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CHAPTER 3

The political interview as an argumentative activity type

3.1 Argumentation in the political interview

The goal of this chapter is to provide an argumentative characterization of the activity type of a political interview. The intended characterization will indicate the conventions of a political interview creating institutional preconditions for argumentation. As van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005) observe, knowledge of such preconditions is vital for an empirically adequate account of argumentative exchanges. In principle, these preconditions shape the argumentation by creating constraints for the arguers' strategic maneuvering, but they can also create special opportunities for arguing. For example, in the activity type of a Dutch criminal trial certain strategic possibilities are closed off for the prosecution as a consequence of the convention of not allowing arguments from analogy. At the same time, other possibilities are opened up for the defense (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009).

The aim of this study, to provide a realistic analysis and evaluation of the politician's responses to an accusation of inconsistency, can only be realized by taking into account exactly how the macro-context of a political interview affects the participants' strategic maneuvering. At all times, the arguers maneuver strategically by being out to balance reasonableness with effectiveness, but their possibilities for maneuvering are determined to a great extent by the preconditions prevailing in the activity type. Van

Eemeren and Houtlosser (2003) explain that the concern for being reasonable can be seen as a dialectical aim and the concern for being effective as a rhetorical aim. At every stage of a critical discussion, the dialectical aim is pursued by arguers in an attempt at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. The rhetorical aim, which is the counterpart of the dialectical aim, is pursued at every stage in attempting to resolve the difference of opinion in their favor. In the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, for example, the arguers' dialectical aim is to define the difference of opinion clearly. The rhetorical aim is do so in their own favor by discussing issues they find easiest to defend. Whether they are arguing in a political interview, a parliamentary debate, an adjudication encounter or any other communicative activity type, arguers always attempt to maintain reasonableness and to have their standpoints accepted at the same time. This combined attempt is in each case shaped differently depending on the institutional aim and the conventions of the activity type concerned. For instance, the arguers' strategic maneuvering in adjudication is carried out to advance the realization of the institutional aim of convincing a judge to resolve a dispute in their favor. The maneuvering is preconditioned by the largely explicit codified rules and established concessions of the activity type concerned (van Eemeren 2010: 151).

In this study, I view a political interview as an activity type that is aimed at convincing the direct interlocutor but primarily the audience at home. Even though a political interview is designed in such a way that informing the public is one of the institutional concerns, it is essentially an activity type in which an accountability procedure is carried out. The political interview will be viewed as a specimen of a predominantly argumentative activity type in the political domain implementing the genre of deliberation, the institutional point[24] of which is to preserve a democratic political culture (van Eemeren 2010: 140).[25] To realize this point, the interviewer acts as the representative of the

[24] Van Eemeren (2010: 138-151) points out that an understanding of activity types from an argumentative perspective is possible if one takes into account a few important factors that affect the argumentative exchanges. One of these factors is the *domain* of discourse to which the activity belongs. These domains are broad spheres of communicative practice defined by the *institutional point* which the activities within the domain aim to realize in society. Van Eemeren distinguishes, without aiming to be exhaustive, various domains such as the legal, political, diplomatic, medical and scholarly domains. The general institutional point, for instance, of activity types in the political domain is to preserve a democratic political culture. In realizing the institutional point of each domain, certain *genres* of communication are implemented that vary from adjudication and deliberation to mediation, negotiation, consultation and others. Furthermore, other factors that affect the argumentation are the *conventions* specific to every activity type, some of which are explicitly stated (especially in highly institutionalized contexts) and others are unwritten. These conventions are functional in achieving the *institutional goal* that is conventionally assigned to every activity type. For instance, the institutional goal of Question Time in British House of Commons is to hold the government to account concerning its general performance (Mohammed 2009).

[25] This idea resembles Clayman and Heritage's remark that in a political interview "journalists perform certain core democratic functions: soliciting statements of official policy, holding officials accountable for their actions, and managing the parameters of public debate, all this under the immediate scrutiny of the citizenry" (2002: 2).

electorate and the mass media. His main aim is not simply to obtain and impart information to the public on matters of general interest, but more importantly, to ask the politician to account for his words and actions. The politician is a political representative who not only gives information, but also clarifies and justifies his views by providing the expected account of his words and actions. [26]

Viewing a political interview as predominantly argumentative calls for a characterization of this activity type from an argumentative perspective. The argumentative characterization of a political interview will be carried out by identifying the institutional conventions which arguers are expected, or even obliged, to follow in the activity type concerned. Just like other activity types, which are "cultural artifacts that can be identified on the basis of careful empirical observation of argumentative practice" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005: 76), the political interview is a conventionalized practice that can be examined by observing its distinctive characteristics.

Unlike the theoretical construct of the ideal model of a critical discussion, the political interview has an empirical status and manifests itself in reality. The model of a critical discussion is not a description of some actual argumentative discussion. It constitutes a reasonable dialectical representation of what argumentative discourse would be like if it were to be aimed exclusively at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits.[27] The model of critical discussion can be instrumental for approaching methodically the actual context of the communicative activity of a political interview from an argumentative perspective. Starting from the four stages of a critical discussion, four counterparts can be distinguished in a political interview: (a) the initial situation of the argumentative exchanges, corresponding to the confrontation stage of a critical discussion (3.2), (b) the procedural and material starting points of the argumentative exchanges, corresponding to the starting points established in the opening stage of a critical discussion (3.3), (c) the arguers' argumentative means and the advancement of criticisms, corresponding to the means available in the argumentation stage (3.4) and (d) the possible outcome of the discussion, corresponding to the concluding stage of a critical discussion

[26] Viewing a political interview as a predominantly argumentative activity type in which an accountability procedure is carried out differs from the view of other scholars. Political interviews have been the subject of research from different viewpoints varying from conversation analysis (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991, Greatbatch 1986, 1988, 1992, Clayman, 1991, 1992, Clayman and Heritage 2002) and media studies (Scannell 1991, 1998) to socio-pragmatics (Blum-Kulka 1983, Fetzer 2000, Jucker 1986, Harris 1986, Johansson 2005, Lauerbach 2004, Weizman 2008) and social psychology (Bull and Mayer 1993, Bull and Fetzer 2006, Bull 2008). In these approaches, political interviews are seen as being aimed at making known public policies, informing the public on matters of general interest or simply familiarizing the public with the politician.

[27] Although it is not a description of reality, ordinary arguers can, and do, recognize the norms embodied in the ideal model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels 2009).

