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Filename	Chapter 4: Strategic maneuvering in response to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview

SOURCE (OR PART OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCE):

Type	Dissertation
Title	Maneuvering strategically in a political interview: analyzing and evaluating responses to an accusation of inconsistency
Author	C. Andone
Faculty	Faculty of Humanities
Year	2010
ISBN	978 90 3610 220 9

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS:
http://dare.uva.nl/record/360449

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CHAPTER 4

Strategic maneuvering in response to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview

4.1 Accusations of inconsistency in a political interview

The political interview is an activity type in which an accountability process takes place. As part of this process, the interviewer asks the politician to account for his words, actions, plans or decisions, and the politician should clarify and justify these. In order to fulfill his role as an accounting agent, the interviewer is in essence interested in questioning and criticizing the politician by challenging his interlocutor to respond. In a political interview, it is often the case that the interviewer's criticism takes the form of an accusation of inconsistency: the interviewer points out that the politician has said something and acts contrary to it or adopts a position that is incompatible with a previously held position on the same issue (Heritage and Clayman 2002: 227).[59] The former is the case in the

[59] Heritage and Clayman (2002: 221) describe questions in which accusations are launched as "accountability questions." In their view, such questions are very hostile and represent some "unusual cases in which interviewers seem voluntarily to slip outside the boundaries of the permissible and clearly start to take an advocacy role" (2002: 217). This view of accountability questions is not surprising. To recall, many authors, including Heritage and Clayman, are of the opinion that interviewers should be impartial. As shown in

discussion between Jon Sopel and Sir Gus, introduced in Chapter 1. In the exchange, Sopel charges Sir Gus with being inconsistent on the ground that he claims to aim at managing the Civil Service efficiently, yet he does not act efficiently. As an example, Sopel points at the case of two departments, the names of which have been changed several times in a short time. An example of the case in which an accusation points at an inconsistency between views is the discussion between Jon Sopel and Alan Duncan, presented in Chapter 3. In the exchange, Sopel remarks that in a previous interview Duncan did not support the use of nuclear energy, whereas in the current interview he seems to be in favor of nuclear energy.

The examination of the interactional dimension of an accusation of inconsistency in Chapter 2 has led to the conclusion that the addressee confronted with such a charge in an argumentative confrontation has two options to respond: he can maintain his standpoint, or he can retract his standpoint. Even though both options count as responses to the charge raised, the preferred interactional effect of an accusation of inconsistency is giving in to the accuser's criticism. That is so because by raising a charge of inconsistency the accuser wants to obtain at least acceptance of the charge so that he can maintain his criticism and the other party loses the discussion. The retraction of a standpoint is the only option conveying that the accused accepts the charge as correct.

An accusation of inconsistency made in a political interview is a means used by interviewers to satisfy the public interest in clarity: it requires the politician to clarify his views on controversial issues in relation to which he has taken opposite stances. Unlike a discussion between politicians in which indeed it is in the best interest of a party to make the other party retract his standpoint, in a political interview the interviewer's accusation is rather a challenge to clarify views or actions. Admittedly, the charge of inconsistency may eventually lead to the politician retracting his standpoint, in which case a situation is created in which the difference of opinion is eliminated. The politician is then shown not to be able to provide a clear account of his words or actions as expected by the public. An interviewer who repetitively shows that a politician is unable to give an account of his (controversial) words or actions in the long term builds up the reputation of an aggressive journalist. The public perceives him then as an interviewer who questions the politician's words or actions thoroughly by following a critical line of inquiry (Heritage and Clayman 2002: 30).

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the politician's responses to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview as confrontational strategic maneuvers. The analysis will provide insight into the advantages a politician can obtain when he responds to an accusation of inconsistency by advancing the move of retracting one of the inconsistent

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Chapter 3, they ignore that impartiality should be understood as part of the expression 'due impartiality,' meaning that the interviewer should not give prominence to one view over another.

standpoints because he cannot remove the criticism. After characterizing the move of retracting a standpoint as an instance of confrontational strategic maneuvering (4.2), I will determine the strategic function of the argumentative move in the context of a political interview (4.3). I will describe how the combined attempt at realizing the dialectical and rhetorical aims of the confrontation stage is carried out by the politician. Further, I will observe how this combined attempt is affected by the institutional constraints on argumentation imposed by the conventions of a political interview. By means of a detailed analysis of cases in which a politician responds to a charge of inconsistency in a political interview by retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints, I will identify some of the advantages he can gain in his strategic maneuvering.

4.2 Retracting a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency

Pragma-dialectics provides a precise account of the role that the retraction of a standpoint by a protagonist plays in an argumentative confrontation. As a dialectical theory, it approaches retraction of a standpoint as a move that is in principle reasonable in the dialectical procedure of a critical discussion.[60] In the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, the model indicates that retraction of a standpoint is a move that occurs in reaction to an antagonist's criticism (Van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 101).[61] This criticism can be expressed in three different ways in a discussion initiated by a protagonist who advances a positive standpoint. First, it can take the form of mere doubt concerning the protagonist's positive standpoint. Second, the antagonist's criticism can be expressed by making a move in which the opposite standpoint is advanced. Third, it can be expressed by performing a move in which the negative standpoint is maintained. In the latter two cases, the criticism goes beyond mere doubt as it constitutes a refutation of the protagonist's positive standpoint. Drawing on the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage represented in Chapter 2, Figure 4.1 outlines the three possible dialectical routes for the protagonist to retract a standpoint in response to criticism:

[60] The move of retraction of a standpoint in a critical discussion can have both sound and fallacious instantiations.

[61] The ideal model of critical discussion stipulates also that the move of retracting a standpoint occurs in the concluding stage. The protagonist who could not successfully defend his standpoint in the argumentation stage concludes that he lost the discussion by retracting his standpoint. While the retraction of a standpoint in the confrontation stage precludes the initiation of a discussion, since there is an immediate end to the discussion, in the concluding stage, the retraction of a standpoint resolves the discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 101). Krabbe (2001: 148) remarks in a similar vein that the retraction of an initial thesis leads to the resolution of a dispute.

	Protagonist (P)	*Antagonist (A)*
Possibility I in the confrontation stage	Advances positive standpoint	
		Casts doubt on P's positive standpoint
	Retracts positive standpoint	
Possibility II in the confrontation stage	Advances positive standpoint	
		Advances negative standpoint
	Retracts doubt concerning A's negative standpoint = *retracts positive standpoint*	
Possibility III in the confrontation stage	Advances positive standpoint	
		Casts doubt on P's positive standpoint
	Maintains positive standpoint	
		Advances negative standpoint
	Advances doubt on A's negative standpoint	
		Maintains negative standpoint
	Retracts doubt on A's negative standpoint = *retracts positive standpoint*	

Figure 4.1 The protagonist's possibilities for responding to criticism by retracting a standpoint in the confrontation stage

In my characterization of accusations of inconsistency as an illocutionary act in Chapter 2, I have shown by means of invented examples that an accusation of inconsistency that is aimed at making the other party retract his standpoint can instantiate the three critical moves: casting doubt (in a non-mixed discussion), advancing the opposite standpoint (in a mixed discussion), and maintaining the opposite standpoint (in a mixed discussion). In all cases, the accusation of inconsistency is aimed at making the other party retract his standpoint on the ground that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with the commitment to another standpoint because they are inconsistent. In a critical discussion, an accusation of inconsistency advanced in the confrontation stage to express criticism counts as the non-acceptance of the other party's standpoint so that there is no need to put the standpoint the antagonist claims to be inconsistent subsequently to critical testing. Putting the standpoint to the test involves an exchange of arguments and criticisms (on the basis of prior agreements in the opening stage) which an arguer would rather avoid.

Even though a criticism of inconsistency can be expressed in the three different ways just mentioned, in a political interview the institutional characteristics oblige the

interviewer (who acts as the antagonist) to advance an accusation of inconsistency as an instantiation of the moves of advancing and maintaining the opposite standpoint. My argumentative characterization of a political interview has shown that the interviewer, acting as an accounting agent, makes an attempt at showing that the politician's standpoint that *My words and/or actions are adequate* is not tenable. When an accusation is launched against the politician's words or actions, it usually comes in support of the implicit opposite standpoint that the politician's words or actions are not adequate. Anticipating that his accusation will be rejected, or at least not accepted by the politician, the interviewer rarely leaves it unjustified. To support his negative evaluation of the politician's performance, the interviewer advances arguments, which turn his accusation into a sub-standpoint. Heritage and Clayman remark that what in pragma-dialectical terms can be reconstructed as a sub-standpoint is the case when they point out that "accusatory questions" take the confrontational form "How can/could you X?:"

> When it [the confrontational question format] is used to question the past activities of the interviewee, it implies the unanswerability of the question, and is virtually specialized for the delivery of accusations. Noticeably, this question format is often followed by statements that consolidate the interviewer's accusatory role with hostile remarks directly asserting a position as the interviewer's own (2002: 222).

