This study examines UK Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQT) in the context of parliamentary discourse. The paper adopts a multilevel analysis, using theories of speech act (Austin 1962; Searle 1976), face (Goffman 2006 [1967]), politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987) and critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 1993), to examine the nature of questions posed by parliamentarians during the PMQT. The data for the study were Hansards of 18 sessions (2005-2012) of PMQT (including six each from Prime Ministers Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron) taken from the House of Commons’ website. From a qualitative-interpretive analysis (Trappes-Lomax 2004) of 198 questions culled from the data by means of WordSmith Tools (Version 6), it is observed that, during the question time, questions posed by the MPs are hardly genuine questions. In most cases, the MPs do not only give directives (request, suggestion/advice), criticise, impute wrongdoings, praise, applaud and make assertions through a manipulation of certain politeness strategies, but also take ideological and confrontational stances. As a result of this, ‘questions’ hardly get answered by the Prime Ministers. The study has implications for both parliamentary discourse in particular and discourse analysis in general. At the theoretical level, the study adds to the claim that a multilevel analysis of discourse would provide substantial insights into the nature of discourse and discourse studies (van Dijk 2011, 2001; Paltridge 2005; Kitzinger 2000), since these theories are interwoven and operate together at different levels.

Keywords: parliamentary discourse, multilevel analysis, question time.