(3.5).[28] The model of critical discussion is thus a heuristic for characterizing the activity type argumentatively, without being an activity type itself.[29] The study of the specificities of the actual argumentative practice is carried out against the background of the model of critical discussion which spells out the argumentative interests of the different stages: defining the difference of opinion clearly (in the confrontation stage), establishing unambiguously the starting points for the discussion (in the opening stage), exchanging arguments and criticisms (in the argumentation stage) and deciding about the outcome of the discussion (in the concluding stage).

In describing the argumentative features of a political interview I will take into account two kinds of conventions:[30] (a) explicit procedural conventions established by institutions that have the power to regulate broadcasting activities (for example, The Office of Communication in Britain), and (b) implicit conventions agreed upon by the participants when they enter this activity type (for example, it is implicitly agreed that the interviewer should at all times question the politician and the latter should answer).[31] It goes without saying that these conventions, in particular the explicit procedural conventions, vary from country to country. However, Clayman and Heritage (2002: 6) remark that, though they are subject to cross-cultural variation and historical change, the conventions of a political

[28] Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005) and van Eemeren (2010) provide an argumentative characterization of some genres of communicative activity, such as adjudication, deliberation, mediation and negotiation. They describe the characteristic conventions which arguers follow in order to reach the aim of the genre concerned. For example, in the case of adjudication, the institutional aim is to convince a judge to resolve a dispute in their favor. The initial situation of adjudication is characterized by the existence of a dispute between two parties in the presence of a third party with jurisdiction to decide (usually a judge). The starting points are largely explicit codified rules and explicitly established concessions. The argumentation of the parties is based on the interpretation of concessions in terms of facts and evidence. The outcome consists in the settlement of the dispute by the third party and no possible return to the initial situation.

[29] Taking the ideal model of critical discussion as a point of departure for the intended characterization does not mean that resolving a difference of opinion on the merits is assigned to the activity type of a political interview. This dialectical goal can be ascribed analytically to the arguers, in the same way in which the rhetorical goal of being effective is assigned. An adequate analysis of argumentative discourse will take into account these two kinds of goals, but, to be realistic, it will consider also the institutional goal. The latter creates context-specific restrictions and opportunities for balancing the realization in practice of the dialectical and the rhetorical goals.

[30] The concept of conventionality is inspired by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 59) who, relying on Lewis (1977), provide a definition of a language usage convention. In their view, three conditions need to be fulfilled by a convention. The first one is factual and stipulates that "the language of the members of the community displays a certain regularity in strictly delineated cases." The second condition is social and requires that "members of the community expect these regularities to occur in those cases." The third condition is normative and imposes that "the members of the community prefer the regularity to occur in those cases because it solves a problem of communication and interaction."

[31] Borrowing a distinction made by van Eemeren (2010: footnote 48) concerning institutional preconditions, a difference can be made between *primary* conventions, which are formally enforced and often constitute procedural rules and *secondary* conventions, which are usually informal and are often substantial. In the European Parliament there are, for instance, the primary conventions constituted by the rules of order and secondary conventions, such as that the parliamentarians need to serve the European interest and at the same time the interest of their home countries (van Eemeren and Garssen 2010).

interview are remarkably similar everywhere. Examining the differences and similarities between the conventions of various countries, it becomes clear that there is a great number of commonalities in the general standards which participants in a political interview are expected to follow. In this study, in which all cases come from BBC interviews, references to the conventions of a political interview concern in the first place Great Britain.

3.2 The initial situation[32]

The initial situation in a political interview starts from a difference of opinion between an interviewer and a politician. The discussion, taking place as a question-answer exchange, concerns words or actions for which the politician can be held to account in public.[33] The topics of discussion in such exchanges, chosen solely by the interviewer, are debatable matters of 'newsworthy character' and political controversy (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 61). The meaning of "matters of political […] controversy and matters relating to current public policy" is explained in *The Broadcasting Code*, issued by the Office of Communication,[34] in Section Five, regarding Due Impartiality and Due Accuracy and Undue Prominence of Views and Opinions:

> Matters of political […] controversy are political […] issues on which politicians […] and/or media are in debate. Matters relating to current public policy need not be the subject of debate but relate to a policy under discussion or already decided by a local, regional or national government or by bodies mandated by those public bodies to make policy on their behalf, for example non-governmental organizations, relevant European institutions, etc. (*Section 5.3*)

[32] The initial situation of the argumentative activity type of a political interview is not the same as the 'opening' of a political interview, described in purely structural terms (Clayman and Heritage 2002). The opening is described as comprising a *headline* – through which the topic of the discussion is introduced – a *background* – which gives details about the context – and a *lead-in* – where the politician is introduced to the public. Unlike the opening, the initial situation, corresponding to the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, is described from a functional argumentative perspective. A characterization of the initial situation makes clear how the difference of opinion is defined.

[33] Being held to account in public does not mean only that the issues can be discussed in public. As Mulgan points out, "the concept of account-*ability* includes an implication of potentiality, literally an ability to be called to account" (2000: 56).

[34] The current Broadcasting Code was issued in October 2008 by the Office of Communication and contains a set of principles, meanings and rules. It also contains in Section Seven (Fairness) and Section Eight (Privacy) two sets of practices to be followed by broadcasters in the United Kingdom. As specified in the Code (2008: 5), "the principles are there to help readers understand the standard objectives and to apply the rules. Broadcasters must ensure that they comply with the rules as set out in the Code. The meanings help explain what the Office of Communication intends by some of the words and phrases used in the Code."

In addition, the Broadcasting Code distinguishes the category of matters of major political controversy and major matters relating to public policy, which it describes in the following way:

> These will vary according to events but are generally matters of political […] controversy or matters of current public policy which are of national, and often international, importance, or are of similar significance within a smaller broadcast area. (*Section 5.11*)

The controversial matters of political or major political importance are the subject of all argumentative exchanges in a political interview. Similar to other activity types in the political domain in which an accountability procedure is carried out (such as a parliamentary debate in which a government renders account to an elected parliament), matters of political importance are associated with, though not limited to, policy making, procedural correctness, ethical standards, the use of public money and the observance of legal rules. Some examples of controversial matters that are at the centre of a discussion in a political interview have been given in Chapter 1: the issue of agency workers (about which John Hutton is questioned), the efficiency of the service a civil servant manages (in the exchange between Jon Sopel and Sir Gus) and the use of nuclear energy (in the interview with Alan Duncan). With regard to the issues that are discussed, the politician is in favor of a positive evaluation of his words or actions, while the interviewer raises doubts concerning this evaluation and, more often than not, goes further than expressing mere doubt by suggesting a negative evaluation of the politician's words or actions. For instance, in the discussion between Jon Sopel and Sir Gus, Sir Gus claims that he manages the Civil Service well, while Sopel doubts his claimed efficiency. To support his criticism, Sopel refers to Sir Gus's frequent renaming of departments, characteristic of his recent activity.

