

Ruling out a Standpoint by means of an Accusation of Inconsistency

Descartar un punto de vista a través de una acusación de inconsistencia

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Abstract: This paper examines the argumentative move in which a discussant responds to a standpoint by accusing the protagonist of that standpoint of being inconsistent in an attempt to exclude the standpoint from the discussion. In analyzing this move a connection is made between the pragmatic characteristics of the move and its dialectical function. Dialectically, the move counts as an expression of critical doubt aimed at eliminating an initial disagreement. Pragmatically, the response is an instance of doubt that is expressed indirectly by means of the speech act of accusation of inconsistency. The characterisation is intended to show how the accusation attempts to bring about the retraction of the standpoint doubted as one particular perlocutionary effect of the speech act, namely repairing the alleged inconsistency by retracting one of the mutually inconsistent commitments.

Keywords: British House of Commons, dialectics, inconsistency, retraction, standpoint.

Resumen: En este trabajo se discute el movimiento argumentativo en el que un hablante responde a punto de vista acusando a quien lo avanzó de ser inconsistente, en un intento de excluir tal punto de vista de la discusión. Para analizar este tipo de movimiento se desarrolla una conexión entre las características pragmáticas y su función dialéctica. Desde un punto de vista dialéctico, el movimiento cuenta como una expresión de una duda crítica con el objeto de eliminar un desacuerdo inicial. Desde un punto de vista pragmático, la respuesta es una instancia de duda que es expresada indirectamente a través de un acto de habla de acusación de inconsistencia. Esta caracterización intenta mostrar cómo la acusación busca causar un efecto perlocutivo particular en la retractación del punto de vista dudado, a saber, reparar la apuntada

inconsistencia mediante la retractación de uno de los compromisos mutuamente inconsistentes.

Palabras clave: Cámara británica de los comunes, dialéctica, inconsistencia, retractación, punto de vista.

1. Introduction

The argumentative move in which a discussant responds to a standpoint by accusing the proponent of that standpoint of being inconsistent in an attempt to exclude the standpoint from the discussion is common in public political discussions. The following is an example. It is part of an exchange in the British House of Commons between Ian Duncan Smith, the leader of the Opposition and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at the time, about the National Health Service (NHS).

Ian Duncan Smith (Leader of the Opposition):

[...] [H]ospital beds are in short supply because they are being blocked by people who cannot get a care home or nursing home bed. The figure that he did not want to provide is that 40,000—nearly 10 per cent.—fewer care home beds are available since 1997 when he took over. Age Concern says that the care sector is in crisis. The head of the Registered Nursing Homes Association said that Government policy was to blame. The Government's policies are damaging the NHS. Is not the Prime Minister's real achievement after five years to have increased both the queue to get into hospital and the queue to get out?

Tony Blair (Prime Minister):

Public sector investment in the health service has increased under the Government and is continuing to increase. We are roughly the only major industrial country anywhere in the world that is increasing expenditure on health and education as a proportion of national income. Is it the Conservative party's case that we are not spending enough on health and education? When we announced our spending plans, Conservatives called them reckless and irresponsible. We know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the national health service because he does not be-

lieve in it. The clearest evidence of that came yesterday, when the Leader of the Opposition said:

“The health service doesn’t serve anybody... It doesn’t serve doctors or nurses. It doesn’t help the people who are treated.”

What an insult to the NHS and the people who work in it! Conservatives denigrate the health service because they want to undermine it. We want to increase investment, whereas the right hon. Gentleman would cut it.

(House of Commons official report, 2002)

In his question to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition advances the standpoint that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS*.¹ In his answer, Mr. Blair attempts to exclude this standpoint from the discussion by accusing the Opposition of an inconsistency in its attitude towards the NHS. Referring to the Conservatives’ opposition to more investment in health, as well as quoting Mr. Duncan Smith about the worthlessness of the NHS, Mr. Blair claims that Mr. Duncan Smith cannot be critical of government policies in relation to the NHS. As presented by Mr. Blair, the view that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS* is inconsistent with Mr. Duncan Smith’s previous positions, namely that the NHS does not deserve to be taken care of. By presenting the current point of view of Mr. Duncan Smith as being inconsistent with the latter’s previous positions, Mr. Blair portrays Mr. Duncan Smith’s current point of view as a position that is untenable, in an attempt to avoid a discussion about it.

In this paper, moves such as the Prime Minister’s above are examined within the pragma-dialectical framework (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004; van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002). They are examined and characterised as a particular way of confrontational strategic manoeuvring (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2009). The characterisation connects the pragmatic characteristics of the move to its dialectical function. Dialectically, the move counts as an expression of critical doubt that attempts to eliminate an initial disagreement. Pragmatically, the response is an instance of doubt that is expressed indirectly by means of the speech act of accusation of inconsis-

¹ The question and answer are part of a longer exchange in which the performance of the Government is discussed. For a more detailed analysis see (Mohammed, Forthcoming).

tency. The characterisation is intended to show how the accusation attempts to bring about the retraction of the standpoint doubted as one particular perlocutionary effect of the speech act, namely repairing the alleged inconsistency by retracting one of the mutually inconsistent commitments.