It often happens that a politician has no other choice to respond to questions pointing at an inconsistency than by retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints. Such is the case in the discussion between Jon Sopel and Alan Duncan presented in Chapter 3. In the exchange, Sopel supports his remark that Duncan is inconsistent on the issue of nuclear energy with a quote from an earlier interview in which Duncan expressed a non-supportive attitude, whereas in the current interview Duncan supports the use of nuclear energy. Confronted with such strong evidence that he is inconsistent, Duncan cannot deny the inconsistency and retracts his original standpoint.

Similar to all other argumentative moves, the politician's retraction of a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency can be seen as an attempt at remaining within the boundaries of reasonableness while steering the discussion towards a favorable outcome. The move seems a reasonable way of responding, as one cannot maintain two mutually inconsistent standpoints about the same issue simultaneously. Confronted with an accusation of inconsistency which is in principle correct, it is reasonable to admit that one of the standpoints is not tenable and needs to be retracted. At the same time, the institutional context of a political interview obliges the politician to providing an account

of his words. After all, he is engaged in an argumentative practice that has been established for the purpose of carrying out an accountability process.

In order to determine the kinds of advantages which the politician may gain in a political interview in fulfilling his role as accountable agent when he retracts one of the inconsistent standpoints, I will combine a pragmatic approach to actual language use (by seeing retraction as a commonly recognized language phenomenon) with a dialectical view on argumentation (by seeing retraction as part of a dialectical procedure). By integrating pragmatic and dialectical concerns, the move of retraction is examined as it manifests itself in reality, while it is not ignored that the retraction is carried out as part of a dialectical procedure. It will thus become possible to study the attempt at being reasonable and at the same time effective as it is carried out in the activity type of a political interview.

As an instance of ordinary language use, retraction[62] comes after the speaker has said something which he would now like to withdraw. In speech act terms, it is an illocutionary act which involves the illocutionary negation of a previous illocutionary act performed by the speaker. According to Bach and Harnish (1979: 43), it is "a constative speech act by which a speaker expresses his disbelief in what he has previously believed and the intention that the hearer should not believe what the speaker expressed before."[63] Following Searle and Vanderveken (1985), van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 101) point out that by performing the act of retraction, a speaker indicates that he is no longer committed to the propositional content expressed in a previous illocutionary act.[64] Taking these views as a starting point, I will 'define' the illocutionary act of retraction in terms of felicity conditions to indicate what is conventionally required for the correct performance:

(1) Retraction counts as the withdrawal of a commitment to the propositional content of an earlier illocutionary act by the speaker. (Essential condition)

(2) The propositional content of a retraction is identical to the propositional content of the earlier illocutionary act. (Propositional content condition)

(3) The speaker believes that the addressee (a) will be prepared to accept that the speaker is no longer committed to the earlier illocutionary act, and (b) does not already know or

[62] Krabbe (2001) distinguishes among the retraction of doubt, of a point of view, of reasons and of concessions.

[63] Vanderveken (1990: 200) remarks that retraction is a declarative by which "a speaker disavows a previous opinion and in so doing he acknowledges his error."

[64] This view coincides with Peetz' (1979) interpretation of an illocutionary negation as an act of withdrawal. Peetz criticizes Searle (1969) who explains illocutionary negation in terms of an act of refusal and Hare (1970) who interprets it as an act of refraining. In her view, not all acts of illocutionary negation amount to a refusal and there is no illocutionary act of refraining.

believe that the speaker is no longer committed to the earlier illocutionary act. (Preparatory conditions)

(4) The speaker no longer wants to assume responsibility for the earlier illocutionary act. (Sincerity condition)

In this definition of retraction, it becomes clear that a certain set of commitments is obtained which can be further specified with the help of the felicity conditions.[65] These commitments are obtained at all times when a speaker retracts, irrespective of the context and the kind of illocutionary act that is being withdrawn. In order to distinguish them from commitments incurred in an argumentative context, I will refer to them, adopting a term used by Hamblin (1970b: 263), as *indicative commitments*. The fulfillment of the essential condition (1) entails a commitment on the addressee to no longer holding the speaker to account for the earlier illocutionary act.[66] The propositional content condition (2) requires that the speaker should withdraw the propositional content of the earlier illocutionary act. The preparatory conditions (3(a) and 3(b)) require that the speaker be committed to assuming that the addressee is ready to accept the speaker's withdrawal of the earlier illocutionary act; otherwise the retraction is pointless. In addition, the preparatory conditions require that the speaker be committed to assuming that the addressee does not already know that he is no longer committed to the earlier illocutionary act; otherwise the retraction is superfluous. The sincerity condition (4) commits the speaker to act in accordance with the consequences of giving up the earlier illocutionary act; otherwise he is guilty of manipulation or deceit.

In an argumentative confrontation in which the move of retraction involves withdrawing a standpoint by a protagonist in response to an antagonist's accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist and the antagonist incur a set of *argumentative commitments*

[65] I follow the view of authors who are of the opinion that the performance of an illocutionary act of any sort implies assuming a set of commitments (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, van Eemeren 2010). Austin (1975) refers to commitments only in connection with commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action. Searle (1969) is of the opinion that not only commissives, but also assertives create commitments. In the case of commissives, for instance, he specifies that their point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action. Walton and Krabbe (1995) believe that participants can incur two kinds of commitments in the discussion in which they participate. One kind is the light-side commitments, which a speaker incurs when he performs an illocutionary act. The other kind is the dark-side commitments, which can remain hidden to the speaker himself, but can be brought to light as the participants work towards achieving the outcome of the discussion in which they are involved. Following the pragma-dialectical principle of externalization (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984), I specify the so-called light-side commitments that come to light as soon as a speaker advances an illocutionary act. For a detailed discussion of commitments in relation to illocutionary acts, see de Brabanter and Dendale (2008).

[66] According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), a set of commitments can be attributed to the speaker who has performed the illocutionary act of retraction as well as to the addressee who acquires a certain commitment when accepting the speaker's illocutionary act.

that are dictated by the argumentative situation the arguers are in at a specific juncture in the exchange. [67] Van Eemeren explains that "due to the various types of speech acts the parties have performed in the argumentative discourse preceding that juncture, including their responses to each other's speech acts, each of the parties has compiled a certain set of commitments" (2010: 178). At the juncture at which an accusation of inconsistency is made and the protagonist retracts a standpoint, the protagonist takes the accusation, as shown in section 2.3, to have been correctly performed. That means that, in line with the essential and the propositional content conditions for retraction, the protagonist becomes committed to giving up one of the inconsistent standpoints, whereas the antagonist can no longer hold him to account for it. [68] In line with the preparatory conditions for retraction, the protagonist commits himself to assuming that the antagonist is ready to accept his response as an answer to the charge[69] and the antagonist is committed to accepting the assumption that the protagonist's response is an answer to the charge. If the antagonist accepts the retraction of a certain standpoint as an answer to the charge, he is committed to accepting that he can no longer ask the protagonist to justify it. The protagonist who has accepted the accusation of inconsistency, without being inconsistent, cannot claim at a later stage of the discussion that the antagonist's charge is incorrect or that there is no evidence for the charge. In line with the sincerity condition, the protagonist is committed to giving up the earlier standpoint altogether as he no longer wants to assume responsibility for it.

To summarize, Figure 4.2 includes the sets of indicative commitments obtained when an act of retraction is performed and the argumentative commitments obtained when the retraction of a standpoint responds to an accusation of inconsistency:[70]

[67] An argumentative situation is defined by "the contracted mutual commitments" (van Eemeren 2010: 164). For example, in an argumentative situation at the confrontation stage in which the protagonist's standpoint has been contradicted by the antagonist, he can hold the antagonist to account for being the protagonist of the opposite standpoint. The antagonist is committed to defend his opposing standpoint if challenged to do so (van Eemeren 2010: 178).

[68] As a consequence of giving up his standpoint, the protagonist is no longer committed to defend the standpoint.

[69] The protagonist makes the assumption that the antagonist will accept his response as an answer to the charge, because he admits that the inconsistency is an obstruction to the discussion (by taking preparatory condition (b) for an accusation of inconsistency to be fulfilled).

[70] The way in which the various commitments are identified does justice to the principle of socialization. This principle is not formulated to indicate that arguers take turns in a discussion, but to indicate that there is an association between the arguers' commitments (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 12).