At all times, the discussion takes place between the interviewer and the politician, but as in most activity types making use of the genre of deliberation, the audience at home is the primary addressee.[35] Although the direct addressee is the immediate interlocutor, in a political interview the participants always try to convince the listening, reading or television-watching audience. The politician's words and actions are scrutinized by the interviewer in order to respond to the audience's presumed interest in the politician's performance and the latter is primarily concerned with conveying statements to the public.

[35] Van Eemeren (2010: 109) makes a distinction between the *primary* audience, i.e. the audience which the arguer considers the most important to reach, and the *secondary* audience, the persons instrumental in reaching the primary audience.

The conventions of a political interview precondition not only the issues for discussion, but also the type of difference of opinion. In the simplest case, the politician puts forward a standpoint and the interviewer casts doubt on it, so that from a pragma-dialectical viewpoint, a non-mixed difference of opinion is at issue. In the argumentative exchanges taking place in a political interview, the interviewer questions and sometimes criticizes the politician's words or actions. He asks the politician to advance a standpoint or doubts the acceptability of a standpoint already advanced. The politician is institutionally obliged to respond to criticism by answering for the words and actions for which he is held accountable. In his answers, the politician defends himself and the party he represents; consequently, his answers can usually be interpreted as conveying a commitment to a standpoint that can be reconstructed as *My words and/or actions are adequate.*[36] In this standpoint, it is implied that the words and actions concern not only the politician's own performance, but also that of the party which he represents.

The following example, selected from an interview broadcast on February 10, 2008 on the *Politics Show* illustrates a non-mixed discussion between Jon Sopel and Nick Clegg, at the time leader of the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom:

> *Jon Sopel*:
> What about faith schools?
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> I think faith schools, personally, what I would like to see is a much greater pressure on faith schools to act as agents for integration rather than segregation. I think it is crucial (interjection)
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> You're hesitating on that answer.

In this fragment, Sopel brings up a controversial issue of 'newsworthy character' in Britain, namely faith schools. Clegg is asked to express his view on the issue selected for discussion, which is what he does in his reply in the fragment just quoted: he is of the opinion that more pressure should be put on faith schools to act as integration agents. In response to Clegg's answer, the interviewer doubts whether the politician's words convey indeed Clegg's belief, by pointing at some hesitance in his reply.

Because of his institutional obligation to question the politician's words and actions, the interviewer commonly goes beyond mere doubt. In order to hold the politician thoroughly to account, the interviewer challenges him to defend his standpoints against criticisms advanced by means of an opposite standpoint. The interviewer not only raises doubt concerning the politician's positive evaluation of his words or actions, but he expresses a negative evaluation by advancing, on behalf of the audience at home, an opposite standpoint that can be reconstructed as *The politician's words and/or actions are*

[36] The words and actions are used here in a general sense to refer also to plans, policies and decisions.

not adequate. In pragma-dialectics, such a difference of opinion in which two opposite standpoints are advanced and upheld constitutes a mixed discussion.

In the literature dealing with political interviews it is often claimed that what pragma-dialectics calls a mixed difference of opinion cannot arise in a political interview. The prevailing view is that the interviewer is institutionally obliged to be neutral and impartial in the sense that he "cannot express opinions, or argue with, debate, or criticize the interviewees' positions" (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 98). Similar to many other authors, Clayman and Heritage stipulate that "the interviewers should (i) avoid the assertion of opinions on their own behalf and (ii) refrain from direct or overt affiliation with (or disaffiliation from) the expressed statements of the interviewees" (2002: 126). The main reasons behind this belief are related to the question-answer framework and the formal requirement of neutrality imposed on the interviewers by the rules of procedure enforced by the broadcasting institutions.

In her investigation of the interviewer's questions, however, Harris (1986) shows that, in contrast to the generally held view, each kind of question in a political interview is "used to express opinions, convey new information, put forward ideas, commit the questioner to a particular point of view on an issue" (1986: 60). In her corpus research on political interviews, Harris convincingly shows that the restriction to questions is not enough reason to believe that opinions cannot be imparted by the interviewer. She demonstrates, for example, that wh-questions in a political interview encode usually presuppositions that convey a negative evaluation of the politician's words or actions. In one of her examples, Harris (1986: 62) shows that the interviewer's remark *Prime Minister – how did the Government get itself so out of touch with its own supporters* contains the presupposition that the government has got out of touch with its own supporters somehow, in which "out of touch" marks a negative evaluation.

A close look at the codified rules in Great Britain reinforces the view that interviewers are allowed to make their views known (Andone 2009b: 47). Section Five of the Broadcasting Code makes clear that 'impartiality' is to be interpreted as part of the expression 'due impartiality,' in which the word 'due' is an important qualification of impartiality. Section 5.9 stipulates that the word 'impartiality' refers to "not favoring one side over another" and 'due' means "adequate to the subject and nature of the programme." The expression 'due impartiality' refers to allowing for a variety of views to be made known without giving more prominence to one view over another, that is to say, maintaining a balance in the representation of views. [37] Contrary to the common opinion that an interviewer should not express his own views, Section 5.9 of The Broadcasting

[37] Sections 6.3 and 6.4 of the Broadcasting Code illustrate how the principle of due impartiality should be maintained during election period, when 'appropriate coverage' should be given to all parties to secure a balance of views.

Code specifies that "presenters and reporters […], and chairs of discussion programmes may express their own views on matters of political […] controversy or matters relating to current public policy".[38]

In the following fragment selected from an interview with Michael Wills on the *Politics Show* on February 10, 2008, Jon Sopel advances explicitly a standpoint that gives an evaluation of Wills' words. At the time, Wills was a Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice. In this fragment, the issue concerns a statement of Britishness:

> *Jon Sopel*:
> And what are we going to do with this statement once we've got it.
>
> *Michael Wills*:
> Well, that's one of the questions that the summit will decide upon. They will be looking at four things: firstly, should there be such a statement and we, the government believe that there should be. But it's for them to decide finally. If there should be, what it should be, how it should be expressed and then very importantly, what it should be used for.
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> We could have it printed on the back of our ID cards.
>
> *Michael Wills*:
> Well, as I say, the Summit is going to decide on all these important questions and I'd be very interested to see what they do in fact decide.
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> It sounds a bit amorphous if you don't mind my saying, just listening to kind of, it's up to the Citizen's Summit whether they have it, what it has, what we do with it.
>
> *Michael Wills*:
> No, I don't think there's anything amorphous about this.