2. The elimination of the initial disagreement

The attempt of a discussant to exclude a standpoint from the discussion occurs in argumentative confrontations. In these confrontations, an initial disagreement arises between a discussant who is the proponent of a standpoint and another discussant who casts doubt on this standpoint. This initial disagreement can give rise to an externalised difference of opinion to be resolved by means of argumentation if the two discussants maintain their points of view and express commitment to them. Otherwise, if any of the discussants retracts his point of view, the initial disagreement is eliminated. A discussant's attempt to exclude a standpoint from the discussion by means of an accusation of inconsistency is an attempt to lead the opponent of this standpoint to retract it in order to eliminate the initial disagreement.

The attempt of a discussant to exclude a standpoint from the discussion by means of an accusation of inconsistency can be considered as instances of confrontational strategic manoeuvring. As defined by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2000, 2002) strategic manoeuvring refers to the arguers' attempts to reasonably steer discussions towards favourable outcomes, an attempt to strike a balance between the aim of critically testing a point of view, i.e. the dialectical aim, and the aim of winning the discussion, i.e. the rhetorical aim. Confrontational strategic manoeuvring, which is the arguers' strategic manoeuvring in argumentative confrontations, concerns the definition of the difference of opinion (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2009). In argumentative confrontations, arguers are expected to pursue the dialectical aim of defining the difference of opinion at issue in a way that does not hinder the critical testing procedure. In this stage of an argumentative discussion, arguers are also expected to pursue the rhetorical aim of defining the difference of opinion in the most opportune way in order to win the discussion. To strategically manoeuvre in this stage is to attempt to strike a balance between these two aims and reach a definition of the difference of

opinion that is opportune without hindering the critical testing procedure.

Argumentative confrontation can lead to different outcomes. That is to say that different types of disputes (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992: 16-22) can result from the different ways in which an initial disagreement between two arguers evolves in their confrontation. For example, arguers arrive at a definition of their difference of opinion as a non-mixed dispute when the standpoint at issue is not accepted, i.e. is faced with mere doubt. In such cases, one of the arguers expresses a certain standpoint and upholds it while the other expresses and upholds doubt concerning this expressed standpoint. In other cases, the standpoint at issue is also rejected. In that case, the definition of the difference of opinion obtained is a mixed dispute, in which one of the arguers expresses and upholds a certain standpoint against the (expressed and upheld) doubt of the other arguer who expresses and upholds an opposite standpoint. There are, however, also cases in which the argumentative confrontation evolves in a way that eliminates the disagreement. For example, the arguer who has advanced a certain standpoint may realise, once his standpoint is faced with doubt, that he cannot commit himself to the defence of this standpoint, and may therefore retract (rather than uphold) the standpoint that he has advanced. The outcome of the confrontation in such a case is a definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute.²

The Prime Minister's attempt to eliminate his disagreement with the Leader of the Opposition, in the exchange above is an example of confrontational strategic manoeuvring that aims at arriving at the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute. The Prime Minister casts doubt upon the standpoint of the Opposition by pointing out that Mr. Duncan Smith cannot uphold a claim that is inconsistent with another position that he can be held committed to, aiming to lead him to retract his claim. The retraction of the critical standpoint by the Opposition would bring about an outcome of the argumentative confrontation that is favourable to the Prime Minister. The success of Mr. Blair's accusation of inconsistency against Mr. Duncan

² Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992a) do not mention no dispute as one of the types of disputes that can result from argumentative confrontations; however, the retraction of a standpoint advanced and the retraction of the doubt cast are listed as options that are available to arguers in the confrontation (1984: 101). The definition of the difference of opinion as a no dispute is the result of these two options being kept available to arguers.

Smith would spare him the need to discuss whether or not government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS, because Mr. Duncan Smith's retraction of his critical standpoint would eliminate the initial disagreement about this standpoint. The definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute, which results from Mr. Duncan Smith's retraction of his standpoint, is very likely to be considered a victory for Mr. Blair. The Prime Minister would seem to have managed to steer the argumentative confrontation towards the favourable outcome of identifying no dispute about the Opposition's retracted critical standpoint, and therefore would be considered to have defeated the Opposition without the need to engage in a discussion concerning their standpoint.

The Prime Minister's resort to an accusation of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint of the Opposition is a good example of arguers' attempts to remain within the boundaries of reasonableness while steering argumentative confrontations towards favourable outcomes. Pointing out an inconsistency between the Opposition's point of view at issue and another position or action of the Opposition seems a reasonable way to lead the Opposition to retract the standpoint at issue. After all, one cannot maintain two mutually inconsistent positions about the same matter simultaneously. In view of the alleged inconsistency, it becomes in principle reasonable to consider the point of view at issue untenable and in need of retraction. Indeed, the Prime Minister's attempt to exclude an opposition standpoint from the discussion is not necessarily unreasonable. Argumentative confrontations can evolve reasonably and yet yield a definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute. In order to establish in a more systematic way how reasonable argumentative confrontations may evolve, and how they may lead to the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute, the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion is useful.

