party. This is a period of intense negotiation within the PPG (Mickler 2017, 188–189; Middel 2003, 74–76; Rosenmöller 2003, 166; Vos 2011, 40).

All in all, the Dutch system mixes individual access and party-based access. Speaking time is allotted to party groups, but in practice in every debate, all this time is taken up by a single MP for each party. They will coordinate the decision whether to participate, and what to say, with their parliamentary party, but more with their peers than with their superiors. Therefore, but in contrast to Proksch and Slapin's (2015) classification of the Netherlands as "party-list favored, individual access allowed" we argue that the Netherlands operates as a fully party-list based system.

The Determinants of Floor Access in Netherlands

To analyze the actual participation of MPs in legislative debates, we have obtained the full transcripts of parliamentary debates for the Dutch lower house (*Handelingen*) for the period 1998–2017.[7] We only include debates when a non-caretaker cabinet was in office and therefore disregard the debates during cabinet formations and caretaker cabinets. During these periods, parliament meets less

[5] MPs who disagree with the party line may also speak out in the media. Even when an MP deviates from the party line in a vote, most of the time, they do not speak out separately in parliament.

[6] In larger parties, the chairs of internal committees also play an essential role (Middel 2003, 72–73).

[7] Digital versions are available from 1995, so we start our analysis from the next full term. For the pre-1995 era, scanned transcripts are available, but the quality is more mixed and metadata is more limited.

often and the lines between coalition and opposition are blurred as the coalition-in-formation starts operating as a bloc and government parties that are not involved in the formation might operate in a more oppositional way.

Our unit of observation is the MP per parliamentary term. Additional data on parliamentary functions and list position has been obtained from Parliamentary Documentation Centre and the Electoral Council. We look at two dependent variables: the number of debates an MP spoke in (in a parliamentary term) and the average number of words they spoke per day during a parliamentary term. As in all country chapters, we disregard all debate interventions that have less than fifty words and subsequently concatenate all interventions that MPs make in a debate into a single speech. We remove interventions by ministers, the Speaker, and individuals who are not members of parliament. In the definition of a debate, we follow the transcripts: discussions on the same subject that are interrupted by discussions on a different subject or held on different days are considered different debates. We exclude several parliamentary meetings from our analysis because they are not substantive debates: the opening and the closing of parliamentary meetings and the agenda-setting meetings. These are not substantive debates, but they have an organizational nature.

Next, we focus on the individual-level characteristics of MPs who speak in parliamentary debates. First, we examine gender differences (Figure 29.1). In general, the share of debate participation and words spoken by female MPs is roughly equivalent to the share of their membership. There is vast variation in female membership of political parties: Party for the Animals (PvdD) had (almost) 100 percent female membership and therefore also an (almost) 100 percent female debate participation. GroenLinks and D66 had close to equal membership of men and women in their PPG. The debate participation and the share of words spoken are lower than the share of women in the group for both GL and D66, although the decrease is much sharper for D66. Despite forming a majority of the group, women speak less than 40 percent of the words. The PvdA comes fourth, in terms of the share of women MPs, female debate participation and share of words spoken by female MPs. The share of women in most other groups is around 30 percent, with debate participation and spoken words showing similar numbers. In the radical right-wing populist PVV and LPF the share of female MPs is quite low (16 percent and 8 percent). However, for these groups, the share of female debate participation and spoken words is higher than one would expect on these low percentages. The SGP and LN, in contrast, have never had any female members of parliament. For 50Plus its one female MP was in parliament for only a short period, joining the SGP and LN at the tail end of female debate participation.

Figure 29.2 shows the relationship between seniority and how often an MP takes the floor: it shows that as MPs have more experience, they tend to take the floor more. This relationship is stronger for women than for men.