Asked by Sopel about the usefulness of a statement of Britishness, Wills explains that the Citizen's Summit will decide on that. This answer is met with Sopel's criticism when he ironically points out that the statement could be printed on the back of the ID cards. In reply to Wills's reiteration that the Summit will decide, Sopel advances a view according to which it is quite unclear what the function of the statement will be. Wills responds to this by advancing the opposite standpoint.

The mixed difference of opinion that arises in a political interview can be moreover explained by the interviewer's role as a critic who plays the devil's advocate. More often than not, the interviewer expresses a view that is unpopular, not necessarily true or counterintuitive just to prompt the interviewee to respond (Bell and van Leeuwen 1994). Due to his challenging role, the interviewer is expected at least to doubt the politician's

[38] Nevertheless, Rule 5.9 makes clear that "presenters must not use the advantage of regular appearances to promote their views in a way that compromises the requirement of due impartiality." In addition, Section 5.10 conditions the expression of a personal view to be "clearly signaled to the audience at the outset."

standpoint that *The politician's words and/or actions are adequate* and, if he thinks that this is in the public interest, to advance and uphold his own contrary standpoint. Such is the case in the following exchange which took place on February 10, 2008 between Jon Sopel and Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, on the issue of tax burden in Britain:

> *Jon Sopel*:
> […] Let's concentrate on one of those things; they're looking for you to be bold and we heard from Mark Littlewood saying, you should simply come out and say, 'the tax burden is too high.' Do you think it is too high.
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> I've said, and I'll say it again, that the tax burden should not rise, but I'm not advocating the tax burden should be lowered from where it is at the moment for the simple reason that there are a number of priorities, social priorities, education, health, improving our infrastructure - transport and so on, which I just don't think would necessarily be possible by significantly reducing the tax burden as a whole. But can I just say (interjection)
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> So the government has got it absolutely right.
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> No, no, no, this is the key thing. The really interesting debate about tax is not where the overall burden is; I am not advocating any further increase in the overall tax burden. The really interesting debate however is what you do within that ceiling. Where does the tax burden rest most heavily, where does it rest most lightly. So, for instance, I want to see a radical cut in income tax for low and middle income earners of 4p in the pound income tax cut. I want to see more people pay a bit more for activities: driving polluting cars, which are bad for the environment. It's how you re-distribute the tax burden within that ceiling that I think is where the debate is now.
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> But you would keep government spending taxes exactly as is.
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> No. I would want to actually quite, quite the reverse, I'd want to dramatically change the list of spending priorities.
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> No, no, I put the total.
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> No. No, well the, the total, what I'm trying to say to you is that I think the key thing is how do you re-order the priorities within the total amounts available at the moment. I for instance have set out an ambition that I want to see the party, the Liberal Democrats, reallocate about twenty billion pounds worth of spending, government spending, on to key priorities. So not wasted on ID cards, but spend it on the poorest children. Not waste it on the Euro Fighter, defence project, but spend it on better health services. That is the debate which I think we're going to have between now and the next General Election.
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> But why not position yourself as the tax cutting party. The Tories seem, if you read their pronouncements, a bit too timid to do that at the moment. You could occupy that ground.
>
> *Nick Clegg*:
> I don't think there's any point occupying ground for the sake of it. You've got to do it credibly. If I could meet, if the Liberal Democrats could meet our public policy priorities

> with less money, with less, you know with a much significant - lower level of overall taxation, of course I'd be prepared to do that. Who knows, we might get there by the next General Election. My estimate though, is that the real difficult choices, and these are going to be tough choices, are scrapping public spending where it's not being well spent at the moment and spending it better in other areas.

In this question-answer exchange, Sopel plays the role of the devil's advocate by maintaining a critical attitude towards Clegg's standpoints on the issue of tax burden. As is usually the case in a political interview, Sopel's first question is not just a demand for information, but creates the expectation that the politician should express his view on the matter, which is what he does: *the tax burden should not rise, nor should it be lowered*. In reply to this standpoint, Sopel makes the remark that Clegg agrees completely with the government's present tax policies. As can be expected, Clegg does not accept Sopel's remark and advances a standpoint in which doubt is implied: *No, no, this is the key thing. I am not advocating any further increase in the overall tax burden.* Sopel challenges Clegg once more to accept a position which he would rather not take when he says that *you would keep the government spending as is.* In this way, Sopel wants to make Clegg endorse a position that the total amount of tax money spent by the government would remain the same. As Clegg replies, that is not what he wants to do, but rather change the priorities: who pays taxes, how much tax and what happens with the money. Sopel makes a new proposal to the leader of the Liberal Democrats to position themselves as the tax cutting party, suggesting that such a bold decision would be adequate at the moment, especially that the Tories do not dare to do that: *The Tories seem, if you read their pronouncements, a bit too timid to do that at the moment. You could occupy that ground*. Clegg rejects this proposal as there is no point occupying that ground just for the sake of it. Accepting Sopel's proposal would lead to the party losing credibility in the eyes of the audience. Public policy priorities could not be met, should the proposal be put in practice.

3.3 Starting points

The argumentative exchanges in a political interview take place in accordance with a set of procedural and material starting points which the participants accept upon entering the activity type concerned. In this institutionalized argumentative practice, the rights and obligations of the discussants are regulated by explicit and implicit conventions. In Great Britain, the broadcasting activity of the BBC is regulated by *The Broadcasting Code*

already mentioned. It is also subject to the *Agreement*[39] and the *Royal Charter*[40] in accordance with which broadcasters function, and to the editorial guidelines that regulate the content of programmes on politics and public policy.[41]

In close connection with the topics at the centre of the discussion in a political interview, Section 5 of The Broadcasting Code and Section 44 of the Agreement precondition the content of the matters to those that are not an infringement of privacy, unless warranted. The term 'warranted' is defined in the following way:

> It means that where broadcasters wish to justify an infringement of privacy as warranted, they should be able to demonstrate why in particular circumstances of the case, it is warranted. If the reason is that it is in the public interest, then the broadcaster should be able to demonstrate that the public interest outweighs the right to privacy. Examples of public interest would include revealing or detecting crime, protecting public health or safety, exposing misleading claims made by individuals or organizations or disclosing incompetence that affects the public. (*Rule 8.1*)

Should the public interest not outweigh the right to privacy, as required by the above rule, the politician may protect confidential information by refusing to express an opinion because it is an infringement of privacy. Such a refusal may also be expressed when the matters discussed do not fall under the politician's responsibilities, constitute *sub judice* matters or simply cannot be disclosed to the public. In the discussion between Jon Sopel and Sir Gus O'Donnell on July 12, 2009, Sir Gus refuses to make known information about the discussions held between the Civil Service, which he represents, and the Opposition, about some databases. In his reply to the interviewer's question, he says:

> *Sir Gus:*
> […] I am going to keep private [about the databases]. I do not tell the Prime Minister what's going on so I'm afraid, John, I'm not going to tell you either.[…] That's what we're doing but I make them absolutely private and I never feed back from those discussions to the Prime Minister. So I'm not going to feed back to anybody else either.

