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Mohammed, D.A.

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2 STRATEGIC MANOEUVRING WITH ACCUSATIONS OF INCONSISTENCY

2.1 Explicit attempts to avoid a discussion

It may very easily happen in Question Time that the Prime Minister is confronted with criticism that he would rather not discuss. For example, he may have no strong defence against a point of view of the Opposition that is critical with respect to the consequences of a government policy or plan, but still would rather not admit that things are not going as they should. In such cases, it seems advantageous for the Prime Minister to avoid a discussion about the criticism expressed. Sometimes, the Prime Minister's attempt to avoid the discussion of a certain point of view is discreet. The Prime Minister may for instance respond to the initial critical standpoint of the Opposition by advancing and defending an alternative standpoint of his own that is different from the initial standpoint but related to the same issue. Cases of evasion arise from these discreet attempts. The exchange below, between Ian Duncan Smith, the leader of the Opposition, and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, is an example.

- (1) *Ian Duncan Smith (Leader of the Opposition):*
May I join the Prime Minister in congratulating Her Majesty on the 50th anniversary of her accession? Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether the number of cancelled operations has risen or fallen since he came to power?

Tony Blair (Prime Minister):
It has risen; however—[Hon. Members: "How much?"] It has risen by about 20,000; however, the number of operations as a whole has also risen by more than 500,000; 19 out of 20 operations are done on time; the average waiting time for an operation has fallen since 1997; and, therefore, although it is correct that the number of cancelled operations has risen, if we look at the number of operations as a whole—more than 5.5 million in this country—I think that the national health service has a record to be proud of.

Mr. Duncan Smith:
The answer is quite correct: 50 per cent. I have to tell the Prime Minister that that is not just a figure. He talks about the rise in the number of operations done, but the numbers that have been cancelled have risen as well, and that is a real tragedy for those who have to wait. [Interruption.] Well, the reality—he may not want to hear this—is that this is not one or two cases, but 80,000 people who have had their operations cancelled on the day when they were expecting to have them. That is a matter of fear and anxiety for 80,000 people—many more than when he came to power. So, as those numbers have risen and 80,000 people have had their operations cancelled, will he now tell us the reason why?

Mr. Blair:

As I explained a moment ago, far more operations have been done by the national health service—about 500,000 more. Less than 2 per cent. of operations are cancelled, which should put the matter in perspective. The only answer is indeed to increase the capacity of the health service, including more nurses, doctors and consultants, as well as other staff, and more beds. That is precisely why we are increasing investment in the national health service. The right hon. Gentleman is in favour of cutting that investment. Therefore, whatever the problems of cancelled operations—I say that they should be put in perspective—the remedy that he has, which is to cut that investment, is the wrong remedy. The remedy that we have—invest and reform—is the right one.

(House of Commons official report, 2002)

Mr. Duncan Smith's question, in his first turn, whether the number of cancelled operations has risen or fallen since the Prime Minister came to power cannot be meant literally. There is no doubt that the Leader of the Conservative Opposition knows well that the number of cancelled operations has risen under the Labour Government. In fact, by means of the question, Mr. Duncan Smith means to imply a critical standpoint regarding the National Health Service (NHS), namely that *there is a problematic rise in the number of cancelled operations*. In his response, Mr. Blair answers the literal question but avoids discussing the critical standpoint implied. He admits that the number has risen, but does not want to discuss whether this is a problematic rise or not. From his answer, it seems that Mr. Blair would rather discuss the performance of the NHS in general. The figures he presents of the number of operations carried out by the NHS in general, the percentage of operations carried out on time and the average waiting time are all arguments that he presents in defence of an alternative standpoint, namely that *the NHS has a record to be proud of*. By portraying the rise in the number of cancelled operations as trivial in comparison with the record of the NHS, Mr. Blair attempts to avoid a discussion about the standpoint of the Opposition without the need to express explicitly that he is not willing to discuss the rise itself.