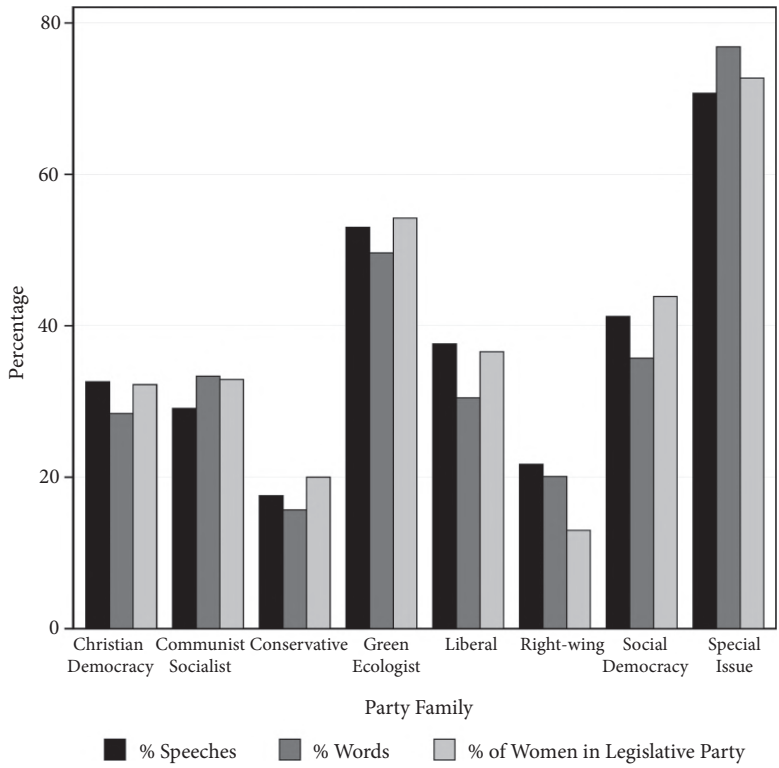

Figure 29.1 Gender numeric representation and speechmaking in the Netherlands

Next, we turn our attention to multivariate analysis. Crucially, this analysis includes dummy variables for each parliamentary term, which is important because of varying term lengths. We analyze the first dependent variable, the number of debates in which an MP spoke during a term, in a negative binomial model as this is overdispersed count data. We use OLS for the number of words. The standard errors are clustered at the MP level. Table 29.2 shows the descriptive statistics of our variables. The regression analyses are presented in Table 29.3 (as models 1 and 3) and in Figures 29.3 and 29.4. We control for government participation, the share of the term an MP has been in parliament, party family, and term.

The multivariate analysis shows that male MPs speak more often and for longer than their female counterparts. Male MPs participate in 15 percent more debates (fifty-eight versus fifty-one) and are predicted to speak fourteen words per day more (sixty-four versus fifty). Our analysis includes several variables that measure the standing of an MP, such as parliamentary functions, so we cannot (fully) attribute the observed gender difference to an under-representation of women in higher positions (Bäck et al. 2014, 506). Therefore, it seems more likely that