3. A dialectical profile of the confrontation stage

Dialectical profiles are heuristic tools developed within the pragma-dialectical framework in order to provide a step-by-step specification of the moves that the two discussants in a critical discussion can make or have to make (van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007a, 2007b). The pro-

files represent in the form of dialogical trees the moves that are relevant to the critical resolution of the difference of opinion. For every stage of the resolution process, a dialectical profile can be designed to represent the sequential patterns of moves that contribute to the realisation of a particular dialectical aim in this stage. The dialectical profile of the confrontation stage would, for example, spell out the different procedural ways in which the difference of opinion can be defined.

It is crucial to emphasise that dialectical profiles are not designed to provide a descriptive representation of how argumentative exchanges actually proceed; they are rather designed to provide a normative representation of how such exchanges ought to proceed in order for a particular dialectical aim of a particular dialectical stage to be realised. For example, the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage is designed to represent how argumentative confrontations ought to proceed if arguers aim at defining their difference of opinion in a reasonable way. For that, the parties' dialectical obligations in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion are expressed in terms of turns in a tree-like dialogical diagram.³

In what follows, I shall propose a design for the dialectical profile of the part of the confrontation stage that covers the argumentative move at issue in this paper.⁴ In designing the profile, I shall follow the principles of (a) systematicity, (b) comprehensiveness, (c) analyticity, (d) economy and (e) finiteness as suggested by van Eemeren *et al.* (2009). By operating in this way, the presentation of sequential moves will include all the moves that are necessary for the achievement of every definition of the difference of opinion that is achieved in accordance with the ideal dialectical procedure of critical testing, without becoming too complex, repetitive or infinite. A basic dialectical profile⁵ of the confrontation stage of a potentially non-mixed

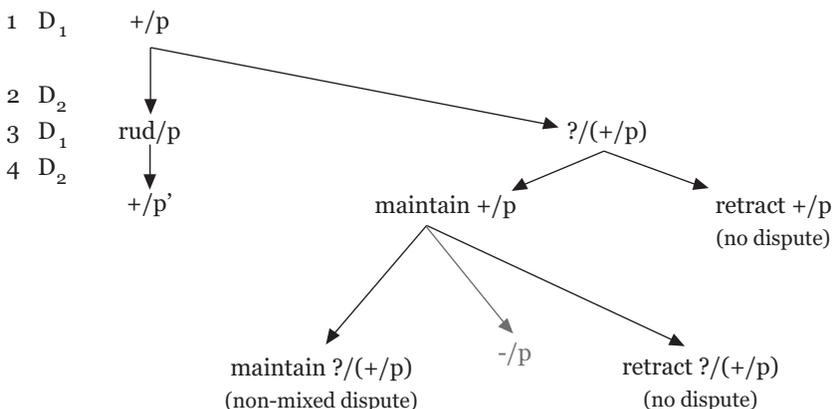
³ The idea of dialectical profiles was inspired by Walton and Krabbe's idea of a profile of dialogue (Krabbe, 1992, 2002; Walton & Krabbe, 1995; Walton 1999). However, unlike profiles of dialogue, dialectical profiles are always supposed to be normative (van Eemeren, Houtlosser & Snoeck Henkemans, 2007a). That eventually makes the heuristic functions of the two concepts significantly different.

⁴ See Mohammed (2009) for a design of the complete dialectical profile of the confrontation stage.

⁵ The profile suggested is basic in the sense that it expresses the basic dialectical procedure. Based on it, extended profiles can be designed to highlight specific extra elements such as the formulation of the expressed opinion (e.g. van Laar, 2006).

dispute is presented below (*Figure 1*) followed by a step-by-step specification of how an ideal confrontation can proceed.

Figure 1. Dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a potentially non-mixed dispute.



- D₁: the proponent of a standpoint
- D₂: a discussant who doubts the standpoint
- +/p: Advance a positive standpoint concerning the proposition p
- ?/(+p): Cast doubt on the positive standpoint
- /p: Advance a negative standpoint concerning the proposition p
- ?/(-p): Cast doubt on the negative standpoint
- rud/p: Request a usage declarative concerning the proposition p
- +/p': Advance a reformulation of the positive standpoint by using a usage declarative

The confrontation stage of a critical discussion is initiated by an arguer, discussant 1 (*D*₁), expressing a standpoint (*turn 1*), and another arguer, discussant 2 (*D*₂), casting doubt on it (*turn 2, right branch*). In these first two turns, an initial disagreement is externalised concerning a certain stand-

point. This externalised initial disagreement triggers the critical discussion aimed at critically resolving the difference of opinion. However, the externalisation of this initial disagreement is not enough for a complete confrontation; the discussants need to arrive at a definition of their difference of opinion. In order for that to happen, D_1 is required in his next turn to either uphold his expressed standpoint or retract it (*turn 3*). Because ideally the discussants are voluntarily engaged in a critical discussion about a certain standpoint, both options should be allowable to D_1 in response to the doubt of D_2 . While upholding the expressed standpoint would be a step towards confirming the initial disagreement, the retraction of the expressed opinion would terminate it. Retracting the expressed standpoint at this turn would leave the discussants with no externalised disagreement, and would therefore end the confrontation stage with no dispute to resolve (*turn 3, right branch*).⁶

