Getting an issue on the table: A pragma-dialectical study of presentational choices in confrontational strategic maneuvering in Dutch parliamentary debate

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The aim of this study is to answer the question of how presentational choices can be helpful to politicians to get their party’s priority issues discussed in parliamentary debate. For this purpose, relevant pieces of Dutch parliamentary discourse are analyzed in which politicians operate who lead a party that is often considered to be a one issue party, such as Geert Wilders (Party for Freedom) and Marianne Thieme (Party for the Animals). Making use of the pragma-dialectical concept of strategic maneuvering, the study shows that attempts to get a party’s priority issue on the table can generally be characterized as either a topic shifting maneuver or a polarizing maneuver. More often than not, the presentational choices these politicians make are to be analyzed as coherent presentational tactics, which serve at the same time the politician’s aims of being effective and remaining within the institutionally determined requirements of reasonableness. The judgment that using party political strategies such as getting a priority issue on the table is by definition unreasonable is not supported by this study. Only when the politician’s efforts frustrate the parliamentary process of resolving the differences of opinion at issue they do not comply with the reasonableness requirements.
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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
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@ Y.M. Tonnard, 2011
To Just and Minka
First of all, I would like to thank Frans van Eemeren, my promoter. When I started this dissertation, he gave me the opportunity to decide what kind of research I would like to conduct within the framework of the NWO-project, of which this study is a part. His conscientious supervision, precise feedback and unwavering trust that problematic drafts of the texts would be followed by improved ones, were indispensible for the completion of this dissertation.

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October 3, 2011
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Initiating a discussion on a priority issue in parliamentary debate

A complaint often heard about parliamentary debates is that when the debate is likely to attract media attention many politicians use it primarily as a form of self-profiling. Instead of solving the issues that matter to society, such politicians try to get issues on the table for which their party wishes to enjoy a favorable reputation among potential voters. For political parties it is of importance to become closely associated with one or more specific issues (or problems), because then voters are inclined to assume the party’s ability to handle these issues well. As Petrocik explains, a median voter’s decision on whom to vote for is not based on what policies politicians promise to pursue, but what problems (medical care needs, high taxes) they promise to resolve (1996: 830). Getting the party’s main issues discussed in Parliament thus appears to be advantageous for a politician trying to win the support of potential voters and to be reelected to Parliament. It is a way to show the electorate that, in contradistinction to their political opponents, the party is able to recognize their problems and is keen to resolve them.

The working procedure of Dutch Parliament provides several opportunities to address the party’s priority issues. One opportunity is offered by the right to file

1 On the importance of issue owning for political parties, see also, for example, Holian (2004) and the Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor (2010).
questions, which has often been criticized for being used only for electoral reasons. In the last two decades the number of questions posed to the Government has increased tremendously. The majority of those questions are concerned with an issue that a given politician or his party considers highly important. A striking example of a party using the opportunity of filing questions to get their priority issue discussed is the Party for the Animals. Since the party was elected into Dutch Parliament in 2006, its two representatives have filed most questions of all parliamentarians, and almost all their questions (90%) were devoted to animal and environmental welfare. Filing a question is a procedural opportunity to get an issue on the table before the debate actually begins; it is one possible way to influence the parliamentary agenda. However, also in the debate itself the politician has opportunities to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue. In this study, I shall focus on how politicians use such opportunities. That means that I shall examine politicians’ attempts to get their party’s priority issue discussed that take place in a running parliamentary debate for which the agenda is already set by the Chair.

When studying politicians’ attempts to get their party’s priority issue on the table, a particularly interesting type of politicians to turn to are ‘one-issue’ politicians. Every politician may be expected to steer the discussion towards an issue that serves his party’s electoral goals best, but politicians who suggest that one issue underlies almost all other problems of society can certainly be expected to make a special effort to have a discussion about that one issue.

Other opportunities to get the party’s spearheads on the table in Parliament are the parliamentary right to request for an emergency debate (de Volkskrant, 30 May 2008 and 9 June 2009) and, indirectly also, interviews in newspapers or on radio or television. Raising a highly controversial standpoint in an interview might influence the parliamentary agenda when it causes social unrest. For example, the leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV), Geert Wilders, used this tactic when he said in a newspaper interview that the Koran should be forbidden, or at least reduced to the size of a Donald Duck magazine (de Volkskrant, 8 August 2007). A week after he made this remark, a parliamentary meeting scheduled to discuss a report of the Scientific board for Government Policy (WRR) on Islamic activism started with a discussion of Wilders’s standpoint concerning the banning of the Koran.

The Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor (2009: 22) and Vrij Nederland (12 September 2009).

Wikipedia defines one-issue parties (or “single-issue parties”) as “campaigning on only one issue”. This could mean that the party is interested in only one issue, or that it takes one particular political area as essential for the problems in other political areas. The party then addresses other issues as well, but it does so from the perspective of one overall problem. Schinkelshock, a Christian Democrat politician, once characterized this kind of one-issue politician as the Pied Piper of Hamelin, because such a politician presents his solution for this particular issue as a
In current Dutch politics, there are both left and right wing politicians who have been accused of being one-issue politicians. The best known example of such a politician on the right is the leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders. His party focuses on the issue of immigration and integration, in particular in relation to Islam. In order to preserve the Dutch national identity the party fights what it calls the danger of Islamisation. Wilders denies that he leads a one-issue party, but the way the party approaches the issue of Islamisation in their electoral program (2010-2015) is rather typical of a one-issue party. Islam is mentioned as the cause of almost all other problems of society. The following quotation from the electoral program provides a demonstration of this point:

“Mass-immigration has enormous consequences for all aspects of our society [my italics, YT]: economically it is a disaster, it harms the quality of our education, it increases the unsafety in our streets, leads to an exodus from our cities, drives away Jews and homosexuals and flushes decades of women’s emancipation down the toilet.”

A more leftist Dutch political party often labeled a one-issue party is the Party for the Animals, led by Marianne Thieme. Although the party emphasizes that it is not represented in Parliament only to ensure the welfare of animals, its critics compare it to a magic flute that “gives the feeling that all problems can be solved in one go” (NRC Handelsblad, 29 March 2008).

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5 One-issue politicians are not to be confused with populist politicians. D’Anjou explains that with populists “their belief in the importance and rights of the common people grows into a belief that the people are always in the right” (2005: 278-79). As a consequence they glorify public opinion and reject the establishment (Abts 2004: 452). Although some one-issue politicians can be populists, this certainly does not apply by definition to all of them. Vice versa, not every populist politician is a one-issue politician because populist politicians might address more than one issue.

6 When he was a member of the Liberal Party (VVD) (1998-2004), Wilders mainly focused on issues concerning social security (Fennema 2010). Especially since he set up his own party in 2005, he started spreading the word that Islam is the cause of almost all problems in Western society.

7 www.nu.nl (11 September 2008) and Algemeen Dagblad (12 June 2010).

8 The program is published on www.pvv.nl. In a report on the extreme rightist and discriminating caliber of the Party for Freedom (initiated and published by the Anne Frank foundation), the party is said to attribute problems such as infrastructure, traffic jams, public housing and the welfare state directly to Islamic migrants (Davidović et al. 2008: 187).

9 The original Dutch texts of the excerpts used in this study can be found in the Appendix. The translations are the author’s (YT) responsibility.
the party to former one-issue parties such as the Party for the Elderly and the Party for the Farmers. On their website (www.partijvoordedieren.nl) the party explains that it is not a one-issue party because it stands up not just for the animals, but for “the most vulnerable, whether it is men, animals or the environment”. However, in December 2008 the party rejected a proposal from one of its members to address non-animal related topics as well (*NRC Handelsblad*, 15 December 2008).

Wilders’s party is capable of giving the impression that every debate in which one of its members participates is ultimately about the issue of the dangers of Islamisation. However, the members of the Party for the Animals also make a special effort to address the issue they consider most important. An illustration is the following remark that Thieme made in the General Debate of 2008. This yearly debate on the general outlines of the Government’s policies (in Dutch: Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen) is always covered by the media and therefore offers a good opportunity for politicians to present themselves to the electorate. Thieme’s remark follows after a question-answer exchange between the leader of the Liberals, Rutte, and the leader of the Christian Democrats, van Geel, on how to control the national debt in times of economic recession. In the first term of the debate van Geel claims that his party, which was then part of the Government, handles this problem well. As a member of the Opposition, Rutte, however, does not agree. In reaction to this exchange Thieme poses a question to van Geel in which she introduces her parties’ priority issue of environmental welfare:

> Thieme (Party for the Animals): “Everything is about money, money, and again, money. [...] I would like to turn things around: what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the rest of the world? Mr. van Geel only thinks of his own hardworking Dutchmen, while we in the Netherlands are deeply responsible for poverty and the loss of a pleasant environment in the rest of the world.”