Mr. Blair's attempt to avoid discussing Mr. Duncan Smith's standpoint about the problematic nature of the rise in the number of the cancelled operations is not really successful. In his next turn, Mr. Duncan Smith persists in expressing his standpoint, and cites the actual number of cancelled operations, 80,000 cases, arguing that such a huge number cannot be considered trivial. Mr. Duncan Smith's persistence gets Mr. Blair to discuss, in the turn that follows, the standpoint about the problematic rise that he attempted to ignore. In his second

turn, Mr. Blair concedes that the rise can be considered a problem but he does so only to criticise the Opposition and justify the policies of his own Government; he says ‘whatever the problems of cancelled operations –I say that they should be put in perspective– the remedy that he has, which is to cut that investment, is the wrong remedy. The remedy that we have—invest and reform—is the right one’. In spite of this criticism, Mr. Blair’s concession is important for Mr. Duncan Smith, who uses it, eventually, to support yet another critical standpoint: *government policies are damaging the NHS*. This standpoint is hinted at when Mr. Duncan Smith says ‘So, as those numbers have risen and 80,000 people have had their operations cancelled, will he now tell us the reason why?’ in his second turn. In his third turn which will be discussed in example (3) to come, this standpoint is expressed explicitly.

The Prime Minister’s attempt to avoid the discussion can also be far less discreet. The Prime Minister might for example attempt to exclude from the discussion a critical standpoint of the Opposition by portraying the standpoint as not worth any discussion. In such attempts, the Prime Minister expresses explicitly that he is not willing to discuss a certain critical standpoint of the Opposition even though he does not accept it. In this study, I shall refer to the Prime Minister’s explicit attempts to avoid discussing a standpoint of the Opposition as attempts to exclude that standpoint from the discussion. I take the explicit unwillingness to discuss a certain standpoint to be central to the attempt of a discussant to exclude another discussant’s standpoint from the discussion. In fact, it is this explicit unwillingness that distinguishes the attempt to exclude a standpoint from the discussion from the mere evasion of a standpoint, both being attempts to avoid the discussion about a certain standpoint.

The expression of unwillingness usually involves some justification for excluding from the discussion the standpoint that is not accepted. For example, the Prime Minister often portrays the standpoint he wishes to exclude as ridiculous, inappropriate or even illegitimate. The exchange below is an example of the Prime Minister’s attempts to justify excluding from the discussion a standpoint of the Opposition that he does not agree with.

(2) *David Cameron (Leader of the Opposition):*

There are currently six police investigations under way into the conduct of government in London. The most recent allegations are that the London Mayor's director for equalities and policing has been channelling public funds into organisations run by friends and cronies. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that that is completely unacceptable?

Gordon Brown (Prime Minister):

As on any occasion when a matter referring to a police investigation is raised, I have to say this is a matter for the police. It should be fully investigated, but it is not a matter for this House until the police complete their investigations.

(House of Commons official report, 2008c)

Mr. Cameron's question to the Prime Minister addresses the conduct of the Government in London in light of a heated controversy over an alleged misuse of public funds by Lee Jasper, the London Mayor's Senior Policy Advisor on Equalities. In his question, Mr. Cameron implies that *it is unacceptable that the London Mayor's director for equalities and policing -Lee Jasper- has been channelling public funds into organisations run by friends and cronies*. A difference of opinion is presumed to arise in relation to this standpoint. Mr. Brown can be expected not to accept the standpoint implied, if only because he would not want to agree with a point of view that is negative of a civil servant who is a fellow member of the Labour Party. Mr. Brown is, however, unwilling to engage in a discussion about the standpoint implied. The case mentioned should not be the subject of a discussion in Parliament because it is being investigated by the police, he argues. By referring to the Parliament's *sub judice rule*, according to which Houses of Parliament must not discuss current or impending court cases (Rogers & Walters, 2006: p. 303), Mr. Brown attempts to exclude from the discussion a standpoint that he does not accept. Regardless of the reasons behind this attempt –it could be that, on the one hand, the Prime Minister finds it difficult to engage in a discussion about Mr. Cameron's standpoint because he has no evidence against the alleged corruption, but that, on the other hand, he would not want to seem hesitant about the unacceptability of the alleged corruption– Mr. Brown's response is an example of a very common (and institutionally acceptable) way of excluding standpoints expressed by the Opposition in Question Time.