Indicative commitments	*Argumentative commitments*
The addressee is committed to no longer holding the speaker to account for the earlier illocutionary act	The antagonist can no longer hold the protagonist to account for the standpoint that is withdrawn
The speaker is committed to withdrawing the propositional content of the earlier illocutionary act	The protagonist becomes committed to giving up one of the inconsistent standpoints
The speaker is committed to assuming that the addressee is ready to accept the speaker's withdrawal of the earlier illocutionary act as well as that the addressee does not already know that the speaker is no longer committed to the earlier illocutionary act	The protagonist commits himself to assuming that the antagonist is ready to accept his response as an answer to the charge
The speaker is committed to act in accordance with the consequences of giving up the earlier illocutionary act	The protagonist is committed to no longer justify the earlier standpoint

Figure 4.2 List of indicative commitments obtained when retraction is carried out and argumentative commitments obtained when the retraction involves the withdrawal of a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency

The set of argumentative commitments[71] just outlined defining the argumentative situation created at the point in the discussion in which a protagonist retracts a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency indicates that the protagonist can no longer justify the standpoint which he withdraws. In a political interview in which the politician, acting as the protagonist, is expected to give an account of his words or actions, simply retracting a standpoint will be avoided. By no longer holding a standpoint in favor of which he can argue, the politician cannot provide the expected account. Therefore, it seems sensible to assume that the politician will often have recourse to "compensating adjustments" (Hamblin 1970b: 264). Hamblin points out that when inconsistencies in one's positions are pointed out they have to be dealt with by retraction, but "in practical cases there will often need to be compensating adjustments elsewhere." Unfortunately, these compensating adjustments are not explained further by Hamblin. However, it is suggested that they help a speaker who retracts to remain engaged in the discussion.

[71] It will become clear in the analysis of various cases in this Chapter that there are also contextual commitments that affect "the commitment store" (Hamblin 1970b) of arguers. According to van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2003), participants agree implicitly on a set of contextual commitments which arise from the specific situation in which they are engaged. They are different from the dark-side commitments distinguished by Walton and Krabbe (1995) since participants know them and consider them to function as implicit or partly implicit starting points. They are similar to Gunlogson's (2008) implicit discourse commitments, which refer to background knowledge, assumptions, entailments, presuppositions and implicatures of explicit commitments.

4.3 Exploiting commitments to win the discussion

In the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, a protagonist has one reasonable option for continuing the discussion after retracting his standpoint in response to criticism.[72] This option is to reformulate his standpoint in a modified version in such a way that the arguments advanced before can be maintained (van Rees 2006). When the arguments that have been advanced for the original standpoint have not been withdrawn and still serve as a defense of the modified standpoint, "this new discussion can be seen as a continuation of the original discussion" (Snoeck Henkemans 1997: 88, footnote 15). In Figure 4.3 the modified standpoint is included in the basic dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a single dispute:

[72] There is a second reasonable option that a protagonist can use after retracting his standpoint, namely to advance a completely new standpoint. But this amounts to initiating a new critical discussion, not to continuing the current discussion.

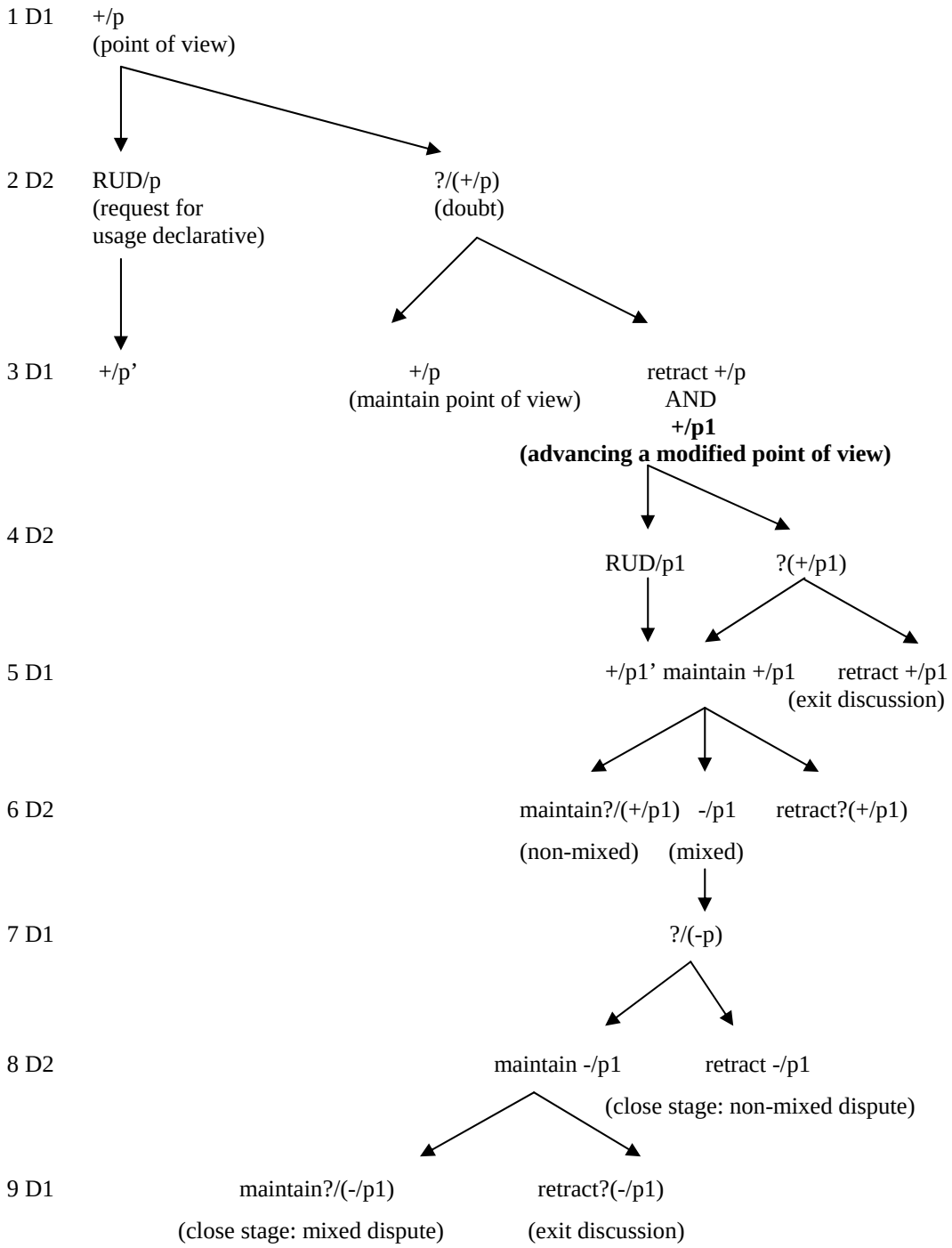

Figure 4.3 Dialectical profile of the confrontation stage in which a modified version of the protagonist's standpoint is included

The profile represented in Figure 4.3 indicates that after the protagonist has advanced a modified version of the original standpoint, the discussion can continue, because the protagonist prevents the disadvantageous ending of the discussion in an incipient phase. The protagonist avoids discussing a standpoint he cannot support, but reformulates this standpoint in the way that he finds it the easiest to defend. The dialectical choice for

presenting a reformulated standpoint is particularly suitable in a political interview, because it allows the politician to define the difference of opinion in his favor while living up to the institutional obligation of giving an account. As an instance of strategic maneuvering, the politician's move is regarded as an attempt at striking a balance between the dialectical aim of defining the difference of opinion clearly and the rhetorical aim of doing so in the way most opportune for winning the discussion. By retracting a standpoint and then reformulating it, the politician tries to realize a favorable definition of the difference of opinion (by remaining engaged in the discussion) without hindering the critical testing procedure (by doing away with the inconsistency).

In principle, a politician who wants to give an account of his words or actions can follow three dialectical routes for achieving an outcome that enables him to win the discussion. One possible route is to maintain his standpoint (+/p1) (turn 5) after being faced with continued doubt from the interviewer (turn 4). This route leads to the interviewer retracting doubt concerning +/p1, which means that the politician maintains the standpoint that *My words and/or actions are adequate*. Taking this route does not lead to a defense in the argumentation stage of his words or actions, because the discussion ends as soon as the interviewer retracts his doubt. Even though he is not living up to the institutional constraint to justify his words or actions, the politician shows at least that he does not accept the interviewer's criticism and that he is still committed to the acceptability of the proposition expressed in +/p1.

In case the interviewer responds to the politician's positive standpoint (+/p1) by advancing the opposite standpoint, a suitable option for the politician is to cast doubt on the opposite standpoint (turn 7) in such a way that the interviewer has to retract his standpoint (turn 8). The discussion then ends with a non-mixed difference of opinion which can continue into the next stages. This outcome, however, as well as the outcome resulting from taking the first option, are not to be expected if an accusation is launched against +/p1. The institutional requirement that the interviewer should be thoroughly critical of the politician's words or actions by at least casting doubt and upholding doubt on them makes it unlikely that the interviewer would retract his doubt so quickly.

A third option for the politician to win the discussion concerns the case in which his reformulated standpoint (+/p1) is confronted with the interviewer's opposite standpoint (-/p1) which is maintained (turn 8). The politician's best choice is then to maintain his doubt concerning the opposite standpoint (turn 9). By maintaining doubt the politician maintains his own positive standpoint *My words and/or actions are adequate* and can proceed to argue for it in the argumentation stage. While taking the first and second route is particularly suitable when the politician cannot argue well for his standpoint, the third route is preferable when he has strong arguments for his case. Indeed, this route is to be expected when an accusation is made in a political interview. Because the interviewer

evaluates his words or actions negatively (by advancing an opposite standpoint), in principle the politician cannot afford to do less than refuting the interviewer's criticism.

