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## **Petitions to the British Parliament: Linguistic Features Related to Toulmin's Argument Model**

**Abstract:** The right to petition the British Parliament is a part of the British democratic traditions. British subjects have constantly signed petitions and then sent them to the Parliament in hope of getting a favourable response. According to the Factsheets of the British Parliament, “[t]he first known petitions to the Lords and to both Houses of Parliament date from the reign of Richard II, but seem to have become widespread from the reign of Henry IV onwards.” (Factsheet P7, p. 5). The present study analyses a sample corpus made up of petitions presented in the House of Commons of the British Parliament and aim at identifying argumentative and linguistic features which may be typical for this kind of petitions. To do this, a general survey of the meaning of the English noun ‘petition’ and the derived verb ‘to petition’ will be carried out first. The argumentative and semantic features identified for them as they emerge from their dictionary definitions will be checked on the corpus of petitions. The results of the analysis are expected to prove their presence in the petitions presented in the British Parliament while differences may also show up. In order to do this, a theoretical framework for the argumentative and for the linguistic approach will be chosen. As will be mentioned further on, this will be Toulmin’s (2003) model of argument (made up of Data, Claim, Warrant, Backing, Qualifiers and Rebuttal). As for the linguistic perspective, the Speech Act theory developed by Searle (1969) and Austin (1975), together with the description of English verbs used in various speech acts, outlined by Kreidler (1998), will be used to identify the speech acts and predicates present in the petitions.

**Keywords:** petition, British Parliament, House of Commons, argumentation, Toulmin, linguistics.