Another common way of excluding standpoints expressed by the Opposition in Question Time is when the Prime Minister justifies the exclusion of a certain standpoint of the Opposition by referring to an inconsistency in the

latter's position. These attempts constitute the focus of this study. The following is an example:

(3) *Ian Duncan Smith (Leader of the Opposition):*
[...] The answer that he did not give to my question is that hospital 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 believe 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)

The question and answer are part of the same exchange as example (1) earlier. After the Leader of the Opposition had managed to get the Prime Minister to concede that the rise of cancelled operations is problematic (*example (1)*), he advances in his question, in example (3) above, the standpoint that *government policies are damaging the NHS*.

Mr. Blair's response is again an attempt to avoid discussing the critical standpoint of the Opposition, this time by an explicit attempt to exclude this standpoint from the discussion. 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*, which was put forward in the question of Mr. Duncan Smith, 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 other words, Mr. Blair points out an inconsistency in Mr. Duncan Smith's position in an attempt to exclude his standpoint from the discussion.

2.2 The elimination of the initial disagreement

The attempts of the Prime Minister to exclude from the discussion a standpoint of the Opposition occur in argumentative confrontations. In these confrontations, there is an initial disagreement between the Prime Minister and the Opposition about a critical point of the Opposition. This disagreement can give rise to an externalised difference of opinion to be resolved by means of argumentation if the Prime Minister and the Opposition maintain their points of view and express commitment to them. The Prime Minister's attempts to exclude opposition standpoints from the discussion are attempts to do away with the initial disagreement without argumentation. The Prime Minister wants to point out the untenability of the standpoint of the Opposition, aiming to lead the MP from the Opposition to retract it. The retraction of the standpoint is favourable to the Prime Minister: it eliminates the initial disagreement that triggered the argumentative confrontation and creates a situation in which the Prime Minister does not need to refute the criticism he does not accept.

The Prime Minister's attempts to eliminate his disagreement with the Opposition about standpoints expressed by the latter, by means of accusations of inconsistency, can be considered as instances of confrontational strategic manoeuvring. As defined by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999, 2003b) strategic manoeuvring refers to the arguers' attempt to reasonably steer the discussion towards a favourable outcome. It is the attempt with every argumentative move in a discussion 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, 2007b). 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 specific aims and attempt to 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, 1992a: pp. 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 (merely) 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.⁸

The Prime Minister's attempts to eliminate his disagreement with the Opposition, in the examples (2) and (3) above, are examples of confrontational strategic manoeuvring that aims at arriving at the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute. In these attempts, the Prime Minister casts doubt upon the critical standpoint of the Opposition by pointing out reasons for considering this

⁸ 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: p. 101). The definition of the difference of opinion as a no dispute is the result of these two options being kept available to arguers.

standpoint untenable, aiming to lead the Opposition to retract it. In example (2), Mr. Brown's reference to the *sub judice* rule provides support for considering Mr. Cameron's point of view about the Lee Jasper case untenable: Mr. Cameron cannot have a claim about a matter that is still undergoing a police investigation. Likewise, in example (3), Mr. Blair's pointing out of an inconsistency in Mr. Duncan Smith's position provides support for considering the latter's position untenable: Mr. Duncan Smith cannot uphold a claim that is inconsistent with another position that he can be held committed to.

In both cases, above, 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. Mr. Brown would not need to engage in a discussion concerning the behaviour of Lee Jasper, and yet he might be considered to have defeated Mr. Cameron who had to give up his critical standpoint. Similarly, the success of Mr. Blair's accusation of inconsistency against Mr. Duncan 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. In both cases, the Prime Minister seems 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 this standpoint.

The Prime Minister's resort to parliamentary rules (*example (2)*) or to accusations of inconsistency (*example (3)*) to rule out a standpoint of the Opposition provide good examples of arguers' attempts to remain within the boundaries of reasonableness while steering argumentative confrontations towards favourable outcomes. Referring to the *sub judice* rule of Parliament seems to be a reasonable way for the Prime Minister to exclude a standpoint of the Opposition which concerns a case that is under police investigation. Similarly, 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.