The three options for winning the discussion represent the dialectical routes a politician can take when he retracts a standpoint after being faced with an accusation of inconsistency. They are theoretical possibilities for the politician to balance the dialectical goal of defining the difference of opinion with doing so favorably in accordance with the ideal norms of critical reasonableness in the confrontation stage.[73] Unlike in a fully externalized and reasonable argumentative confrontation, in actual argumentative practice (such as a political interview) the politician will maneuvers strategically with retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints by taking dialectical routes that may be different than those outlined theoretically. He may skip certain sequences of argumentative moves or engage in more elaborate sub-discussions than those outlined. All of this under the constraints imposed by the conventions of the activity type of a political interview.

In the actual argumentative practice of a political interview, the politician will make an attempt at reaching the dialectical aims and the rhetorical aims by coordinating in his move the three inseparable (though analytically distinguishable) aspects of strategic maneuvering: topical choice, audience adaptation and presentational means (van Eemeren 2010: 93-127). Depending on the intended results of the discussion, the routes the politician can follow at a specific juncture, the constraints of the activity type and the commitments defining the argumentative situation, each of the three aspects of strategic maneuvering is dealt with differently.[74] Starting from the theoretical outline provided in this Chapter and from the insight gained in Chapter 3 about the institutional pre-conditions for strategic maneuvering, I will now analyze in detail several cases in which a politician retracts one of the inconsistent standpoints in response to an accusation of inconsistency.[75] Thus, it will become possible to determine the strategic function of the move concerned.

Example 1

The first example selected for analysis is a fragment from a discussion on the BBC *Politics Show* which took place on November 12, 2006 between Jon Sopel and William Hague. At

[73] As will be shown in Chapter 5, following these routes can be sound, but can also derail into fallacious strategic maneuvering.

[74] Following van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007, 2009), van Eemeren (2010: 163-186) elaborates on four factors that should be considered in analyzing strategic maneuvering: (a) the results that can be achieved by making a certain move, (b) the routes that can be taken to achieve the results, (c) the constraints imposed on the discourse by the institutional context, and (d) the commitments of the parties defining the argumentative situation. In an elaborate analysis of an advertorial, van Eemeren illustrates what it means to take the four factors into account.

[75] The full text of the interviews from which the following three examples have been selected can be found in the Appendix.

the time, Hague, former Conservative Party leader, was the British Shadow Foreign Secretary. The interview from which the exchange has been taken concerns the Conservatives' support to the British government concerning the issue of combating terrorism. One aspect related to this issue is the detention period of suspected terrorists about which the government is proposing an extension from 28 days to 90 days. The Conservatives reject the government's proposal on the ground that the government could not come up with "good arguments" and "effective ideas," as it could not present a single case justifying the necessity of a 90-day detention.[76]

Another aspect related to the issue of combating terrorism which Sopel selects for discussion in the fragment below concerns biometric identity cards. Drawing on the institutional convention of discussing political matters for which the politician can be held to account, Sopel makes an issue of one of the Conservatives' political stances indicating lack of support for the government's proposal to introduce biometric identity cards. The Conservatives' non-supportive attitude is met with criticism from Sopel because, according to him, it is inconsistent with an earlier supportive attitude towards the introduction of biometric identity cards. In response to the charge of inconsistency, Hague retracts one of the two standpoints. The exchange between Sopel and Hague on this issue runs as follows:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> And Labor say the big thing that you could do to help would be to support identity cards. It's fair to say that this is an issue that your party has rather flip flopped on isn't it.
>
> *William Hague:*
> Well it's… I think it's become clearer over time where we should stand on this, let's put it that way, because we've got the government adopting an identity card scheme, but one that is so bureaucratic and involves a vast data base and this is the government of serial catastrophes when it comes to data bases as we all know, costing now, according to the London School of Economics, up to twenty billion pounds and we said that if some of that money was spent instead on an effective border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects, and strengthening special branch and things like that, we'd actually get a lot further…. (interjection)….having identity cards.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> Isn't that a detail of the legislation. I mean you supported identity cards back in December 2004, less than two years ago.
>
> *William Hague:*
> We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.

[76] By having a non-supportive attitude towards the government's proposal, Hague claims that the Conservatives act consistently. According to him, they voted against the extension before and they maintain their vote. In an interview between Sopel and Hague taking place a few months later on July 1, 2007, the issue of support for the extension of the detention period is again discussed. This time, Sopel questions the proclaimed consistency of the Conservatives, as Hague explains that the Conservatives would vote in favor of the extension period in case the government has "compelling evidence" that justifies the prolongation.

The argumentative characterization of the activity type of a political interview made clear that the encounter between an interviewer and a politician is part of an accountability process in which the interviewer questions and criticizes a politician and the latter is expected to clarify and justify his words or actions. The question-answer exchange between Sopel and Hague illustrates one way in which the accountability process takes place: Sopel advances an accusation of inconsistency for which Hague should answer: *it's fair to say that this is an issue your party has rather flipped flopped on isn't it*. Knowing that Sopel acts as an accounting agent, his words cannot be interpreted as a request for information whether the Conservatives have flipped flopped on the issue of biometric identity cards. Sopel, who knows very well that Hague's party is inconsistent, is in essence interested in challenging Hague to clarify and justify the Conservatives' stance not to support the government despite the earlier claimed support. His question restricts Hague to confirming the attributed flip flopping (*isn't it*), a confirmation which he can use as an argument in favor of an implicit standpoint that the Conservatives' stance is not adequate. Sopel's role is to secure answers that go beyond purely providing information; his question is, therefore, a way of subjecting Hague's views to critical testing.

The criticism raised by Sopel is not a simple expression of doubt. Sopel does not just question Hague for the Conservatives' inconsistency, but explicitly gives a negative evaluation of his party's stance (*your party has rather flipped flopped*). Sopel anticipates, given the institutional context of a political interview, that Hague will argue for an implicit standpoint that the Conservatives' stance is adequate. In an effort to show that this expected standpoint is not tenable, Sopel gives a negative evaluation that is not a mere expression of doubt, but a refutation of Hague's expected standpoint.[77] In his second turn in this fragment, Sopel argues explicitly for the inconsistency by pointing at the Conservatives' support for biometric identity cards less than two years earlier, thus turning the accusation, presented at first as an argument for the standpoint that the Conservatives' stance is not adequate, into a sub-standpoint. The reference to the shared background information is aimed at directing Hague to retract his standpoint and thereby retract his implicit standpoint that the Conservatives' stance on biometric identity cards is adequate. If Hague were to retract, the discussion would end with Sopel maintaining his criticism of inconsistency. Sopel's argumentation can be reconstructed as in Figure 4.4:

[77] Sopel's refutation of the anticipated standpoint that the Conservatives' decision is adequate comes after Hague has repeatedly argued for the adequacy of his views and actions in previous interviews in which he had to answer for being inconsistent. Just prior to the time at which the interview chosen for analysis took place, Sopel questioned Hague on the issue of consistency within the party among party members. On September 30, 2007 the same matter is again discussed.

(1)	(The Conservatives' stance regarding biometric identity cards is not adequate)
(1).1	The Conservatives have flipped flopped on biometric identity cards
(1).1.1	The Conservatives have supported biometric identity cards less than two years earlier, whereas now they do not support them

Figure 4.4 Sopel's argumentation in the discussion with Hague

The attributed inconsistency (sub-standpoint (1).1 in Figure 4.4), justified by the factual argument that the Conservatives supported the introduction of biometric identity cards less than two years earlier, whereas now they do not support them, makes it impossible for Hague to deny the inconsistency. His current standpoint according to which the Conservatives do not support the introduction of biometric identity cards is, according to Sopel, obviously inconsistent with Hague's other standpoint (less than two years earlier) indicating support for the introduction of biometric identity cards. But as Hague himself argues in his first reply, there are a lot of reasons for which the Conservatives cannot be supportive of biometric identity cards (as argued in the three main arguments according to which the details are not impressive, the card scheme is bureaucratic, and the costs are terrible).

In this initial situation of the political interview, Hague has only one option: to retract one of the inconsistent standpoints. As an accountable agent who has to justify his performance, retracting a standpoint, though, is certainly not the best option for Hague. It would show to the television-watching audience that he is not able to provide an account. This would have negative consequences for the political party Hague represents, eventually coming to light in the long term. A party which cannot act consistently on such an important matter cannot be expected to be fit for solving the problems of the country and does not have the public's support.