In response to D_1 upholding his expressed opinion, D_2 should also be given the chance to either maintain or retract his expressed doubt concerning D_1 's expressed opinion (*turn 4*). Here too, both options should be granted to D_2 in order to guarantee the discussants' freedom of engagement in a discussion. The retraction of the expressed doubt by D_2 would leave the discussants with no disagreement to resolve, and therefore end the confrontation stage with a definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute (*turn 4, right branch*). The upholding of doubt by D_2 would in contrast confirm the difference of opinion between the discussants: there would then be an elementary difference of opinion, a non-mixed dispute in which D_1 has a positive standpoint that D_2 doubts (*turn 4, left branch*).⁷

The specification presented above describes the different ways in which an ideal confrontation can proceed; an actual confrontation hardly ever proceeds as described. Actual argumentative confrontations are never ideal in the sense that they do hardly ever aim solely at defining the difference of

⁶ The retraction of doubt or of the standpoint advanced, at this point of the argumentative exchange, does not fall under the problematic cases of retractions discussed by Krabbe (2001). At this point, the retraction does not remove a commitment that is necessary for the other party to build a case. It is, consequently, not a retraction that hinders the critical testing procedure and should therefore be considered permissible.

⁷ The profile also includes the option for D_2 to respond to the initial expression of the positive standpoint of D_1 by requesting the latter to define or clarify some terms or to be more precise or detailed in expressing his standpoint. This is achieved by performing a

opinion between the arguers in a way that does not hinder critical testing. Furthermore, actual argumentative confrontations are not always reasonable, in the sense that even when arguers are actually geared towards achieving a clear definition of the difference of opinion, their efforts need not always be successful and they might well fail to achieve the definition they pursue. Moreover, arguers can even be geared towards a reasonable definition of their difference of opinion, and argue reasonably, without necessarily performing all and only those moves that are prescribed in the ideal model and represented in the dialectical profile. An arguer can for example express his doubt by means of a question or a request for justification, and he may also respond to an initial expression of a positive standpoint by the immediate expression of the opposite standpoint.

In spite of the gap that exists between ideal and actual argumentative exchanges, dialectical profiles are instrumental for the examination of actual argumentative confrontations. Every move in the profile is in fact a slot that expresses the (dialectical) function of a multitude of actual argumentative moves that can be considered analytically relevant, and is in that sense a slot for analytically relevant moves (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006). As van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, 2004) explain, a particular argumen-

request for a usage declarative (D_2 , *turn 2, left branch*) that promotes mutual comprehension of the expressed standpoint (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984: p. 109). In response to this request, D_1 has to provide the requested usage declarative, which results in a reformulation of the initial standpoint that is clearer, more precise or more detailed (D_1 , *turn 3, left branch*). In response to this reformulated standpoint, D_2 can either express doubt, or request another usage declarative to which D_1 has to respond by a once more reformulated standpoint which can be faced with either doubt or yet another request for a usage declarative, and so on. Eventually, every reformulated standpoint of D_1 becomes an initial standpoint from which the confrontation can proceed (*turn 1*). Even though it is in principle the right of any of the discussants to request the other to perform a usage declarative that provides further definition, precisation, amplification, explication or explicitisation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984), in the confrontation stage, this move can be performed only by D_2 as a response to the initial expression of the positive standpoint by D_1 . The reason for this is that all the other moves in the confrontation stage are about a specific proposition p about which D_1 expresses a standpoint. Ideally, the need for a usage declarative to promote mutual understanding arises only as a response to the expression of the (positive) standpoint by D_1 in his first turn. Once D_2 understands D_1 's expressed standpoint, there should no longer be any room for misunderstanding. If D_1 's expressed standpoint is understood by D_2 , all the remaining moves become clear: upholding the expressed standpoint, retracting it, doubting it or retracting the doubt cast on it, as well as the expression of its opposite, retracting it, doubting it or retracting the doubt cast on it; there should be no need for a usage declarative with respect to any of these.

tative move can be considered analytically relevant when the move plays a role in the critical resolution of a difference of opinion. For example, asking a question in response to an expressed opinion is often analytically relevant because the question can function as an expression of doubt concerning the expressed opinion.⁸

Because dialectical profiles are derived from the ideal model of a critical discussion, which includes all moves that are relevant to the resolution process, these profiles taken together represent every move in actual argumentative discussions that is relevant to the resolution of the difference of opinion. Under the basic assumption that arguers are expected to pursue a critical resolution of their difference of opinion, the profiles guide the analyst into a methodological interpretation of the moves in actual argumentative exchanges. For example, with the help of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, the analyst can assign an argumentative function to the actual argumentative moves that play a role in the definition of the difference of opinion between the arguers. Every actual argumentative move that is analytically relevant can, from this perspective, be considered a realisation of a certain slot for analytically relevant moves in the dialectical profile.⁹