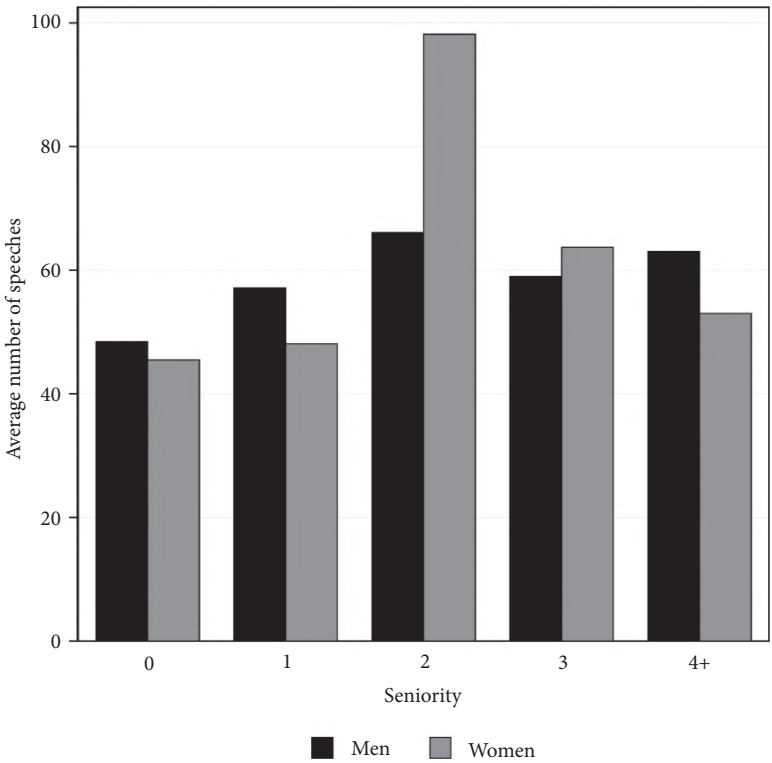

Figure 29.2 Average number of speeches, by seniority and gender in the Netherlands

Table 29.2 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Median	SD.	Min.	Max.
# Speeches	55.35	38.50	57.76	1.00	352.00
# Words per day	59.44	42.42	54.48	0.07	356.74
Gender	0.36	-	-	0.00	1.00
Party size	27.09	29.00	13.48	2.00	45.00
Seniority	1.55	3.16	4.11	0.00	25.47
Age	44.35	43.93	9.01	18.85	71.15
Age-squared	2048.1	1929.6	816.05	355.5	5061.6
Committee chair	0.11	-	-	0.00	1.00
Government	0.52	-	-	0.00	1.00
Legislative party leadership	0.10	-	-	0.00	1.00
Legislative party chair	0.07	-	-	0.00	1.00
Exposure (logged)	–0.20	0	0.46	–2.74	0.00
Electoral list position	0.68	0.67	0.43	0.00	4.43

Table 29.3 Determinants of floor access and words uttered in legislative debates in the Netherlands

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Dependent variable	**Speeches**	**Speeches**	**Words per Day**	**Words per Day**
Model	**NB**	**NB**	**OLS**	**OLS**
Individual characteristics				
Gender	−0.13***	−0.14***	−13.98***	−15.02***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(3.09)	(3.02)
Seniority	0.01**	0.01**	1.60***	1.21***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.42)	(0.45)
Age	0.02	0.02	−0.78	−0.80
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(1.40)	(1.35)
Age squared	−0.00	−0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ln(exposure)	1.25***	1.23***		
	(0.05)	(0.05)		
Relative list position		−0.08*		−17.12***
		(0.05)		(4.96)
Offices				
Committee chair	0.00	−0.00	4.24	2.70
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(4.32)	(4.31)
Legislative party leadership	0.00	−0.02	8.75*	4.23
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(5.14)	(5.25)
Legislative party leader	−0.06	−0.11	34.63***	24.08***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(8.99)	(9.06)
Party characteristics				
Party size	−0.04***	−0.04***	−1.87***	−2.05***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Government	−0.07*	−0.05	−5.42	−1.90
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(3.40)	(3.57)
Party family FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Term FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	942	942	942	942
AIC	8000	7999	9520	9496
R-squared	-	-	0.54	0.55

Notes: [a] Christian-Democrats as reference category; [b] 1998–2002 as reference category; Standard errors clustered at the MP level; ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.

norms, expectations, and socialization play a role: women are socialized to engage less in assertive, controlling, and dominant behavior compared to men. Therefore, women are less voluble (Bäck et al. 2014, 507; Bäck and Debus 2019, 580).