As can be seen from examples (2) and (3) above, the Prime Minister's explicit attempts to exclude opposition standpoints from the discussion are 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 can be useful.

2.3 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 profiles 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

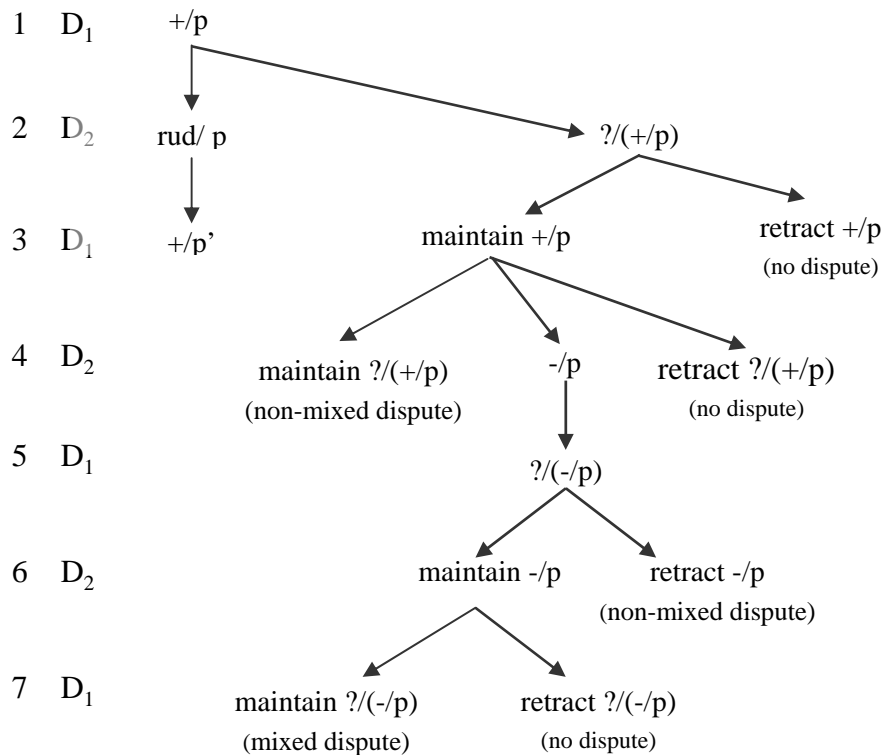
stage of a critical discussion are expressed in terms of turns in a tree-like dialogical diagram.⁹

In what follows, I shall propose a design for the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. 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.* (2007b). 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 profile¹⁰ of the confrontation stage of a single dispute is presented below (*Figure 1*) followed by a step-by-step specification of how an ideal confrontation can proceed.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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).

Figure 1: Basic dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a single dispute



-
- D₁ : MP from the Opposition
 - D₂ : The Prime Minister
 - +/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 standpoint. 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*).¹¹

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*).

In response to D_1 's upheld standpoint, D_2 can go one step further in externalising the disagreement: instead of merely upholding his doubt concerning the expressed and upheld standpoint, he could also express its opposite (*turn 4, middle branch*). Supposing that D_1 's expressed standpoint is a positive standpoint concerning a proposition p , D_2 can at this turn of the confrontation respond to D_1 's maintained positive standpoint by advancing a negative standpoint concerning the same proposition p . In contrast with the simple move of upholding doubt, the move of advancing a negative standpoint in response to D_1 's

¹¹ 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.

maintained positive standpoint is a complex move. It is complex in the sense that it involves two simple moves: upholding doubt and expressing a negative standpoint. This complex move by D_2 has the potential to turn the disagreement between D_1 and D_2 into a mixed dispute in which the discussants have opposite standpoints concerning the same proposition.