Viewed in light of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, a discussant's attempt to exclude a standpoint from the discussion can be viewed as an attempt to reach the outcome of no dispute at turn 3 of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. The attempt can be considered an instance of a particular *mode* of confrontational strategic manoeuvring in which a discussant who casts doubt on an expressed opinion aims to lead the other discussant, who is the proponent of this expressed opinion, to retract it in order to define the difference of opinion as no dispute. In general, a *mode* of confrontational strategic manoeuvring can be viewed as the attempt, at a certain slot for analytically relevant moves in the confrontation stage, to bring about the performance of a *preferred* analytically relevant move in a turn that follows, in order to reach a favourable definition

⁸ Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992b) draw a distinction between analytic and evaluative relevance. While it is enough for a move to play a role in the critical testing procedure to be analytically relevant, a move needs to play a positive role, i.e. to be a positive contribution to the critical testing procedure, in order for it to be also evaluatively relevant.

⁹ The profile can also be insightful in making explicit the moves that are left implicit in the discourse, such as the doubt that is implicit in expressing an opposite point of view.

of the difference of opinion. Like all modes of confrontational manoeuvring, the mode at issue aims at a favourable definition of the difference of opinion within the boundaries of critical reasonableness. This particular mode of manoeuvring can however be distinguished from other modes in terms of (a) the particular point in the dialectical procedure where it occurs, (b) the specific outcome that is pursued, and (c) the dialectical route¹⁰ that is favoured to reach the pursued outcome.

4. Strategic manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint

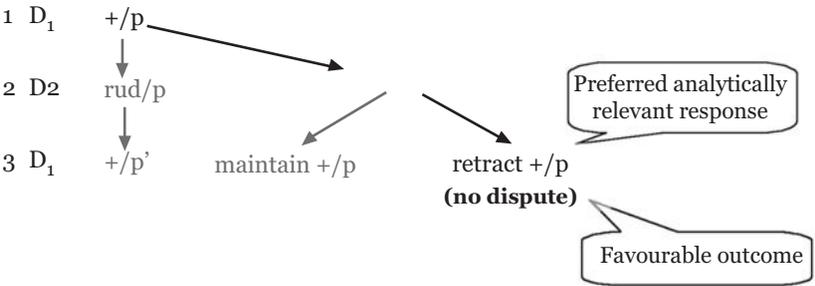
The mode of confrontational strategic manoeuvring at issue occurs at the slot for the analytically relevant move of casting doubt by D_2 on a positive standpoint that has just been expressed by D_1 . In the exchange about the NHS above, the Prime Minister reacts to the expression of a critical standpoint by the Opposition by providing justification for not accepting the expressed standpoint: Mr. Blair points out that the standpoint of Mr. Duncan Smith is inconsistent with some other position that the Opposition assumes. Because Mr. Blair's reaction conveys that the Prime Minister does not accept the standpoint of the Opposition; such reaction functions as expressions of critical doubt about it. Thus, the mode of strategic manoeuvring at issue realises the slot for the analytically relevant move of casting doubt at turn 2 of the dialectical procedure (see Figure 1, above).

The mode of confrontational strategic manoeuvring at issue aims at defining the difference of opinion as no dispute, to the favour of D_2 . As can be seen from the dialectical profile above, a no dispute outcome can be reasonably achieved at two points of the dialectical procedure sketched: turns 3 and 4. At turn 3, D_1 can retract his expressed positive standpoint. That would eliminate the initial disagreement between D_1 and D_2 leaving them with no dispute to argue about. At turn 4, D_2 can retract his expressed doubt about the positive standpoint of D_1 , which would also eliminate the initial disagreement between D_1 and D_2 leaving them with no difference of opinion to

¹⁰ A dialectical route is a sequence of analytically relevant moves that needs to be performed in order to achieve an outcome of a certain dialectical stage (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006, 2007b).

resolve by means of argumentation. While the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute resulting at turn 3 is to the favour of D_2 who would not have to give up his doubt, the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute resulting at turn 4 is to the favour of D_1 who can in fact maintain his positive standpoint. Consequently, the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute reached at turn 4 cannot be considered to be the favourable outcome pursued in a mode of strategic manoeuvring of D_2 . The particular mode of strategic manoeuvring at issue is represented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2.



The Prime Minister’s attempt to exclude the standpoint of the Opposition in the exchange about the NHS above is an instance of this mode of strategic manoeuvring. In it, the Prime Minister casts doubt on a standpoint expressed by the Opposition in a way that is very likely to lead the Opposition to retract the standpoint at issue in the next turn. The Prime Minister thereby aims to reach a definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute, which is favourable to him.

This mode of manoeuvring can be referred to, either by mentioning the slot for analytically relevant moves that it realises, as strategic manoeuvring in casting doubt, or by mentioning to the slot for analytically relevant moves that it aims at bringing about, i.e. the preferred analytically relevant response, as strategic manoeuvring to lead the proponent of a standpoint to retract his standpoint, or by mentioning both slots, as strategic manoeuvring in

casting doubt in an attempt to lead the proponent of a standpoint to retract his standpoint. Even though the latter is the most accurate of the three, for the sake of simplicity, I shall opt for a slightly less complicated way of referring merely to this mode of manoeuvring by mentioning the aim of the arguer in this mode, that of ruling out a standpoint.