To avoid losing the discussion, Hague 'compensates' for the retraction to which he is obliged: he advances a modified version of the original standpoint indicating support for the introduction of biometric identity cards. Hague modifies his original standpoint by making a dissociation between the principle of introducing biometric identity cards and the practice of introducing biometric identity cards (*I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out*).[78] As van Rees (2009: 64)

[78] The retraction of the original standpoint is implicit in the dissociation Hague makes, as a speaker cannot advance a modified standpoint without having retracted the earlier standpoint. The list of allowable illocutionary acts specified in the ideal model of critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 101) makes it possible to distinguish analytically moves that are left implicit in the discourse (such as the retraction of a standpoint). There are also other ways to identify the retraction of a standpoint. As van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans (2007a: 62) remark, the word "but" is an indicator that what follows after it is an alternative to a standpoint which is withdrawn. Moreover, the identity conditions that

explains, the use of dissociation allows Hague to give an interpretation of his standpoint according to which the support showed earlier concerned the principle and it was a conditional support that depended on the details of putting the idea of the introduction of biometric identity cards into practice. Since the details have not been worked out satisfactorily, the Conservatives, according to Hague, cannot be supportive of the idea of introducing biometric identity cards. In fact, Hague seems to suggest that his supportive standpoint for the introduction of biometric identity cards always concerned the principle and not the details, which means that his party has never been inconsistent. Guided by the characterization of the activity type of a political interview according to which the politician is the protagonist of the standpoint that *My (party's) words and/or actions are adequate*, Hague's argumentation can be reconstructed as in Figure 4.5:

(1)	(The Conservatives' stance regarding biometric identity cards is adequate)
((1).1)	(The Conservatives are not inconsistent about biometric identity cards)
((1).1).1a	Less than two years ago, the Conservatives supported the principle, not the details of introducing biometric identity cards
(((1).1).1b)	(There was good reason not to support the details)
(((1).1).1b).1a	The details are not impressive
(((1).1).1b).1a.1	The details have not been worked out satisfactorily
(((1).1).1b).1b	The card scheme is bureaucratic
(((1).1).1b).1b. 1	The card scheme involves a vast database
(((1).1).1b).1c	The costs are terrible
(((1).1).1b).1c.1	The scheme costs two billion pounds
(((1).1).1b).1d	The money should be used instead on an effective border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects

Figure 4.5 Hague's argumentation

By arguing in the way shown in this reconstruction, Hague lives up to his political role obliging him to refute Sopel's criticism ((1) in Figure 4.4) that the Conservatives' stance is not adequate. At the same time, he accepts the inconsistency of which he is accused, as it would be very strange, when confronted with clear proof ((1).1.1 in Figure 4.4), to deny it as being untrue. Hague finds moreover a way to provide an account by advancing a modified version of the original standpoint and arguing for it ((((1).1).1b).1a, (((1).1).1b).1b, and (((1).1).1b).1c in Figure 4.5).

The choice for continuing the discussion by retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints and immediately afterwards advancing a modified standpoint leaves Hague

characterize the illocutionary act of retraction can be used as pointers to the move of retraction of a standpoint.

with two dialectical routes he can follow for winning the discussion. One of the dialectical routes, as shown in the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage in which a modified standpoint is included (4.2), is to try and lead Sopel to immediately retract his criticism. The choice for taking this route seems suitable because Hague would show that Sopel's standpoint that the Conservatives' stance is not adequate is not tenable by maintaining the opposite standpoint. This choice, however, is unsuitable in this political interview. Following this route could be an option in a political interview if Sopel had advanced mere criticism instead of an accusation of inconsistency. Such a charge is too serious and the matter discussed too important for Hague to afford not accounting for his party's decision.

Another option that Hague could take to win the discussion is to lead the sub-discussion into a mixed difference of opinion in which he advances arguments justifying the Conservatives' stance. If Hague is to live up to his institutional obligation to defend the Conservatives' stance, he has to challenge and refute Sopel's arguments in which criticism of their stance is expressed. In this case in which a serious charge is raised, the argumentative sub-confrontation is preconditioned to result in a mixed difference of opinion. What Hague is expected to do is to not accept Sopel's criticism of the Conservatives' decision and also to refute it by arguing for the opposite (sub-)standpoint. If this sequential way of proceeding is accepted, the difference of opinion ends in Hague's favor.

By taking a dialectical route which eventually leads him to argue for his (sub)standpoint, Hague exploits to his advantage the argumentative situation created at the point in the discussion in which Sopel advances an accusation of inconsistency and Hague has to retract his standpoint. In the first place, Hague incurs the commitment of giving up a standpoint, but he turns this constraint into an opportunity for advancing a modified version of the original standpoint for which the earlier advanced arguments are more suitable. Further, Sopel becomes committed to accepting that Hague's response is an answer to the charge of inconsistency (Figure 4.2)[79] so that he cannot claim later that Hague is avoiding an answer. It is characteristical of a political interview that the politician evading an answer creates an additional burden of justification for evasion. By making Sopel accept that his modified standpoint counts as an answer to the charge of inconsistency, Hague avoids incurring an additional burden of justification.

Obtaining an outcome in which Hague gives an account of the Conservatives' political stance on biometric identity cards is a potentially effective confrontational maneuver in the political interview at hand due to the combined exploitation of the three aspects of strategic

[79] As will be shown, accepting Hague's response as an answer to the charge of inconsistency is a way of emphasizing that the preparatory conditions of an accusation of inconsistency (Chapter 2) have been fulfilled. Hence, Hague adapts to his interlocutor (van Eemeren 2010: 112).

maneuvering. First, Hague makes a choice from the available *topical potential* by selecting from the range of options outlined in the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. This choice amounts to retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints which is subsequently modified. This choice is vital to Hague in this political interview: just as Sopel chooses to hold him to account by pursuing the most critical line of inquiry, Hague should find a way to give an account of the Conservatives' stance on biometric identity cards that is most effective in taking away Sopel's criticism.

In order to define clearly the difference of opinion with Sopel, Hague can choose from a number of options (Figure 4.3). His preference is for responding to the criticism by advancing a modified version of the original standpoint that the Conservatives support the introduction of biometric identity cards. In the modified version, Hague presents the support as conditional upon the way in which the details are worked out. Given that the details have not been worked out well, Hague can use this fact as a reason for the Conservatives to have changed their mind.

By defining the confrontation in accordance with his preference for a conditional support for biometric identity cards, Hague chooses a middle ground that does not fully accept the accusation of inconsistency, but does not reject it either. Sopel's charge is directed at making Hague accept the accusation as correct. This involves accepting that there is an inconsistency, that the presence of an inconsistency is an obstruction to the argumentative exchange in which Hague and Sopel are engaged and that a response that answers the charge should be given (as specified in the preparatory conditions of an accusation of inconsistency). In the political domain in which the discussion takes place, accepting the charge of inconsistency in this way by simply retracting his standpoint would raise a question about Hague's credibility before the audience. What is the audience to believe of a politician who is confronted with a significant allegation but does not take the opportunity to respond (or cannot respond) by accounting for his words? At the same time, it is almost impossible for Hague to reject the accusation: he is presented with clear evidence that less than two years earlier the Conservatives have taken the opposite stance regarding biometric identity cards. Making a choice for a conditional support and arguing for it is in the circumstances perhaps the most effective topical selection.

Second, Hague responds to *audience demand* in his strategic maneuvering.[80] At all times, the discussion takes place between Hague and Sopel, but as in most activity types making use of deliberation, the audience at home is the primary addressee. Just as Hague's words are scrutinized by Sopel in order to be in agreement with the audience's presumed interest in Hague's political stance, as a holder of political authority Hague is primarily

[80] According to van Eemeren (2010: 108), two issues are crucial in adapting to audience demand: identifying the audience and identifying their relevant views and preferences.

interested in making a favorable impression on the public. Having to address both Sopel and the television-watching audience, Hague has to take into account the commitments and preferences of the immediate interlocutor and those of the general public.

The task of adapting himself to Sopel is fulfilled by Hague by taking into account that in the political interview Sopel's role is to thoroughly criticize his interlocutor. To respond as effectively as possible to such criticism, Hague tries to give a response that has the highest chances of being accepted as an answer to the charge. To make his response acceptable, one of the best policies, as remarked by van Eemeren (2010: 112), is to act as if the preparatory conditions of the accusation of inconsistency have been fulfilled. These conditions indicate which requirements regarding the addressee must be fulfilled for a correct performance of the illocutionary act. That is to say, a potentially suitable maneuvering for Hague is to accept that he has committed an inconsistency, which is obstructing the discussion in which participants are involved. However, simply accepting that an inconsistency is at issue by retracting a standpoint is not the most favorable choice. Consequently, Hague finds a way to make his response more acceptable by advancing a modified version of his standpoint that is justified in the way shown in Figure 4.5.