In response to D_2 's expressed negative standpoint, D_1 has only one option: to doubt it (*turn 5*). Given that a standpoint implies doubt concerning its opposite, and that D_1 has expressed and upheld a positive standpoint concerning a proposition p , D_1 can be held committed to an implied doubt concerning the opposite standpoint as soon as this standpoint is expressed by D_2 . In response to D_1 's doubt concerning his negative standpoint, D_2 should be allowed to either retract or uphold his advanced negative standpoint (*turn 6*). Here again, D_2 should have these options in order to guarantee that the externalisation of the disagreement remains voluntary. Retracting the negative standpoint will terminate the disagreement about it and leave the discussants with an externalised disagreement about the positive standpoint only, i.e. a non-mixed dispute (*turn 6, right branch*). Maintaining the negative standpoint (*turn 6, left branch*) will in contrast move the disagreement about the negative standpoint one step further: the disagreement has the potential to become fully externalised in the following turn.

In response to D_2 's upheld negative standpoint (*turn 6, left branch*), D_1 is granted, in line with the voluntariness requirement, the freedom of either upholding or retracting his doubt concerning the negative standpoint advanced (*turn 7*). If D_1 maintains his doubt concerning the negative standpoint of D_2 , the disagreement about this standpoint is confirmed. Confirming the disagreement about the negative standpoint closes the confrontation stage with a definition of the difference of opinion as a mixed dispute in which the discussants have opposite standpoints, each doubted by the other discussant (*turn 7, left branch*). If D_1 retracts his doubt concerning the negative standpoint of D_2 , the disagreement about this standpoint ceases to exist. Furthermore, the retraction of doubt concerning the negative standpoint by D_1 requires him to retract his own positive standpoint: D_1 cannot maintain a positive standpoint if he does not have doubt

about its opposite. After all, when a discussant expresses a positive standpoint concerning a proposition, doubt regarding the negative standpoint is implied, and he can be held committed to it as soon as this negative standpoint is expressed. Without having doubt concerning an existing negative standpoint, a discussant cannot uphold a positive standpoint.¹² Retracting doubt concerning the negative standpoint is in this case another complex move in the confrontation stage: it implies the retraction of the positive standpoint as well. Opting for this complex move, D₁ eventually puts an end to his disagreement with D₂ and closes the confrontation stage with no dispute to be resolved by means of argumentation (*turn 7, right branch*).

The profile also includes the option for D₂ to respond to the initial expression of the positive standpoint of D₁ 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 request for a usage declarative (D₂, *turn 2, left branch*) that promotes mutual comprehension of the expressed standpoint (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984: p. 109). In response to this request, D₁ has to provide the requested usage declarative, which results in a reformulation of the initial standpoint that is clearer, more precise or more detailed (D₁, *turn 3, left branch*). In response to this reformulated standpoint, D₂ can either express doubt, or request another usage declarative to which D₁ 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 D₁ 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, precision, amplification, explication or explicitisation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984), in the confrontation stage, this move can be performed only by D₂ as a response to the initial expression of the positive standpoint by D₁. The reason for this is that all the other moves in the confrontation stage are about a

¹² If D₁ and D₂ have a disagreement concerning a positive point of view, it is not possible for them to have no disagreement concerning the negative point of view, unless this negative point of view is not assumed by any of them. (see van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992a: p. 17)

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.

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 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 (1992b, 2000) explain, a particular argumentative 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.¹³

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.¹⁴

Viewed in light of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, the Prime Minister's attempts to exclude opposition standpoints in examples (2) and (3) can be viewed as attempts to reach the outcome of no dispute at turn 3 of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. The attempts can be considered cases of a particular *type* 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 *type* 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 of the difference of opinion. Like all types of confrontational manoeuvring, the type at issue aims at a favourable definition of the difference of opinion within the boundaries of critical reasonableness. This

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

particular type of manoeuvring can however be distinguished from other types 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 route¹⁵ that is favoured to reach the pursued outcome.

2.4 Strategic manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint

The type 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 both examples (2) and (3), the Prime Minister reacts to the expression of a critical standpoint by the Opposition by providing justification for not accepting the expressed standpoint. In example (2), he points out that the standpoint of the Opposition violates the rules of Parliament by bringing into discussion a matter that is under police investigation, and in example (3) he points out that the standpoint of the Opposition is inconsistent with some other position that the Opposition assumes. Both of these moves convey that the Prime Minister does not accept the standpoint of the Opposition; they therefore function as expressions of critical doubt about it. Thus, the type 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).