[39] The full title is "An Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation." The document currently in force dates from July, 2006 and covers the BBC's regulatory obligations. It is accompanied by an Amendment dated December 4, 2003.

[40] The full title of the current Royal Charter is "the Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation." It dates from September 19, 2006.

[41] Such programmes concern political broadcasts, ministerial broadcasts, reports on national and international elections, reports on opinion polls, online voting, surveys, broadcasting of Parliament. The editorial guidelines of these programmes are outlined under the strict advice of the Chief Adviser Politics.

The content of questions is preconditioned further by The Royal Charter which stipulates in Article 23, paragraph (c) that the interviewer should formulate questions that "carefully and appropriately assess the views of licence fee payers."[42] Likewise, editorial guidelines prescribe that in a political interview "[…] arrangements must not prevent the programme asking questions that our audiences would reasonably expect to hear." The requirements set by these documents explain why the interviewer plays the role of the devil's advocate. They are also indicative of the fact that the question-answer procedure gains institutional significance in a political interview only if the participants are oriented towards an audience. There is no point in trying to hold the politician to account through an argumentative exchange if there is no mutual commitment to do so for the benefit of the audience.

The discussion format in a political interview is institutionally conventionalized as a question-answer exchange in which the interviewer is expected to ask questions and the politician is expected to give answers, albeit that the latter can also ask rhetorical questions. In this activity type, the interviewer's questions are not limited to interrogatives, but are often accompanied by assertions.[43] Emphasizing that a question-answer exchange is always the format in which a political interview is carried out, Heritage and Greatbatch (1991: 103) describe this kind of turn-taking as a norm, the violation of which is not considered acceptable. That this is the case becomes clear when the politician departs from the expected format: the interviewer may then initiate a return to the opening stage in which he points out a reversal of roles (Andone 2010: 78). In the following exchange broadcast on October 19, 2008, between Jon Sopel and the British MP Phil Woolas, the interviewer draws on this convention to point out that the politician is trying to ask questions instead of answering them:

> *Jon Sopel*:
> So, hang on, so there will be a cap or there won't be a cap.
>
> *Phil Woolas*:
> Well you tell me what you mean by a cap Jon and I'll tell you the answer to the question, and this has be-devilled this debate. We recognize of course that we (interjection)
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> Well, sorry, let me answer your question, cos you've been kind enough to start interviewing me. A number of people in this country.

[42] According to Article 57 of the Royal Charter, a licence fee payer "is not to be taken literally but includes […] any […] person in the UK who watches, listens to or uses any BBC service, or may do so or wish to do so in the future."

[43] Heritage and Roth (1995) use the term 'questioning' in order to make clear that the interviewer does not put forward strictly interrogatives, but also other kinds of utterances which, even if they are not in question form, function as questions to which an answer is expected.

> *Phil Woolas*:
> The population as a whole? Including temporary visitors?
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> Yeah.
>
> *Phil Woolas*:
> Students, tourists?
>
> *Jon Sopel*:
> Well, I mean you know – okay. Let's go back to me interviewing you.

Asked whether there will be a limit on the number of immigrant workers in Britain, Woolas is trying to avoid a clear answer by pretending that he does not understand the term 'cap' used by Sopel. After Sopel ironically accepts to answer Woolas' question (*let me answer your question, cos you've been kind enough to start interviewing me*), the politician continues the discussion by asking more questions. Because such a way of proceeding goes against the conventional format, Sopel explicitly requires a return to the institutionally pre-allocated situation (*let's go back to me interviewing you*) in which the interviewer should ask questions and the politician should answer them.

The question-answer format preconditions the assignment of the discussion roles and the division of the burden of proof. Conventionally, in a non-mixed difference of opinion, the politician, who is expected to clarify and defend his views, acts as protagonist of the standpoint that *My words and/or actions are adequate*. As an accountable agent who has to clarify and justify his performance, the politician should defend not only prior views and actions, but also his future policies and plans. As Schedler explains, accountable agents "have to stand up not only for what they have done (retrospective or ex post accountability) but also for what they plan to do (prospective or ex ante accountability) (1999: 27).[44] Because the interviewer is institutionally expected to question and criticize the politician, he acts as the antagonist who casts doubt on the acceptability of the politician's standpoint.[45] As an accounting agent, he is in essence interested in challenging the politician to justify his views and actions. The fact that a political interview constitutes a context in which a process of *political* accountability takes place in *public* obliges the interviewer to act as a critic. Holders of political authority, such as government

[44] Curtin and Nollkaemper point out that accountability is traditionally understood as "a retrospective process that involves giving an account of prior conduct. However, this view of accountability is being increasingly challenged by approaches that argue for a more participative and ongoing process of accountability" (2005: 8). More attention is being paid, especially when the purpose of holding to account is to prevent certain things from happening, to connecting past and future conduct. Curtin (2007: 525) refers also to dumque accountability, which involves holding an agent to account during the process of taking a decision or action.

[45] In a mixed difference of opinion, the discussants obviously play the role of protagonists of their own standpoints and antagonists of the standpoints of the other.

representatives, render an account of their performance not so much to the interviewer, but essentially to the public.[46] In this process, the interviewer acts as an intermediary between the public and the holders of public office. His main role is to secure answers from the politicians for their performance that go beyond purely providing information. Therefore, the interviewer is expected to put the politician's views to critical testing by criticizing them.