As suggested above, a mode of confrontational manoeuvring is an attempt to strike a balance between arguers' dialectical and rhetorical aims at a certain slot for analytically relevant moves in the dialectical procedure of the confrontation stage. While the concern for rhetorical effectiveness directs the arguer's choices towards a favourable definition of the difference of opinion and a particular dialectical route that leads to it, i.e. a preferred dialectical route, the concern for critical reasonableness restricts their choices to those outcomes and routes that are in accord with the dialectical norm of critical testing.

The main advantage of identifying modes of confrontational strategic manoeuvring in terms of analytically relevant moves is that at this level of characterisation it is possible to generate, in a systematic way, a finite list of modes of strategic manoeuvring within the category of confrontational manoeuvring. That is because, as van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2009) observe, the dialectical profile indicates a finite set of routes that arguers can take if they want to achieve the outcome of a certain dialectical stage in a reasonable way (2009: 12).

In contrast with the finite number of analytically relevant moves that are available to the discussants in a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992a, 2004), the number of moves that the arguer may choose in actual argumentative discussions is infinite. In fact, in every actual move in an actual discussion a choice is made from countless possibilities for realising a slot for analytically relevant moves in the dialectical procedure. Because every actual argumentative move is an opportunity for strategic manoeuvring in realising a slot for analytically relevant moves in a certain dialectical stage (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006), the countless possibilities for realising a certain slot of analytically relevant moves are in fact countless *ways* of strategic manoeuvring. In other words, every mode of strategic manoeuvring, which is identified in terms of analytically relevant moves, can be realised in an indefinite number of *ways* in an actual argumentative discussion. The Prime Minister's resort to an accusation of inconsistency in

an attempt to exclude standpoints of the Opposition can be considered as a particular *way* of strategic manoeuvring, in which the particular mode of strategic manoeuvring characterised above is realised by means of accusations of inconsistency.

While a mode of strategic manoeuvring can be referred to by reference to the slots for analytically relevant moves it involves, the reference to a particular way of manoeuvring needs to include reference to the actual moves that are performed by the arguer in a discussion. The particular way of manoeuvring, subject of examination in this paper, can thus be referred to by mentioning the actual move that is performed as strategic manoeuvring by accusation of inconsistency. Reference to actual moves is however not sufficient in depicting the particular way of manoeuvring; there also needs to be a reference to the analytically relevant function of the move and the outcome it pursues. An adequate way to refer to the way of strategic manoeuvring at issue would hence be to refer to it as strategic manoeuvring in casting doubt by an accusation of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint. Here too, I opt for simplicity by referring to the way of confrontational manoeuvring at issue as strategic manoeuvring by accusation of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint. This way of referring to the manoeuvring reflects both the actual argumentative move that is performed and the favourable outcome that is aimed at. Furthermore, referring to the way of strategic manoeuvring at issue as proposed above mentions, as van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2009) recommend, the most conspicuous manifestation of the manoeuvring at issue, i.e. the accusation of inconsistency.

5. Accusations of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint

In light of the view that an instance of strategic manoeuvring is actually a speech act that realises a slot for analytically relevant moves of the dialectical procedure (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2006), the particular way of strategic manoeuvring that is the subject of this paper can be viewed as the one in which the speech act of accusation of inconsistency realises the particular mode of manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint. With the help of the characterisation of an accusation of inconsistency as a speech act (Andone, 2009) and in light of the account given by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984)

for speech acts in argumentative discussions, I shall characterise the particular way of strategic manoeuvring at issue and analyse the Prime Minister's responses in the exchange about the NHS as a case of this particular way of manoeuvring.

The account Andone provides of the speech act of accusation of inconsistency is central to the intended characterisation and analysis because it makes it possible to link the perlocutionary effects of the speech act of accusation of inconsistency to the Opposition's retraction of their standpoint, which the Prime Minister's manoeuvring aims at. As characterised by Andone (2009), "an accusation of inconsistency counts as raising a charge against an addressee for having committed himself to both p and $\neg p$ (or informal equivalents thereof) in an attempt to challenge the addressee to provide a response that answers the charge" (2009: 155).

According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), the minimal perlocutionary effect of an illocutionary act is acceptance; illocutionary acts can however have optimal perlocutionary effects as well. For example, the illocutionary act of a question has the minimal perlocutionary effect of getting itself accepted as such, but also the optimal perlocutionary effect of securing an answer. As for all other illocutionary acts, the minimal perlocutionary effect of accusations of inconsistency is acceptance. The optimal effect of this speech act (also referred to as consecutive perlocutionary effect or consecutive consequence) is what Andone refers to in the essential condition as providing a response that answers the charge. In line with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1995), who understand an accusation of inconsistency as an attempt to get the accused to eliminate the inconsistency by retracting one of the inconsistent commitments (p. 195), I suggest that such an answer needs to be the retraction of either of the two mutually inconsistent commitments expressed, i.e. either the commitment to p or the commitment to $\neg p$. In what follows, I will refer to the mutually inconsistent commitments as commitment to A and commitment to $\neg A$, in order to avoid confusing the commitment at issue with the commitment to the standpoint advanced ($+/p$).