Seniority is related positively to total speech length and the number of debates. For every year MP is in parliament, after the first term, they speak one word more per day and participate in 1 percent more debates. New members of parliament speak about fifty-four words per day compared to ninety-four

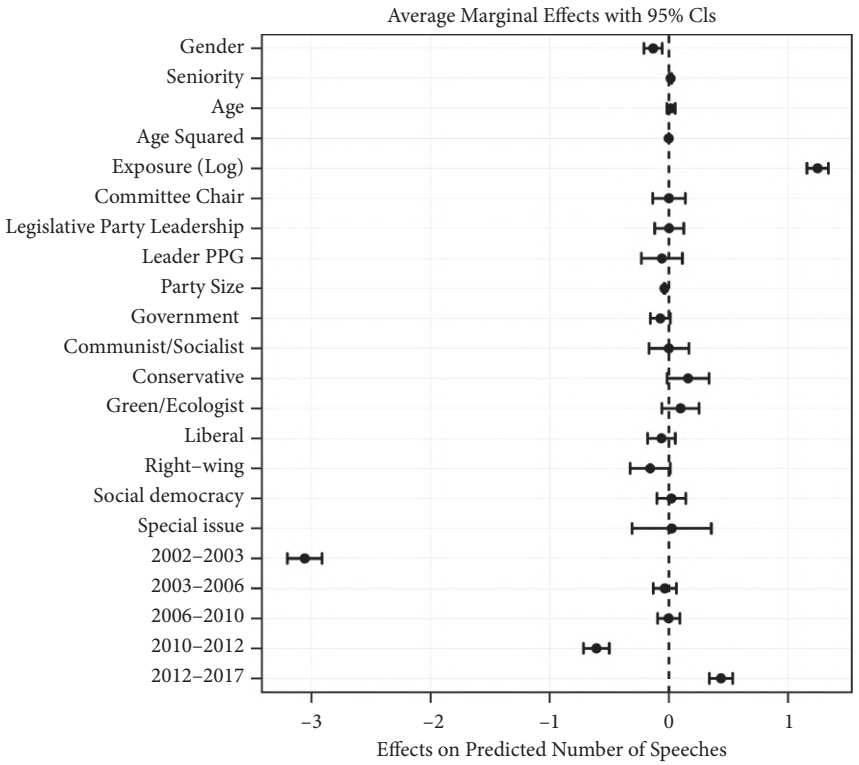

Figure 29.3 Marginal effects on predicted number of speeches in the Netherlands

words for the most experienced parliamentarians. The newest members speak in fifty-three debates while the oldest members participate in seventy-four debates. From Table 29.3, we glean that age has no significant effect, but this is due to collinearity of the two age terms. When the total effect of age is estimated, age can have a significantly negative effect on the number of words spoken and the debates. The youngest MP (aged eighteen) is estimated to speak around eighty words per day. An MP of the average age (aged forty-four) speaks around sixty words per day. The oldest MP speaks only thirty-nine words. We see a similar decline in the number debates: from seventy-four debates to fifty-six debates to thirty-seven debates.

As we saw above, most parliamentary offices in the Netherlands, such as committee chairpersonship and PPG board, are mostly internal functions that do not increase the standing of MPs in parliament. We find that they do not have a significant effect on the number of speeches MPs participate in or the number of words they speak. The only office that affects speeches is the position of PPG leader. This affects the number of words spoken, but not the number of debates