The division of the discussion roles has direct consequences for the division of the burden of proof. As the politician has to give an account of his words and actions, he is obliged to argue for his standpoint, once challenged to do so by the interviewer. When giving an account is avoided, the interviewer initiates more often than not a sub-discussion in which he criticizes the politician for his attempt to avoid providing the expected justification by explicitly demanding and re-demanding the politician to answer.[47]

One famous example of such questioning is the 1997 interview between Jeremy Paxman and Michael Howard on the BBC's *Newsnight* program. At the time of the interview, Howard, formerly a Home Secretary under John Major, was a challenger of the leadership of the Conservative Party. As Home Secretary, he played a contentious role regarding the British prison system. Two years before, after a prison escape, Howard appeared before the House of Commons and admitted setting policy for the prison service, yet he denied any involvement in operational matters. Afterwards, many official sources contradicted his denial. In the interview, Paxman referred to an event bearing directly on Howard's claim to have had no operational role in the prison service: the firing of a prison official. Asked whether he had threatened to overrule the Director General of Prisons by instructing him to fire the official, Howard did not answer clearly. Paxman asked the same question twelve times and made it in this way very clear that Howard's prior claim to having been operationally uninvolved was contradicted.

Similar questioning is at issue in the following fragment from a discussion that took place on July 12, 2009 between Jon Sopel and Lord Drayson, Minister of State for Strategic Defence Acquisition Reform. Lord Drayson is asked about the decision to send additional troops to Afghanistan. Sopel wants to know whether General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff in the British Army, who has asked for more troops, has been turned down or not. Because Lord Drayson is trying to avoid responding to this

[46]As noted by Curtin and Nollkaemper (2005: 11), another prominent case of political accountability is the parliament in which the executive branch is held responsible by parliament for action undertaken in the past.

[47] This institutional characteristic is justified by the fact that the interviewer has to take into account the expectations of the audience. As the audience expects the interviewer to hold the politician to account, exerting pressure through repetition of the same question is a way of meeting these expectations. The politician resisting the pressure creates an additional burden of justification which, if not met, undermines his credibility in front of the audience. He would have to answer for why he cannot provide an account.

question, Sopel explicitly requests him to answer. Because this request is in fact a repetition of the question that he already asked earlier, whether Richard Dannatt obtained the troop numbers he wanted, Sopel cannot simply be asking for information. He attempts to elicit information that he can use as an argument to defend the standpoint that *Lord Drayson's decision is not adequate*:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> Just answer, just address that narrow point. Has Sir Richard Dannatt got what he wants in terms of troop numbers?

The obligation to defend his standpoint holds also for the interviewer once challenged by the politician, though this rarely happens. Clayman and Heritage (2002: 140) suggest that such a challenge may arise in two cases. One such case occurs when the politician disagrees with or denies the statements with which the interviewer prefaces his questions. For instance, this might be the case because the interviewer's remarks offer "contentious statements of opinion rather than merely relevant background information."[48] Another case in which the politician challenges the interviewer to defend himself occurs when he is questioning the interviewer's conduct or the broadcasting organization which the interviewer represents. For instance, the politician accuses the interviewer of being impolite or attacks the broadcasting company for being biased. Such a situation requires the interviewer "to abandon questioning in order to defend himself" or otherwise the interviewer appears guilty as charged (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 140).

Although both participants to the discussion may provide argumentation, there is conventionally a difference regarding the length of their contributions. Due to strict time constraints and because the interview concentrates on the politician's words and actions, the interviewer needs to argue his case as briefly as possible in order to leave enough time for the politician to offer an extensive account. Heritage and Greatbatch (1991: 102) underline this when they point out that the politician's extended turns are an institutional characteristic of a political interview. The Broadcasting Code emphasizes this characteristic by relating it to a principle of fairness. The Code prescribes that especially when an accusation is made, the politician should be allowed time for a more elaborate response:

> if a programme alleges wrongdoing or incompetence or makes other significant allegations, those concerned should normally be given an appropriate and timely opportunity to respond. (*Section 7.11*)

[48] Bull and Mayer (1993: 664) observe that Margaret Thatcher often attacked the interviewers' statements in an attempt at making them not pursue a certain line of inquiry. In most cases, though, (83% of the questions), the interviewers would typically ask a new question rather than argue for their words.

3.4 Argumentative means

In a political interview, the exchange of argumentation and criticisms is essential in carrying out the accountability procedure for which the activity type concerned has been established. Without advancing criticisms, the interviewer cannot hold the politician properly to account. By definition, demanding an account involves asking critical questions that challenge the interlocutor to respond. Without argumentation, the politician cannot clarify and justify his words and actions as is expected of him when giving an account. As Mulgan points out,

> Accountability is seen to be a dialectical activity, requiring officials to answer, explain and justify, while those holding to account engage in questioning, assessing and criticizing. It thus involves open discussion and debate about matters of public interest and so becomes equated with the principles of deliberative democracy. (2000: 569)[49]

Discourse analysts, studying the conversational forms and structures of the political interview, and scholars taking a socio-pragmatic approach to it, have only incidentally observed that argumentation is used by the participants. Notably, Wilson (1990) points out that the interviewer's critical questions, together with the assertions preceding them, convey often a position that gives a negative evaluation of the politician's words and actions. In her examination of political interviews in Great Britain, Fetzer (2007) shows how a politician presents his standpoints as reasonable and those of his opponents as unreasonable. Such appeals to reasonableness function as arguments to convince the audience to vote for the politician.

The explicit and implicit conventions mentioned in the previous section have made clear that the length and shape of the participants' contributions and the possibilities to address arguments and criticisms are rather strictly prescribed. The political interview is thus a regulated institutionalized activity regimenting what can be reconstructed as the argumentation stage of a critical discussion. Conventionally, the content of the

[49] A similar view is held by Curtin. She remarks that "the provision of information is clearly an element of accountability, although it cannot be regarded, without more, as synonymous with accountability. Yet without the provision of (full and complete) information, it will not be possible to hold actors to account for their actions and inactions. In other words, we can best view the provision of information in general terms as an essential pre-requisite enabling actors to be held to account by accountability forums in various ways" (2007: 532). She adds that "more is needed in the quest for accountability, namely the opportunity of hearing an explanation or justification of the actor's actions or decisions and for such an account giving to be debated and queried" (2007: 534).

participants' argumentation is preconditioned by the topics that trigger the difference of opinion. At all times, the argumentation should concern words or actions for which the politician is held to account publicly. His argumentation is embedded in the answers the politician provides in defense of his words or actions. Because the interviewer often evaluates these words and actions negatively, the politician cannot afford to do less than refuting the interviewer's criticisms. His political role requires him to at least doubt the interviewer's statements, if not reject them altogether. This rejection is at the same time directed against his opponents. He does so, because the audience usually judges the acceptability of his words and actions in comparison with the words and actions of his political rivals. Drawing on this institutional characteristic, Yvette Cooper, a British Labor Party politician, and at the time, Work and Pensions Secretary, defends her party's policies concerning recession in a discussion with Jon Sopel on June 28, 2009 in the following way:

> *Yvette Cooper:*
> [..] I think the important thing is that this is about helping people, like those Corus workers, with additional support; we're putting in additional investment, we've got a one billion pound future jobs fund, which is particularly about creating youth jobs that never again go back to a lost generation who don't get their first job, don't get their second job and spend years unemployed because they happen to be unlucky and leave school in the middle of a recession and in the early '80s government turned its back on people; we're determined not to do that. So yes, that is part of this vision for the future, part of building Britain's future. We help those young people, we don't turn our backs on them and that's something the Conservatives have repeatedly said they will not support the investment to do.