In the exchange between Mr. Blair and Mr. Duncan Smith examined earlier, Mr. Blair accuses Mr. Duncan Smith of an inconsistency concerning the latter's attitude towards the NHS. On the one hand, the position implied in the question of Mr. Duncan, namely that the *Government is to blame for*

damaging the NHS, entails an interest in the NHS. On the other hand, the Conservatives' opposition to the government's plans to increase investment in the health sector as well as the quoted point of view of Mr. Duncan Smith commit him to an opposite attitude, Mr. Blair implies. In support of the alleged inconsistency, Mr. Blair says that 'we know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the national health service because he does not believe in it', and he quotes Mr. Duncan Smith as saying that 'the health service does not serve anybody' to conclude that the Opposition wants to undermine the NHS.

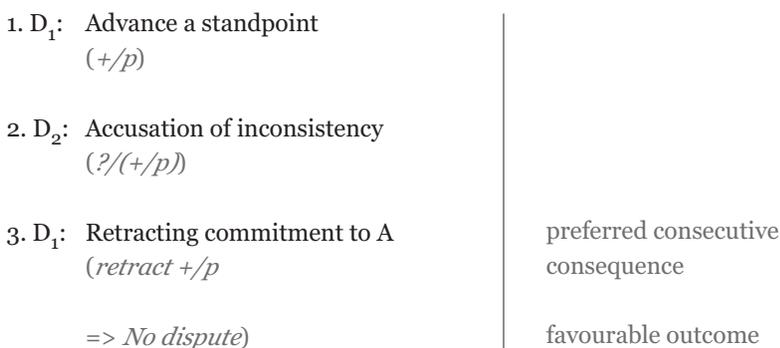
Mr. Blair's accusation attributes to Mr. Duncan Smith a commitment to *the NHS deserves to be taken care of* (A) and to its opposite. The commitment to A is presented as following from the Opposition's critical standpoint that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS*, and the opposite commitment is attributed to Mr. Duncan Smith on the basis of his previous positions, especially his quoted words that the NHS does not serve anybody. The accusation also requires the accused to retract one of the inconsistent commitments. Upon acceptance of the accusation, Mr. Duncan Smith needs to act in accordance with one of the consecutive consequences of his acceptance, i.e. he must either retract his current position (and therefore his commitment to A) or to admit that he does not maintain his other position (and therefore retract the attributed commitment to -A).

Once the expression of a standpoint and the response with an accusation of inconsistency in the actual dialogue between Mr. Blair and Mr. Duncan Smith are viewed as part of an argumentative exchange, these two actual moves can be viewed as realisations of the slots in the dialectical profile for advancing a standpoint and for casting doubt respectively. These slots are represented in turns 1 and 2 of the dialectical profile. The accusation of inconsistency can be the realisation of an expression of doubt concerning the standpoint of the Opposition that *the Government's policies are to blame for damaging the NHS* because an implication of this accusation is that the Opposition cannot express this standpoint. More precisely, in presenting the previous positions of Mr. Duncan Smith as his real position (*we know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the national health service*), Mr. Blair implies that the commitment that Mr. Duncan Smith cannot maintain is the commitment to *the NHS deserves to be taken care of*. Since this commitment, which needs to be retracted ac-

According to Mr. Blair, follows from the standpoint of the Opposition, Mr. Blair's accusation can be taken to convey his doubt concerning the standpoint of the Opposition.

When an accusation of inconsistency is employed in an argumentative discussion, arguers usually aim to bring about one particular consecutive consequence of the illocutionary act: either the retraction of the commitment to A, or the retraction of the commitment to $\neg A$. The particular consecutive consequence that an arguer aims at will be hereafter referred to as the *preferred* consecutive consequence. Considering that the speech act of accusation of inconsistency is a realisation of a certain slot for analytically relevant moves in a particular mode of strategic manoeuvring, the preferred consecutive consequence will realise the preferred analytically relevant move in that particular mode of manoeuvring. When an accusation of inconsistency is employed to rule out a standpoint, I take the preferred consecutive consequence to be the retraction of the commitment that follows from the standpoint of the proponent, i.e. the commitment to A, because such a retraction entails the retraction of the expressed standpoint itself, which is the preferred analytically relevant response in the mode of strategic manoeuvring at issue (*see Figure 3, below*).

Figure 3. Actual preferred route taken in the strategic manoeuvring by accusation of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint.



The retraction of the commitment to *the NHS deserves to be taken care of* by Mr. Duncan Smith is clearly the response preferred by Mr. Blair. In his response to the standpoint of Mr. Duncan Smith, Mr. Blair seems to imply that the Opposition cannot criticise the government for having policies that damage the NHS if they do not think that the NHS deserves to be taken care of. Failing to commit to *the NHS deserves to be taken care of* therefore requires the Opposition to retract the standpoint that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS*. In other words, the retraction of the commitment to *the NHS deserves to be taken care of* by Mr. Duncan Smith would be a realisation of the slot for retracting the expressed standpoint in the dialectical procedure.