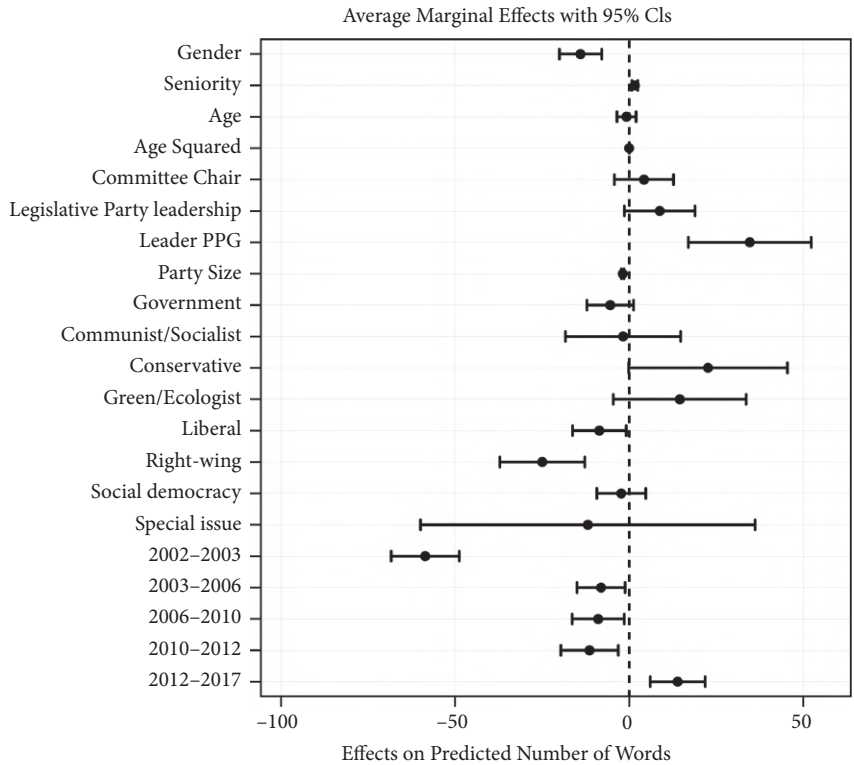

Figure 29.4 Marginal effects on predicted number of words uttered in legislative debates in the Netherlands

they participate in. PPG leaders are thus more likely to participate in long debates and less likely to participate in short debates. The effect is substantive: group leaders speak about ninety-two words compared to fifty-seven words per day for non-leaders. This makes sense, as PPG leaders often speak in the most politically sensitive and more protracted debates, such as the Annual Budget Debate (*Algemene Beschouwingen*).

Party characteristics matter somewhat for how long an MP speaks. By far, the most critical factor is the size of a party. The larger their party, the lower the number of debates that an MP speaks in, and the fewer words they speak in total: for every additional seat their party has, an MP participates in 4 percent fewer debates and speaks two words per day less. This makes sense from the perspective of specialization: in small parties with only a handful of MPs, all MPs have to work hard and speak a lot in parliament to get their party on the record on all significant issues. Nevertheless, in larger parties, many MPs have relatively "niche" portfolios, and subsequently, they cannot take the floor often.

Electoral List Position

Above we looked at MP characteristics included in all country chapters in this volume. Here, we add a country-specific factor, namely the electoral list position. This makes sense in a country with a quasi-open (but effectively quite closed) list system with national lists.[8] The list position of an MP is an indication of their standing within the party: how important are they to the party? In models 2 and 4 (in Table 29.3), we model the effect of relative list position:[9] The lower the relative list position of MPs, the more certain their position is. MPs with lower relative list positions are likely to have a higher standing within the party group. Based on a purely electoral incentives perspective (Mayhew 1974), one would expect MPs with an uncertain list position to speak more often because it would be a way to gain attention among voters or the selectorate. We find the reverse pattern. MPs with lower relative list position speak more words. An MP at the top of the list speaks seventy-one words per day. MPs who have a relative list position of 1 (those who have a list position equal to the number of seats their party has) speak about fifty-four words per day. MPs with lower list positions are more likely to have less standing within their party group. With their weaker position, they are more likely to be assigned a smaller policy portfolio or one that focuses on a less salient issue, which will be associated with shorter and less frequent plenary debates. When we include the list position, the substantive conclusions concerning the other variables discussed above stay the same.

In earlier work, we found that the use of other parliamentary instruments (motions, amendments, questions) was organized along the same lines, and pointed to the importance of committee peers' and party colleagues' level of activity (Louwerse and Otjes 2016). That analysis also found that more specialized MPs (those speaking about a more limited set of issues) showed lower levels of activity. Both our discussion regarding institutions and rules, as well as our quantitative findings, align with this picture. There is a division of labor within parliamentary party groups, with more important MPs (i.e., those high on the electoral list) being able to arguably claim broader and important portfolios, which in turn translates into more speechmaking. Division of labor is a critical way to keep the parliamentary party united (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011), with those higher up the party hierarchy being able to claim the most important portfolios. At the same time, younger MPs, on average, speak a little bit more than their older colleagues, which

[8] Parties have the option of submitting a list per electoral district. In the studied period, parties tend to divide between a uniform start of the list and only alter the candidates at the end of the list. Almost all MPs come from the national start of the list.