The type 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 of the confrontation stage, a no dispute outcome can be reasonably achieved at three points of the dialectical procedure of the confrontation: turns 3, 4 and 7. 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 resolve by means of argumentation. While the definition of the

¹⁵ 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).

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 type of strategic manoeuvring of D_2 . Another definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute can result at turn 7 where D_1 retracts his doubt concerning D_2 's negative standpoint and consequently withdraws his own positive standpoint. This no dispute definition of the definition of the difference of opinion is also favourable for D_2 because it enables him to maintain his negative standpoint without the need to discuss it.

Because the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute, favourable to D_2 , can be achieved at two different points of the dialectical procedure, two different dialectical routes that lead to it can be favoured by D_2 (*Figure 2, below*).

Figure 2: Dialectical routes that lead to the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute favourable to D_2

Dialectical route 1:

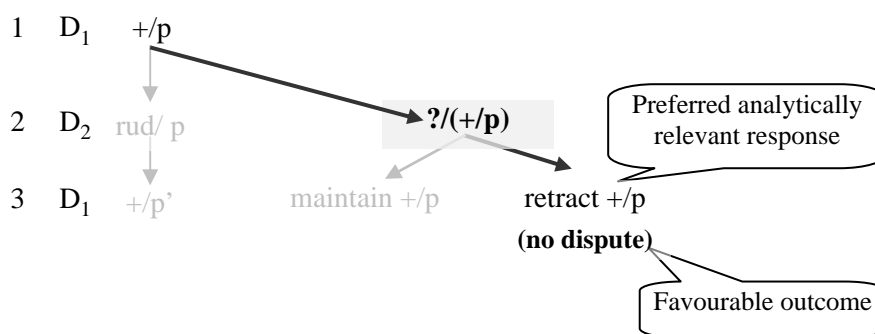
1.	D_1 :	+/p	advance a positive standpoint
2.	D_2 :	?/(+p)	advance doubt in respect of the advanced positive standpoint
3.	D_1 :	retract +/p	retract the positive standpoint => No dispute

Dialectical route 2:

1.	D_1 :	+/p	advance a positive standpoint
2.	D_2 :	?/(+p)	advance doubt in respect of the advanced positive standpoint
3.	D_1 :	maintain +/p	maintain the advanced positive standpoint
4.	D_2 :	-/p	advance a negative standpoint
5.	D_1 :	?/(-p)	advance doubt in respect of the advanced negative standpoint
6.	D_2 :	maintain -/p	maintain the advanced negative standpoint
7.	D_1 :	retract ?/(-p)	Retract doubt in respect of the advanced negative standpoint, which implies retracting one's own positive standpoint => No dispute

In principle, it is possible that either of these routes is D_2 's favourite when he casts doubt on the expressed opinion of D_1 attempting to bring about the definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute, favourable to him. However, for the Prime Minister's attempts to exclude a standpoint of the Opposition described above, route 2 cannot really be the Prime Minister's favourite. Route 2 requires the Prime Minister to assume a standpoint that is the opposite of the one he wants to exclude from the discussion, and that is a commitment that we may assume he would rather avoid. The Prime Minister's attempts are, therefore, best represented by the type of strategic manoeuvring that takes route 1 to achieve a definition of the difference of opinion as no dispute. The particular type of strategic manoeuvring at issue is represented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3