When an arguer manoeuvres strategically to rule out a standpoint by means of an accusation of inconsistency the arguer makes the most opportune choices from the topical potential, audience frames and stylistic devices that are available in order to lead the proponent to retract his commitment to A, and to portray the retraction of the proponent's standpoint to be due as a consequence of the retraction of the commitment to A. For instance, Mr. Blair exploits the three aspects of strategic manoeuvring in an attempt to appear reasonable while leading Mr. Duncan Smith to retract the standpoint that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS* through the retraction of his commitment to the proposition that *the NHS deserves to be taken care of*.

From the topical potential available to Mr. Blair, he has chosen to express his doubt about the opposition standpoint by reference to a relevant inconsistency in the position of the Opposition. From all the propositions that follow from the Opposition's (current) standpoint, Mr. Blair selected a proposition A (*the NHS deserves to be taken care of*) that is inconsistent with another position of the Opposition, namely the one against investment in the health sector. The accusation of inconsistency puts pressure on the Opposition to retract one of the inconsistent commitments. The Prime Minister's choice of the previous position puts pressure on the Opposition to retract the commitment that follows from the current position, i.e. commitment to A, rather than the other commitment assumed. In other words, the choice of the previous position directs the Opposition towards Mr. Blair's preferred response. Mr. Blair chooses to refer to a particular position of the Opposition that is not easy to abandon. He refers to one of the Conservative

Party's principal positions, one that is very unlikely to change: the opposition to more investment in public sector. From this position, Mr. Blair draws an opportune implication that is inconsistent with the Opposition's current position, namely that the Opposition can be held committed to –A (*the NHS does not deserve to be taken care of*). He further quotes Mr. Duncan Smith as saying that the NHS does not serve anybody to support the attribution of the latter commitment. Given that Mr. Duncan Smith is very unlikely to give up the Conservatives' position against investment in the public sector, there is little chance that he would retract the commitment implied in the other position. It is rather the commitment that follows from the current standpoint that Mr. Duncan Smith will have to retract if he accepts the alleged inconsistency.

Mr. Blair's choice from the topical potential becomes an even more effective means of directing Mr. Duncan Smith towards the retraction of his standpoint thanks to an opportune choice of stylistic devices in presenting the alleged inconsistency. For example, Mr. Blair's presents Mr. Duncan Smith's commitment to *the NHS does not deserve to be taken care of* as beyond doubt when he says 'we know that the right hon. Gentleman wants to run down the national health service'. Such a presentation is opportune because it creates the impression that the accusation of inconsistency will be acceptable, i.e. the minimal perlocutionary effect of the speech act will be achieved, and that therefore Mr. Duncan Smith will have to make a choice between the two inconsistent commitments, i.e. the optimal perlocutionary effect of the speech act is expected. In other words, the way the accusation is formulated makes it not easy for the accused to deny it.

Furthermore, Mr. Blair attempts to present his accusation in a way that supports his interpretation of the Opposition's previous position as implying the commitment to –A. As he presents the Conservatives' opposition to an increase of investment in the health sector, Mr. Blair repeats in different formulations the idea that the Conservatives do not care about the NHS: they want to run it down, they do not believe in it, they say it does not serve anybody, they insult it, denigrate it and want to undermine it. To attribute these different and yet much related attitudes towards the NHS to the Conservatives strengthens the implication that the Opposition does not think that the *NHS deserves to be taken care of*. Mr. Blair presents these different and yet very related attitudes as variations of the same commitment, namely

that the NHS does not deserve to be taken care of, in order to compensate for the absence of an explicit pronouncement where this commitment is clearly taken by the Opposition.

The Prime Minister's choices of the topic and presentation of the accusation of inconsistency are in fact strategic only in combination with a particular choice of audience frame: the Conservative Party as a proponent of the critical standpoint that the Prime Minister wishes to exclude from the discussion. Had the proponent of the standpoint that *government policies are to blame for damaging the NHS* been an MP from a party that does not oppose investment in health, the Prime Minister would not have been capable of pointing out an inconsistency in the position of this proponent concerning the commitment as to whether or not *the NHS deserves to be taken care of*. With such a proponent, it would not have been possible for Mr. Blair to express doubt by means of the accusation of inconsistency that he employs to doubt Mr. Duncan Smith's standpoint.

Not only the appropriateness but also the effectiveness of employing the particular accusation which Mr. Blair employs depends on the proponent of the standpoint that he attempts to rule out. For example, suppose the proponent had been some other MP from the Conservative Party, an MP who is not the leader of the party or someone who had not expressed his standpoint against investment in health so strongly. For such a proponent, it would have been easier to change his mind concerning the Party's original position against the investment in health. There is a quite good chance that such a proponent would retract the commitment to –A instead of retracting the commitment to A as Mr. Blair's strategic manoeuvring intends. Because of the personal nature of commitments, strategic manoeuvring by means of accusations of inconsistency is more audience-frame-dependent than other ways of strategic manoeuvring are.

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