The task of identifying the views and preferences of the audience at home is a more difficult enterprise for Hague. The audience of political interviews is both multiple (the members of the audience have different positions regarding the issue under discussion) and mixed (they have different starting points). [81] Despite this diversity in audience, the institutional context is such that certain preferences can be expected. Because the audience usually judges the acceptability of a politician's words or actions in comparison with the words or actions of his political rivals, Hague draws on this institutional characteristic by directing his response not only against Sopel's statement, but also against his political opponents. In the reformulated standpoint (*I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out*), *subject to how the details were worked out* suggests that the details have not been worked well by the government. That Hague's words criticize the government for the lack of quality of the details of how the idea of introducing biometric identity cards has been put into practice is confirmed when arguments are given for why there is good reason for the Conservatives not to support the details. In this way, the constraint of responding to criticism is turned into an opportunity to portray the Conservatives as offering a better alternative to combating terrorism: instead of using the money on biometric identity cards, it should be used on an effective border police and strengthened surveillance of terrorist suspects. By providing this argument ((((1).1).1b).1d in Figure 4.5) for the implicit standpoint that the Conservatives' stance is

[81] Van Eemeren (2010: 110) distinguishes in the case of a heterogeneous audience between a multiple and a mixed audience.

adequate ((1) in Figure 4.5) Hague lives up to his political role of refuting the potential criticism that the Conservatives are not making a concrete proposal for combating terrorism.[82]

Hague's retraction of his original standpoint and his advancing a modified version of it is most likely well adapted to the audience if one takes into account that it allows him to show that the Conservatives have never been inconsistent. By reformulating his standpoint implying that it has always concerned the principle and not the details of putting the idea of biometric identity cards into practice, Hague claims that no change of position has occurred. Creating this impression gives Hague the advantage that the public may judge his words as acceptable. The audience applies a standard of consistency that is common to all activity types in the political domain. A politician who cannot be at least consistent cannot be expected to solve the country's problems.

Finally, Hague makes a potentially effective *presentational choice* for his strategic maneuvering. Sopel's accusation of inconsistency is formulated as a polar question (*it's fair to say that this is an issue your party has rather flipped flopped isn't it*), aimed at limiting Hague's options for a response to either an explicit acceptance or a rejection. Hague has to design his response in such a way that neither of the two possibilities is chosen, because they are both disadvantageous for him. Accepting the charge is not a good option because it makes it look as if Hague is a politician who cannot be trusted because he does not meet a standard of consistency. Rejecting the accusation is impossible, because the accusation is well justified by a factual argument ((1).1.1 in Figure 4.4). The use of a dissociation to distinguish between the principle and the practice of introducing biometric identity cards is perhaps most suitable in a case in which an inconsistency is pointed out (van Rees 2009: 63). Hague backs out from the commitment to the original standpoint (indicating a supportive attitude towards the introduction of biometric identity cards), but at the same time he maintains a certain interpretation of this standpoint (the Conservatives support the principle of introducing biometric identity cards). He claims moreover that the original standpoint always indicated support for the principle of introducing biometric identity cards. If this perspective is accepted, it looks as if the Conservatives have not been inconsistent at all.[83]

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[82] The audience is also taken into account in argument ((1).1).1b).1c (The costs are terrible) supported in turn by ((1).1).1b).1c.1 (The scheme costs two billion pounds). These two arguments suggest that some of the money the audience pays is wasted.

[83] Van Rees (2009: 120-121) discusses three reasons for which the use of a dissociation can gain the audience's acceptance: (a) it inherently acknowledges the audience's views (in the case at hand, Hague acknowledges to some extent that Sopel's accusation is correct); (b) it obviates the need to argue for one's position by offering an alternative interpretation (enough to convince the audience that the original interpretation does not hold), and (c) it is authoritatively posed (in this case, the distinction between the principle and the practice is presented as self-evident, presupposing that the distinction introduced is

Example 2

Another example selected for analyzing the politician's strategic maneuvering in a political interview comes from a discussion between Jon Sopel and Yvette Cooper on July 15, 2007. At the time of the interview, Cooper was the Housing Minister of Great Britain. As can be expected, Cooper is interviewed on an issue for which she is in the first place responsible: housing in Great Britain. In relation to this issue, Sopel questions Cooper in a way that is clearly part of the game of playing the devil's advocate. He asks questions with regard to the building of new housing, the role of the local councils and the type of new housing (social housing, private housing and shared ownership), which are not so much aimed at obtaining information from Cooper on these matters as at challenging her to endorse positions she would rather not take and clarify problems to which Cooper should have a solution in case they would arise. The following fragment is an illustration from the beginning of the interview in which Sopel presses Cooper to respond to critical questions:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> Well the minister responsible for housing is Yvette Cooper and it was a sign of Gordon Brown's intent on this issue that she's one of the new faces round the Cabinet table. I spoke to her just before we came on air and asked her if Britain should follow Germany's example and build on more green field sites.
>
> *Yvette Cooper:*
> Well, we do need to build more homes because we need to help first time buyers and also people who are on council waiting lists and who need homes for the future, but we do think the priority should be around brown field land. We've already seen a big increase in the proportion of homes being built on brown field land, over the last ten years and we think that's important but ultimately, local councils need to decide what the best location is in their area.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> But you've had a review on this, the Barker Review, that looked at what the availability would be of brown field sites, came up with a figure of just under being able to create a million new homes, your estimate is that you need three and a half million new homes.
>
> *Yvette Cooper:*
> That's right. And the thing about brown field land is that it comes, it becomes available all the time because you have you know, maybe a factory that closes or maybe use that changes in a particular area, so brown field land does develop and change. But ultimately, it is for local councils to decide what is the best location in their area, and they have to look at all the areas you know, around the town, the town centre, in their communities, because they'll know best where these homes should best be built to meet their local needs.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> You keep saying brown field sites, but brown field sites are also our playing fields our parks, our gardens.

---

accepted; the use of the definite article *the* in *I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out* is an indicator of this self-evidence).

> *Yvette Cooper:*
> No. That's not right. Parks and playing fields have special protection and we have also given local councils greater powers to differentiate between different kinds of brown field land, so that they can introduce much stronger protections on perhaps garden land in an area, where they've got alternative sites available.
>
> But the bottom line is, that people do need to identify where the homes should go. It's no good just saying, here's all the areas we're going to protect and oh, there's nothing left, you know, we're not going to build any homes anywhere. We need to build the homes but of course, we've got to protect the urban green spaces and make sure, that you know, those are the parks and the play areas for the children to play in as they grow.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> Because one of the things we saw in that film there, in Germany was that people that person saying, look, you can't just worry about fossilizing the countryside and keeping that beautiful and then just cramming everybody tight in to cities and towns. They've got to have quality of life too.
>
> *Yvette Cooper:*
> Well you've got to improve both the towns and cities but also rural areas. We've been working for example with the affordable rural housing commission on the need to build more affordable housing in rural areas because sometimes you get small villages and areas where they are in danger of becoming fossilized if they don't have small numbers of affordable homes and other homes being build in those communities too. So this is about you know, recognising the different character of different communities but every single community recognising that more homes do need to be built.

As can be seen in this fragment, in his first question Sopel asks Cooper to express a view with regard to building on green field sites following a German example. Cooper advances a view according to which more houses need to be built, but the priority should be around brown field sites. In the same answer, Cooper emphasizes that local councils will eventually decide on the best location. In response to this, Sopel remarks that the Barker Review indicates that there is a very great need for houses: no less than approximately three and a half million homes need to be built to meet the current needs. This remark is obviously not a piece of information which Sopel gives to Cooper. As Housing Minister, she is informed about such statistical data. The question is a challenge to make Cooper justify her view expressed in answer to Sopel's first question. She supports her view that the priority should be around brown fields by pointing at the large number of factories which are often closed down and on the land of which new houses can be built. Once again, Cooper underlines that it is eventually for the local councils to take the decisions. Sopel puts more pressure on Cooper to come up with arguments for supporting brown field sites: he points out that brown field sites include parks and gardens. By making this remark, Sopel would like Cooper to explain how she will put into practice the plan to build so many houses. Mentioning the parks and gardens is a way of challenging her to endorse a position according to which this land could be used for meeting housing needs. After Cooper explains that there are different kinds of brown fields, some of which such as parks and gardens are protected and will not be built on, she emphasizes that a solution needs to

be found to solve the housing problem. Sopel keeps on raising new doubts: if the green space is so much protected, the plan of building so many new houses will end up with cramming everyone into towns and cities and fossilizing the countryside. Sopel tries to make Cooper concede that this solution is not good because the quality of life will be lowered.[84]

Returning to the power of the local councils to take decisions on the issue of housing, Sopel criticizes Cooper because, as he puts it, she said in the beginning of the interview that local councils are free to take decisions about housing, whereas later in the same interview she said that local councils are not in fact free to do so. Like in Hague's response in example 1, Cooper replies to the charge of inconsistency by retracting one of the two standpoints. The exchange between Sopel and Cooper in which the accusation of inconsistency is made is reproduced below:

> *Jon Sopel:*
> You keep stressing that it's up to local councils, local councils to decide what is the best thing to do. What do you do with the local council who say, well frankly, we don't think we want to build that much.
>
> *Yvette Cooper:*
> Well we do have a serious problem with Conservative local councils in particular across the south east region in particular, but not just there, who are opposing increases in housing…the south east Regional Assembly indeed has been arguing for cuts in the level of house building over the next few years, which I just think it's bonkers, given the needs we have. But I think it's, you know, it's not on really for councils to simply turn their backs and say, well we don't want any new houses round here, build them somewhere else. Build them in another community, build them in another town.
>
> Every town, every city, every community has first time buyers who can't get on the ladder, has sons and daughters who are still stuck living at home with their mum and dad because they just can't afford anywhere to live, that is not fair and every community needs to recognize its responsibility to do something about that.
>
> *Jon Sopel:*
> But you just said at the start, it's up to councils to decide. Councils could decide they don't want to build extra houses, then what are you going to do about it.
>
> *Yvette Cooper:*
> No, we're clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they've got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes.
>
> You know, they may need more family homes in their area to look at those sorts of issues as well. What they can't do is turn their backs on their responsibility to deliver more homes and interestingly, we had forty towns and cities came forward over the last twelve months to say, well we want to increase the level of homes in our area.