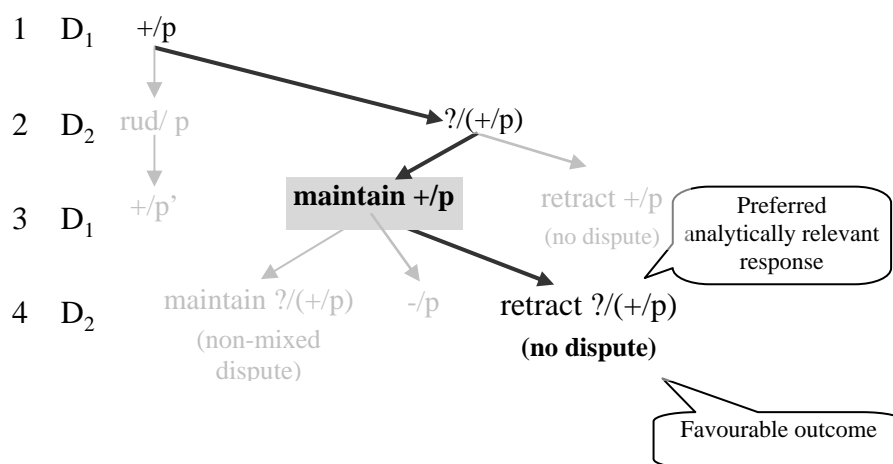
The Prime Minister's attempts to exclude the standpoint of the Opposition in examples (2) and (3) were both instances of this type of strategic manoeuvring. In each of these instances, the Prime Minister casts doubt on a standpoint expressed by the Opposition in a way that is very likely to lead the 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 type 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 type of manoeuvring by mentioning the aim of the arguer in this type, that of ruling out a standpoint.

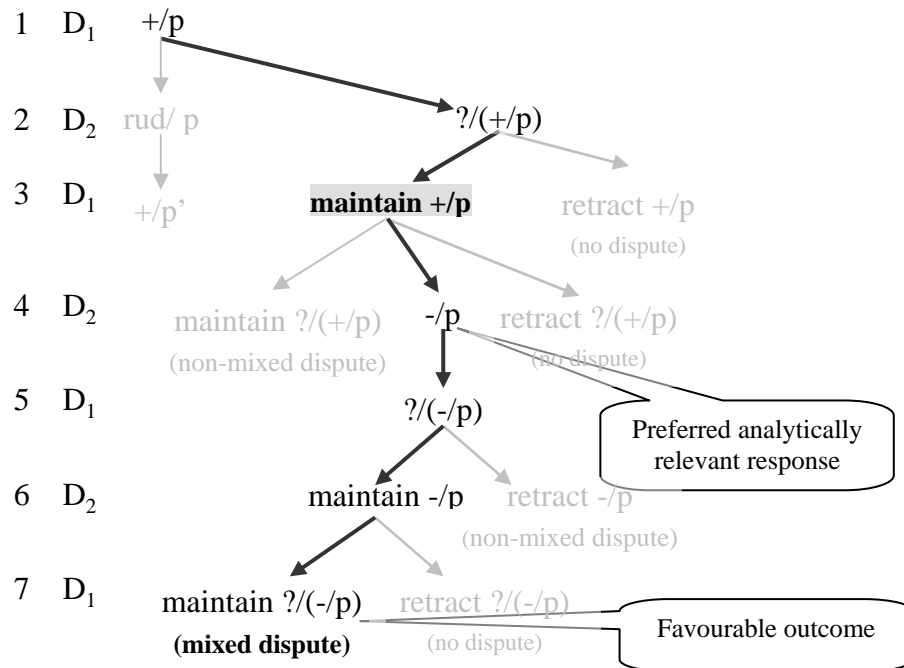
Different types of strategic manoeuvring result from variations in the slot for the analytically relevant move that is realised, the outcome that is pursued or the dialectical route that is favoured. For example, there can be a type of confrontational strategic manoeuvring in which D_1 aims at a defining the difference of opinion as no dispute, and, in order to achieve this outcome, maintains his positive standpoint at turn 3 in a way that leads D_2 to retract his advanced doubt at the next turn. This type is represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4



Another type of confrontational manoeuvring that is available to D_1 (Figure 5) is one that brings about a definition of the difference of opinion as a mixed dispute, which can also be a favourable outcome of the confrontation stage for D_1 . D_1 then maintains the positive standpoint in a way that leads D_2 to express and uphold the opposite standpoint in turns 4 and 6 of the dialectical profile.

Figure 5



As suggested above, a type 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 types 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 types of strategic manoeuvring within the category of confrontational manoeuvring. That is because, as van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007b) 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 (p. 376).