Guided by the characterization of the activity type according to which the politician is the protagonist of the standpoint that *My words and/or actions are adequate*, Cooper's argumentation can be reconstructed as follows:[50]

(1)	(Labour's policies during recession are adequate)
(1).1a	We help people with additional support
(1).1b	We do not turn our backs on young people like the Conservatives did in the '80s
(1).1.b.1	We are making an additional investment of one billion pound for creating jobs

In this fragment, Cooper defends the standpoint that the policies of the Labour Party, which she represents, are adequate during recession. She gives two main arguments in support of her standpoint. According to the first main argument, her party offers additional support to people during recession ((1).1a). According to the second main argument, the

[50] The notation in the analytic overviews made in this study follows the style in van Eemeren (2010).

Labour party's policy during recession is adequate because the party does not turn its back on people like the Conservatives did in the '80s ((1).1b). By means of the second argument, Cooper does more than responding to the institutional obligation of defending her party's policies as adequate for solving problems during recession. She criticizes at the same time her political rivals, the Conservatives, in an attempt at convincing the audience that her party's opponents cannot offer a good alternative to solving the problems during recession. Anticipating that her second argument ((1).1b) will be rejected, or at least not easily accepted by the interviewer and the audience, Cooper supports it further with a statement in which she points out that her party is making an additional investment of one billion pound for creating jobs ((1).1.b.1). By providing this argument, she lives up to her political role of refuting the potential criticism that *Labour is not doing anything concretely*.

The way in which Cooper combines the two main arguments ((1).1a and (1).1b) to make acceptable the implicit standpoint that Labour's policies are adequate ((1)) responds to the institutional requirement stipulating that a politician's statements must be oriented towards the audience. In fact, it is an intrinsic requirement of a political accountability procedure that the accountable person answers to the public.[51] To respond to this institutional obligation, Cooper connects the two arguments in a coordinative structure. In this way, she argues that Labour's policy is adequate because it takes care of the present and at the same time of the future. It helps the people who are most directly affected now and it also cares about the future of the young people. In the end, caring about the situation for the present and also about the future is what matters most in recession time.

The interviewer's role as the devil's advocate, constantly criticizing the politician in order to force him to render an account before the audience, obliges him to defend his own views, if challenged to do so. The interviewer advances standpoints that are critical of the politician's words or actions and expects his criticism to be rejected, or at least not accepted, by the politician. Especially in cases in which the interviewer asks 'accusatory questions' (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 221), he rarely leaves his position unjustified. The interviewer knows that such strong criticism will be rejected and argues for it, usually in assertions preceding the actual questions (Harris 1986). This progressive presentation of the argumentation signals to the politician that his words and actions are inadequate in one respect or another and need defending.[52] In this way, it becomes difficult for the politician

[51] I have explained in the previous section that in a political interview there is an accountability relationship between the public and the politician. The interviewer acts as an intermediary that makes this relationship possible by acting as a representative of the public.

[52] Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992: 45) make a difference between *retrogressive* presentation, in which the argumentation is advanced after the standpoint has been advanced and *progressive* presentation, in which the argumentation precedes the standpoint.

to simply attack the interviewer's charges for being unjustified. He has to argue for his own standpoint and against the interviewer's view.

Another fragment from the discussion between Sopel and Cooper on June 28, 2009 is illustrative of the way in which Sopel advances arguments for an accusation of inconsistency, anticipating that the charge will not be accepted:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> We've seen a briefing paper on some of what is being talked about and about the need to create green jobs in the economy and then you take Vestas who build wind turbines on the Isle of Wight, their factory closed in April and the company said it was because of falling demand and bureaucratic red tape and not enough support from government.

The issue at the centre of the discussion between Sopel and Cooper from which this fragment has been selected is the policy of the government to take an environment-friendly approach. With regard to this issue, Cooper adopts a standpoint according to which the government supports green jobs. Cooper's standpoint is met with criticism from Sopel who points out that the government is inconsistent because it is not complying with its announced policy. His argumentation can be reconstructed as follows:

(1)	(The government's words and actions are not adequate)
((1).1)	(The government is acting inconsistently)
((1).1).1	The government is saying that it supports green jobs, yet it did not support Vestas, which offered green jobs

Sopel defends the implicit standpoint that the government's words and actions are not adequate ((1)) by means of an implicit argument pointing out an inconsistency between the government's words and actions (((1).1)). Sopel anticipates that Cooper will not accept his implicit argument that the government is acting inconsistently. Therefore, he presents, as an argument that supports the charge, the case of the company Vestas which offered green jobs, but was not supported by the government (((1).1).1). As is typical of a political interview, the argumentation is presented in assertions preceding the question which Sopel advances in the next turn by means of which he tries to make Cooper account for the alleged inconsistency.[53]

[53] In such sub-disputes, the politician's response to the interviewer's sub-standpoint needs to advance and defend another sub-standpoint that is related to the same issue as addressed in the interviewer's sub-standpoint. A deviation from this institutional requirement counts as an attempt at agenda-shifting that is usually sanctioned by the interviewer with a request for returning to the real issue.