[84] This example is a good illustration of the way in which retrospective accountability (accounting for what the politician has said and done) as well as prospective accountability (accounting for what the politician plans to do) are at work.

Sopel's first question in the fragment just mentioned is meant to put more pressure on Cooper to give a justification of her plans. She is asked to imagine a situation in which local councils, making use of the power they have to make decisions, would say that they do not want to build more (*You keep stressing that it's up to local councils, local councils to decide what is the best thing to do. What do you do with the local council who say, well frankly, we don't think we want to build that much).* After Cooper has emphasized that a decision to build is not up to the local councils, Sopel accuses Cooper of holding inconsistent standpoints. According to him, she said in the beginning of the interview that it is up to councils to decide about the construction of new houses, but now she seems to advocate this no longer (*But you just said at the start, it's up to councils to decide*). Knowing that in this interview Sopel plays the devil's advocate who claims that *The politician's words and/or actions are not adequate*, his criticism can be reconstructed in the argumentation structure of the justification of the accusation in Figure 4.6:

(1)	(Cooper's view with regard to the construction of new houses is not adequate)
((1).1)	(Cooper's view with regard to the decisional power of the local councils on the construction of new houses is inconsistent)
((1).1).1	Cooper says that local councils cannot take decisions with regard to the construction of new houses
(((1).1).1')	(Local councils not being allowed to take decisions with regard to the construction of new houses is the opposite of Cooper's saying in the beginning of the interview that local councils can take such decisions)

Figure 4.6 Sopel's argumentation in the discussion with Cooper

This reconstruction shows that Sopel's accusation of inconsistency is not a simple criticism. It is a way of justifying that Cooper's view on the decisional power of the local councils is not adequate in order to challenge her once more to clarify and justify her views. However, the attribution of two inconsistent commitments about the power of the local councils to build new houses (((1).1).1 in Figure 4.6) is not justified. In the beginning of the interview, Cooper does not simply say that *it's up to councils to decide*, as Sopel claims, but she says that *it's up to councils to decide what the best location is in their area*.[85] In this formulation, it is ambiguous whether the local councils can decide whether to build on brown fields or not or whether they can decide what the best location is on these brown fields. Taking advantage of this ambiguity, Sopel interprets the advocated power of the local councils as referring to full power to take decisions. Because this power

[85] Sopel seems guilty in this case of a straw man fallacy, because he attributes to Cooper more than what she actually says.

is later in the interview restricted to power where to build and what type of houses to build, Sopel accuses Cooper of being inconsistent.

In the context of a political interview, Sopel's accusation of inconsistency is a challenge to respond to the charge (as specified in the essential condition of an accusation of inconsistency) and, at the same time, a request for clarification is embedded in the charge (*what are you going to do about it).* Cooper draws on this institutional characteristic by interpreting Sopel's charge as a request for clarifying how the responsibilities of the local councils are precisely divided. However, in view of her role as a politician, she does more than simply clarify things. She rejects any suggestion that her view with regard to the decisional power of the local councils is not adequate ((1) in Figure 4.7) by implicitly arguing that her view with regard to the decisional power of the local councils is not inconsistent (((1).1) in Figure 4.8). The argument that she is not inconsistent is further supported by Cooper when she argues that local councils do have decisional power, but not the power to decide whether to build nor not (*No, we're clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they've got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes).* The full reconstruction of Cooper's argumentation can be represented as follows:

(1)	(My view with regard to the decisional power of the local councils concerning the construction of new houses is adequate)
((1).1)	(My view with regard to the decisional power of the local councils is not inconsistent, nor does it amount to taking away too much decisional power from the local councils)
((1).1).1a	Local councils do have decisional power, but not power whether to build or not
(((1).1).1b)	(There is good reason for the local councils not to have the power to decide whether to build or not)
(((1).1).1b).1	There is a great need for housing
(((1).1).1b).1.1	There are a lot of first time buyers who do not have a house

Figure 4.7 Cooper's argumentation

By embedding a clarification in her answer, Cooper accepts that what she said in the beginning of the interview has been unclear. In addition to making clear what kind of power local councils have, she also argues why local councils do not have the power to decide whether to build or not ((((1).1).1b), (((1).1).1b).1, and (((1).1).1b).1.1 in Figure 4.7). In her answer, addressing directly Sopel's accusation of inconsistency (((1).1).1a in Figure 4.7), she admits that her original (unclear) standpoint about the power of the local

councils is tenable only if a more limited interpretation is given: local councils have the power to decide about the location, the brown fields and the kinds of homes. Cooper restricts the decisional power of the local councils originally advocated by retracting her standpoint and reformulating it in terms of responsibilities (*they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes).* In this way, she leaves the impression that there is no inconsistency and clarifies what might have been unclear.

Cooper's solution to solve the problem of inconsistency is probably the most suitable strategic choice from the available *topical potential*. At this stage of the discussion, she could have maintained exactly what she said in the beginning. But because of the unclear earlier formulation, by maintaining it, she would have given the impression that local councils have full power to take decisions. This topical choice would have made her look inconsistent: if local councils have the power to decide, as she said in the beginning, then this is inconsistent with the what she says later in the interview when she circumscribes the power of the local councils to deciding about where to build and what kind of houses to build. Another option for Cooper could be to retract what she said in the beginning. But if she retracts the original standpoint, again because of the unclear formulation, it would have looked as if local councils do not have the power to take decisions. This is obviously an option she would rather avoid: local councils are executive bodies and taking away their decisional power would be an abuse. Given that neither of the options just outlined is advantageous, Cooper goes for a middle choice: she retracts to some extent what she said in the beginning, reformulates that in terms of responsibilities, and clarifies how these responsibilities are divided. In this way, she is no longer committed to the standpoint she originally advanced, but exploits this by advancing a reformulated standpoint that makes her no longer seem inconsistent. Equally important, Sopel becomes committed to accepting Cooper's answer as a response to the charge of inconsistency and cannot claim otherwise at a later stage of the discussion. That is to say, Sopel has to retract his criticism of inconsistency.

Cooper's maneuvering with the topical potential is potentially effective if only because in this way the power of the local councils is on the one hand acknowledged, as the local councils would like, but on the other hand restricted, as she would like. Her maneuvering may moreover be effective because it is designed in such a way that *audience demands* are perfectly met. In the interview, Cooper has to address not just Sopel as the direct interlocutor, but also the general public watching the interview and the local councils. In order to respond to Sopel's views and commitments, Cooper is obliged to address the issue of inconsistency or she cannot clear herself from the accusation. In the context of a political interview, Cooper cannot straightaway deny the charge, despite her knowing that she has not been inconsistent as Sopel claims. Even the perception of an inconsistency can be extremely damaging, because it might suggest that Cooper is

indecisive. She has to achieve her aim of making Sopel retract any criticism in a less direct manner. She implicitly acknowledges that the way she talked in the beginning is at least unclear by providing a clarification of what she said before. Her clarification is well adapted to the local councils: they not only know now exactly what their responsibilities are, but also that they have power to take certain decisions. Their power is limited, but on objective grounds: there are many people in need of housing (as indicated in the statistics, according to which at least forty cities and towns are in need of housing). Pointing at people's needs will in all probability also go down well with the public, as among them there are certainly also those in need of housing. These people will easily accept that whether to build or not should not be a matter of choice for the local councils, but a responsibility they have to assume.

The characterization of a political interview has shown that in an accountability process taking place in a deliberative context, imposing sanctions is part of the game. Cooper avoids being sanctioned by the public by showing a close interest in the people's needs. She emphasizes their need for housing and imposes the construction of new houses as a responsibility that has to be assumed and is not a matter of choice.