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 *type* 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 *type* of strategic manoeuvring characterised above is realised by means of accusations of inconsistency.

2.5 Accusations of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint

While both examples (2) and (3) discussed earlier are cases of the same type of strategic manoeuvring, which is aimed at excluding a standpoint from the discussion, the two examples differ in the way the slot for the analytically relevant move of casting doubt is realised in the actual confrontation. In example (2), Mr. Brown casts doubt by referring to the *sub judice* rule, while, in example (3), Mr. Blair casts doubt by pointing out an inconsistency in Mr. Duncan Smith's position. This difference in the actual argumentative move that realises the slot for the analytically relevant move of casting doubt results in two different ways of strategic manoeuvring. In example (2), the Prime Minister's attempt to rule out a standpoint of the Opposition is an instance of a particular way of manoeuvring in which reference to parliamentary rules is employed to exclude a certain standpoint from the discussion. In example (3), the Prime Minister's attempt is an instance of another way of manoeuvring, one in which an accusation of inconsistency is employed to exclude the standpoint.

A particular *way* of strategic manoeuvring is in this sense a particular way of realising a particular *type* of strategic manoeuvring. The Prime Minister's

attempts to exclude standpoints of the Opposition by means of accusations of inconsistency are to be viewed as instances of a particular way of strategic manoeuvring in which a particular type of manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint is realised by means of an actual accusation of inconsistency. It is this particular way of manoeuvring that will be the subject of examination in this study.

While a type 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 study, 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 (2007b) recommend, the most conspicuous manifestation of the manoeuvring at issue, i.e. the accusation of inconsistency.

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 study can be viewed as the one in which the speech act of accusation of inconsistency realises the particular type of manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint. With the help of the characterisation of an accusation of inconsistency as a speech act (Andone, 2008) 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 example (3) 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 (2008), "an accusation of inconsistency counts as raising a charge against an addressee for having committed himself to both A and \neg A, in an attempt to challenge him to provide an answering response to the charge" (p. 155).¹⁶

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 an answering response to the charge. In line with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1955), 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 A or the commitment to \neg A.

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

¹⁶ Andone (2008) lists the following conditions for the speech act of accusation of inconsistency: the addressee has committed himself to both A and \neg A (*propositional content condition*); the speaker believes that the addressee will (1) acknowledge that the presence of an inconsistency obstructs the argumentative exchange that he and his interlocutor are engaged in, and (2) be committed to provide an answering response to the charge of inconsistency (*preparatory conditions*); the speaker believes that (a) the addressee has committed an inconsistency, and (b) the presence of an inconsistency constitutes an obstruction to the exchange (*sincerity conditions*).

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.

As characterised by Andone, the accusation of inconsistency attributes to the accused the commitments to A and $\neg A$. In the case at issue, Mr. Blair 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 $\neg A$).

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 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 type of strategic manoeuvring, the preferred consecutive consequence will realise the preferred analytically relevant move in that particular type 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 type of strategic manoeuvring at issue (*see Figure 6, below*).

Figure 6: Actual preferred route taken in the strategic manoeuvring by accusation of inconsistency to rule out a standpoint

1. D ₁ : Advance a standpoint (+/p)	preferred consecutive consequence
2. D ₂ : Accusation of inconsistency (?/(+/p))	
3. D ₁ : Retracting commitment to A (retract +/p => No dispute)	
	favourable outcome

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.

As it has been characterised above, Mr. Blair's attempt to rule out a standpoint of the Opposition by means of an accusation of inconsistency is an instance of a particular way of realising the type of confrontational manoeuvring characterised earlier as strategic manoeuvring to rule out a standpoint. In this way of manoeuvring, the accusation of inconsistency is a particular realisation of the slot for expressing doubt. The preferred consecutive consequence of the accusation, the retraction of the commitment to A, would be a realisation of the slot for retracting the positive standpoint, which is the preferred analytically relevant move. An arguer's strategic manoeuvring in this particular way would consist of making 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. In example (3), 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 $\neg A$ 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.