3.5 The possible outcome[54]

The outcome of a discussion representing an activity type is an implementation of the concluding stage of a critical discussion. At this stage, the participants in the discussion establish the result of their attempt at resolving the difference of opinion. The difference of opinion is resolved if the parties agree that the protagonist's standpoint is acceptable and the antagonist's doubt must be retracted (in which case the difference of opinion is resolved in the protagonist's favor), or that the protagonist's standpoint must be retracted (the difference of opinion is then resolved in the antagonist's favor). In a political interview, the outcome of the discussion is not procedurally defined as in a legal trial, in which the institutional requirements impose that it should be made known in whose favor the discussion is resolved. In the activity type at hand, the outcome is preconditioned by the characteristics of a political interview. In any case, it should be clear whether the institutional goal of holding the politician to account has been realized and more generally, whether the institutional point of the deliberation has been attained.[55]

Typical of the political interview is that the interviewer always closes off the discussion. This gives him the advantage that he can comment, but is not in any way institutionally obliged to do so, on the discussion as a whole. Clayman and Heritage observe that his comments have "a cumulative sense or import of what has been said over the course of the discussion" (2002: 78). His comments do not establish whether the discussion has been resolved and in whose favor, but they can give a good indication of whether the institutional goal has been realized. A case in point is Sopel's final comment in the interview with Cooper on June 28, 2009:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> Okay, Yvette Cooper, we must leave it there. We will look forward to the detailed announcement. Thanks ever so much being with us. Thank you.

Prior to this final remark, Sopel asked Cooper to give details about what will happen in case public services, such as hospitals and educational institutions, do not respond to people's needs. Sopel wants to know in which way these institutions will be punished in

[54] The outcome of a political interview is to a certain extent, though not completely, different from the 'closing' of a political interview (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 72). The latter is a structural element that marks the termination of the discussion. For example, a thanking formula from the interviewer or a reminder of the time limits are indicators that the interview is coming to a close. The outcome of a political interview should not be seen in purely structural terms, even though, establishing the result of the discussion may take place in the part usually described as 'closing.'

[55] As Mulgan remarks, "the public explanation and justification involved in accountability make it an important component of deliberative democracy" (2000: 570).

case they do not offer people the things to which they are entitled. Cooper does not have a clear answer and promises that details will be made known later. After asking a few questions which Cooper cannot really answer, Sopel rounds off the discussion by ironically commenting that people will be looking forward to these details. This remark is a way of pointing out that Cooper did not give the account expected of her as Work and Pensions Secretary.

The interviewer's comments, such as pointing out that an account has not been provided, can help the public to judge the outcome of the discussion. After all, the public is involved in the public accountability process that takes place in a political interview.[56] Indirectly, through the interviewer, the public requires a justification of the politician's performance and judges it against certain standards (such as democratic standards) and, eventually, imposes sanctions if the accountable actor fails to live up to the public's expectations (such as by not voting for him later).[57]

However, it often happens that the discussion in a political interview does not lead to a resolution in the sense in which a critical discussion is resolved. This is not surprising if one takes into account that a fundamental characteristic of an accountability process in the political domain is the continuous critical testing of the politician's words. Many of the examples presented in this chapter have illustrated that when it comes to matters of major political importance, the politician rarely gives a definitive answer. Therefore, it is not uncommon that a politician is interviewed again on the same matters or that the same issue is discussed with different politicians in other interviews. That this is the case becomes clear, for example, when the interviewer points out an inconsistency between what a politician said in another interview and the present occasion. Sopel, for example, remarks on December 9, 2007, that Alan Duncan, at the time Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform, changed his views about the use of nuclear energy:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> You were rather more skeptical the last time I spoke to you when you were on this programme – we can just have a listen to what you said last time.

---

[56] Grant and Keohane (2005) elaborate on the role of citizens in public accountability processes for the protection of democratic values.

[57] Curtin and Nollkaemper (2005: 4) explain that in its core sense, accountability involves (a) the justification of an actor's performance to others, (b) the assessment of that performance against certain standards and (c) the possible imposition of consequences if the actor fails to live up to applicable standards. By participating in the accountability process, the public protects democratic values, possibly going as far as limiting abuses of power (Curtin and Nollkaemper 2005: 9). The interview between Paxman and Howard discussed in 3.4 is a good illustration of how a politician's attempt at abuse can be prevented from being put into practice. Howard threatened to overrule the Director General of Prisons. After this interview in which the threat comes to light, Howard was 'sanctioned' by not receiving enough support in his bid for leadership. Sanctions can be imposed not only for actions taken, but also for actions not taken (Mulgan 2000: 561).

> 'we think that the nuclear power sector, should be there as a last resort in many respects. We want to explore every conceivable method of generating electricity before we go to nuclear'

Examples such as the one just given illustrate that a return to the initial situation is not excluded in a political interview. Unlike an ordinary conversation in which participants may change roles, in the new discussion in a political interview the politician maintains his role of the protagonist who has to give an account and the interviewer acts as the antagonist who holds him to account. This does not mean that in the activity type of a political interview an outcome is never determined. Determining the outcome usually happens in the long run, for example, when the public has to cast a vote.[58]

3.6 Conclusion

The political interview is a deliberative activity type in which argumentation plays a predominant role. The question-answer exchanges between an interviewer and a politician taking place in a political interview are part of an accountability procedure that is carried out with the help of arguments and criticisms. In this procedure, the interviewer criticizes words, actions, plans, policies or decisions for which the politician can be held publicly responsible, and the politician is expected to argue in defense of his words and actions. Although the interlocutors address each other directly, they are primarily interested in convincing a listening, reading or television-watching audience.

In this activity type, the participants' argumentation is governed by explicit procedural conventions enforced by institutions with the power to regulate the broadcasting activity and by implicit conventions on which participants agree when they enter the activity type concerned. These conventions precondition in a particular manner the way in which the interviewer and the politician define the difference of opinion, the starting points they adopt, the argumentative means and criticisms they advance and the possible outcome of the discussion. In Figure 3.1 the main characteristics of the activity type of a political interview are outlined:

[58] Mulgan (2000: 569) points out that in political accounts there is an open-ended dialogue between public servants and the public.

Critical discussion: dialectical stages in the process of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits		*Argumentative activity type of a political interview:* counterparts of the dialectical stages of a critical discussion in an accountability process	
Confrontation stage	The difference of opinion is clearly defined	*Initial situation*	Mixed or non-mixed difference of opinion with respect to matters of (major) political importance between an interviewer and a politician; the listening, reading or television-watching audience is the primary addressee
Opening stage	The starting points of the discussion are unambiguously established	*Starting points*	Question-answer format; the politician is the protagonist who gives an account; the interviewer is the antagonist who holds him to account
Argumentation stage	Arguments and criticisms are advanced	*Argumentative means and criticisms*	The politician argues in defense of his words and actions; the interviewer puts the politician's words continuously to a critical test
Concluding stage	The result of the discussion is established	*Possible outcome*	Possible resolution for some members of the audience; possible return to the initial situation

Figure 3.1 Argumentative characterization of the activity type of a political interview