[9] Relative list position equals list position across parties: $RLP = \frac{position-1}{partyseats-1}$ So in a 21-seat party, the MP with list rank 1 has a RLP of 0, an MP on list position 11 receives has RLP 0.5, a candidate on position 21 receives RLP 1 and a candidate who was on list position 30 has a RLP of 1.45. The latter is possible if other candidates do not take their seats or resign early (i.e., in the case of ministers leaving parliament).

signals at least an opportunity for those starting their parliamentary career to make their way up the ladder by using legislative instruments, like speaking in the plenary.

Conclusions

Speechmaking in the Dutch parliament is characterized by party dominance as well as relative individual autonomy within an MP's portfolio. This paradoxical characterization can be understood from the perspective of specialization: each MP is assigned a policy portfolio and is expected only to speak on issues related to this portfolio. The decisions about delegation are made at the beginning of the parliamentary term when portfolios are divided. After that, parties do relatively little to control floor access. MPs have considerable leeway within their portfolio. Of course, the party's election manifesto and, for government parties, the coalition agreement offers essential limitations to this freedom. When an MP speaks, they do so on behalf of their party.

This means that the *Tweede Kamer* sits uneasily in the models that Laver (this volume) and Proksch and Slapin (this volume) employ. For instance, Laver's *Claim 3*, that the heterogeneity in the personal views of MPs is more likely to be visible in debates than in voting cannot be observed in the Netherlands, because usually, there is no deviation from the party line in debates. Yet the *Tweede Kamer* cannot be said to be dominated by an "effective cartel of party leaders" (Laver, this volume). The image of party whips "doling out allotted time to MPs wishing to participate in debates" that Proksch and Slapin (this volume) sketch is also at odds with the Dutch case. PPGs do not make strategic decisions about who goes to each debate. The decision of delegation does not occur per debate, but rather at the beginning of the term when the leadership assigns policy portfolios to MPs. The MPs then decide to participate in which debate and what to say there. Their position can perhaps best be described as "bounded autonomy": as long as they work within an accepted range of options, they will have relatively large freedom to determine how to cover their portfolios. Of course, there is coordination between a PPG's MPs in developing the party line, for example, through PPG committees and between peers working on similar issues. In coalition parties, what MPs can say and propose is bounded by the coalition agreement. The party leadership prefers to stay out of these substantive debates. They also lack the necessary information to determine party policy on every issue, relying on their MPs' specialist knowledge. Only on highly visible and salient issues will the party leadership become involved *ex ante*. The PPG leadership is more likely to get involved *ex post*, that is to chastise an who MP has "flown off the rails" internally and, in extreme cases, take their portfolio from them. Like policy-making in the Dutch consensus, democracy has been described as "an orchestra with no conductor" (Gladdish 1991, 144). PPGs operate mainly through coordination,

consensus, and with the leadership allowing MPs to take the lead on their portfolio.Our empirical analysis shows that the number of debates MPs get to speak in and the total length of their contributions is related to their standing within the party: those who were higher on the electoral list get to speak more. Men and PPG leaders also, on average, speak longer in parliamentary debates than women and non-leaders. We find no effect of holding other functions in the PPG or being committee chair. This is not surprising given the fact that the PPG board is mostly an inward-looking body and chairpersonship of parliamentary committees is generally seen as a mostly technical role, awarded to those with parliamentary experience, but not necessarily a firm political profile.

These findings align with the relatively proportional rules for determining speaking times in the Dutch parliament: time is awarded to party groups is regressively proportional to party size, generally somewhat favoring the smaller parties. Combined with specialization, this explains why MPs belonging to smaller parties speak more often.

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