The clarity with which Cooper specifies which responsibilities and which flexibilities local councils have seems a good choice in terms of *presentational means*. Although it may seem at first sight as if no special presentational devices are employed, the precision with which things are presented is an excellent means for making Cooper's move more easily acceptable. After all, it is exactly a lack of clarity which Sopel exploits in his accusation of inconsistency. By readjusting this problematic aspect, Cooper has better chances of making herself understood (thus obtaining the desired communicative effect) and eventually have her move accepted (thus obtaining the desired interactional effect).

Example 3

A final example in which I analyze a politician's strategic maneuvering comes from an interview between Jon Sopel and Alan Duncan on December 9, 2007. At the time of the interview, Duncan was Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Entreprise and Regulatory Reform. The example has been mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter to illustrate the case in which an accusation is made to point at an inconsistency between words. Sopel criticizes the Conservatives, represented here by Duncan, for being in favor of the use of nuclear energy, because this favorable attitude is inconsistent with a previously expressed non-supportive attitude towards the use of nuclear energy. In response to the charge, Duncan retracts one of the inconsistent standpoints in order to no longer seem inconsistent. The exchange between Sopel and Duncan is reproduced as follows:

Jon Sopel:
And on nuclear, the government says that obviously has to be part of the mix. Are you on that page as well.

Alan Duncan:
Our policy is absolutely clear and it's again, very similar, we want approval for sites and designs. We want a proper carbon price, we want honesty about costs, with no subsidy. Get on with the decision to do something with the waste, again, David Cameron said that this week, and I think the government has been a bit slow on working out what to do with nuclear waste. So then people can invest and I think probably they will.

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.

'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'

Alan Duncan:
so fluent.

Jon Sopel:
Yes. But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there. It has to be the last option, now you're saying, we're on the same page as the government and yes, let's get on with it.

Alan Duncan:
I think what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy. I think it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words and I think the policy as it has always been is exactly as I've just explained.

Jon Sopel:
So you are fine about nuclear.

In this fragment, Sopel asks Duncan to express a view with regard to the use of nuclear energy (*And on nuclear, the government says that obviously has to be part of the mix. Are you on that page as well).* Taking into account what Sopel says in his next reply (*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),* Sopel's first question cannot really be meant to gain information from Duncan. Sopel knows very well from a previous interview what the Conservatives' view on the use of nuclear energy is, and he also knows that they have changed their view. As Duncan himself mentions, David Cameron, the Leader of the Conservatives, made their (supportive) view known earlier in the same week in which the interview was held (*Get on with the decision to do something with the waste, again, David Cameron said that this week*). Therefore, Sopel's first question is preparatory for the accusation of inconsistency launched in his next reply, which he later maintains (*But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there. It has to be the last option, now*

you're saying, we're on the same page as the government and yes, let's get on with it). Because a discussion on the issue of nuclear energy has taken place before, Sopel opens a new discussion on the same issue precisely to challenge Duncan to account for the Conservatives' change of position. Knowing that Sopel argues for the standpoint that *The Conservatives' views with regard to the use of nuclear energy are not adequate*, his argumentation can be reconstructed in the following way:

(1)	(The Conservatives' views with regard to the use of nuclear energy are not adequate)
((1).1)	(The Conservatives' views with regard to the use of nuclear energy are inconsistent)
((1).1).1	Duncan said in a previous interview that the Conservatives do not support the use of nuclear energy, whereas now they support the use of nuclear energy

Figure 4.8 Sopel's argumentation in the discussion with Duncan

Just like in examples 1 and 2 in which the politicians were challenged to respond to a charge of inconsistency, Sopel's accusation criticizes the Conservatives in an attempt at obtaining from Duncan an account that justifies the change of position. To make his accusation acceptable, Sopel justifies it by quoting Duncan's earlier statement indicating, according to Sopel, lack of support for the use of nuclear energy. The word-by-word quote leaves Duncan only one option to respond: he has to retract what he said earlier. He is obliged to maintain the support just claimed, if only because otherwise he would claim the opposite of what the Leader of the Conservatives said earlier that week. But simply retracting what he said earlier means conceding that Sopel's criticism is correct. For the public the Conservatives are then people who cannot be trusted, because they easily change their mind without a good reason for doing so. Realizing that a potentially negative image about his party could be created for the audience at home, Duncan tries to find a way out. Although not explicitly, he makes a dissociation between the nuclear energy policy and the nuclear energy practice. As far as the policy is concerned, Duncan says, the Conservatives have always been in support of the use of nuclear energy. The current standpoint regards this policy of using nuclear energy, which has never changed, while the previous statement quoted by Sopel concerned something else (the practice of using nuclear energy). The dissociation enables Duncan to give a particular interpretation of his earlier standpoint – presented as the less important one (concerning the practice) – in which he gives up this standpoint, while maintaining another interpretation of the standpoint (concerning the policy) presented as the most important interpretation. Duncan's argumentation can be represented in the following argumentation structure:

(1)	(The Conservatives' views with regard to the use of nuclear energy are adequate)
((1).1)	(The Conservatives' views with regard to the use of nuclear energy are not inconsistent)
((1).1).1	The Conservatives have never opposed the policy of using nuclear energy, but the practice of using nuclear energy

Figure 4.9 Duncan's argumentation

Because Sopel justifies the accusation of inconsistency with a word-by-word quote Duncan cannot simply deny what he has said earlier. The only option from the *topical potential* is to retract the originally advanced standpoint. This move is disadvantageous to him because he gives up something he said himself and for which he was supposed to have good arguments. Instead, Duncan claims support for the policy of using nuclear energy without giving any further argumentation. The dissociation between the policy of using nuclear energy and the practice of using nuclear energy is a *presentational means* with which Duncan exploits the constraint of having to retract his original standpoint to his advantage. He backs out from a commitment to a standpoint but makes it look like this is not really the case: his original standpoint concerned something else (the practice of using nuclear energy) that he presents as not very important. According to Duncan, the crucial aspect is the policy of using nuclear energy (*what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy).* The constraint of having to retract his original standpoint is moreover exploited for reasons of *audience adaptation*. By retracting his standpoint, Duncan grants Sopel a concession that his accusation is correct and needs to be dealt with by a retraction. But the concession Duncan makes concerns an interpretation that is presented as marginal (about the practice of using nuclear energy), while he takes a position on an interpretation that suits him better (about the policy of using nuclear energy). In the way the policy is introduced, the audience will find it almost impossible to reject Duncan's reformulated standpoint. His words (we want a *proper* carbon price, we want *honesty* about costs, so then *people* can invest) are potentially well suited to elicit a positive attitude. Duncan does not precizate further what a proper price exactly is or what honesty about costs means. Without further precization, people associate with these words the values that they subscribe to.[86]

[86] This example is very similar to the one provided and discussed by Naess (1966: 92-93) in which a politician's way of expression concerning democracy suggests furthering the interests of the people. According to Naess, a wording without further precization makes it almost impossible not to be accepted.

4.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have characterized a politician's responses to an interviewer's accusation of inconsistency that are realized by retracting one of the inconsistent standpoints. In a political interview, the interviewer's charge of inconsistency is a criticism of the politician's words or actions that functions as an implicit argument in support of the standpoint that the politician's words or actions are not adequate. Anticipating that such a charge will not be easily accepted, the interviewer justifies his accusation, thus turning the argument into a sub-standpoint. In the context of a political interview, the politician has to respond to such criticism by going beyond merely questioning its acceptability. He has to argue against the interviewer's charge of inconsistency and in favor of a standpoint according to which his words or actions are adequate. In order to give the defense expected of him in a political interview, the politician who has to retract a standpoint also needs to find a compensating adjustment. To remain within the boundaries of reasonableness, this adjustment is a reformulated standpoint that allows him to continue the discussion and argue for the adequacy of his words or actions.

A detailed analysis of three argumentative exchanges in which politicians are accused of being inconsistent has illustrated what kind of advantages a politician can gain when he retracts one of the inconsistent standpoints and afterwards reformulates it. The analysis has brought to light three patterns of confrontational strategic maneuvering which a politician resorts to when he is confronted with an accusation of inconsistency. The first pattern, as illustrated by the Sopel-Hague exchange, amounts to reformulating the original standpoint in such a way that in the reformulated standpoint the politician's support is dependent upon certain conditions being fulfilled. The second pattern, as can be seen in the Sopel-Cooper exchange, consists in the politician reformulating the original standpoint by portraying the interviewer's interpretation that there is an inconsistency as a misunderstanding that needs clarification. The third pattern, as can be seen in the Sopel-Duncan exchange, amounts to reformulating the original standpoint in such a way that the politician can claim that the original standpoint concerned something different than what the current standpoint pertains to.

The three patterns that can be expected in a political interview in response to an accusation of inconsistency have certain features in common. First, the politician lives up to the institutional requirement of giving an account of his words or actions. Second, the politician takes away the inconsistency with which he is charged. Finally, the politician repairs the potentially damaging image suggested by the accusation of inconsistency. Being inconsistent could be seen as a sign of indecisiveness which might suggest to some that the politician cannot be trusted on his word. By means of one of the three patterns of

maneuvering, the politician is likely to create a better image of himself for the audience at home.