(*Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79*)

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10 In *de Volkskrant* (18 December 2007), political commentator Hilhorst explains that Wilders was voted politician of the year in 2007 because he dominated the debate. By bending the political agenda time and again in his own favor, he made the debate always center around the dangers of Islam. The *Nederlandse Nieuwmonitor* concludes that in the months preceding the elections of 2010, Wilders managed to be consistently in the news with the issue of immigration whereas the campaign was dominated by economic issues (2010).
In her question to van Geel, Thieme introduces the issue of environmental welfare (“sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare”) by saying that she would like to turn things around. Such a turn of phrase opens up the possibility to change the topic from (in this case) the national debt to environmental welfare. In order to initiate a discussion on the issue, she suggests that van Geel holds a standpoint that is to be regarded as the opposite of the standpoint of the Party for the Animals – it is her party that takes responsibility for the environment in the rest of world, while the Christian Democrats do not. Mr. van Geel, she claims, only think of his own hardworking Dutchmen. With this remark Thieme challenges the possible thoughts in the minds of van Geel or the audience that the two parties agree on the matter. She claims that although the parties seem to agree on the issue of environmental welfare, this certainly is not the case.

This example shows that there are at least two ways to get a party’s priority issue on the table. The first way is to *shift the topic* of the debate, and the second way is to *polarize the parties’ standpoints*. In the first sentence, Thieme shifts the topic of the discussion from the national debt to environmental welfare; in the second sentence, by claiming that Mr. van Geel *only* thinks of his own hardworking Dutchmen, she suggests that they disagree on the matter. A politician who wants to discuss a priority issue may try to shift the topic when the discussion is not about this issue. In cases where no disagreement has manifested itself on the issue (which means that the party’s priority issue is actually not an issue) the politician may try to polarize the parties’ standpoints.  

Shifting the topic and polarizing can be used independently, but – as the example of Thieme shows – they can also be used together in one piece of discourse. When used together, the politician tries to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue by introducing this issue as a topic for discussion while, at the same time, claiming that the parties disagree on this issue.

The members of one-issue parties try to keep their priority issues high on the parliamentary agenda. They do so, predominantly, by issuing a continuous flow of questions that are related to their priority issue and, as a Dutch newsmagazine wrote with respect to the Party for Freedom, by using “all kinds of Hague tricks in order to make the debate evolve their own way” (*HP/De Tijd*, 4 april 2008). Most of these tricks exploit the possibilities of parliamentary debate by a way of

11 This is not to say that topic shifts or polarization take only place to get a priority topic on the table. A more detailed account of the aims of topic shifts and polarizing can be found in chapter 2.
skillful phrasing. Journalist and writer Kuitenbrouwer even claims that his choice of language is what makes a politician successful (2010). In relation to Wilders’s debating style, his manner of formulation is regularly described as a very effective way to get his standpoints accepted. Various analysts even attributed the party’s electoral success in 2006 and 2010 to Wilders’s clear and frank way of formulating his standpoints (Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor 2010). Analysts of Wilders universally point to his unrefined, anti-Hague and unparliamentary language. As Pleij explains, “his electorate considers Wilders’s language a bit rude, but sincere”. People vote for the Party for Freedom because Wilders is a politician who dares to identify problems in no uncertain terms. Kuitenbrouwer, who wrote a book on Wilders’s language use, indicates that Wilders obviously spends a lot of time and energy on words that work, and – conversely – that he is very focused on words that do not work (2010: 36). In my study, the choice of words is the primary object of research. I will examine a politician’s choice of presentational means in topic-shifting and polarizing contributions to parliamentary debates aimed at getting his party’s priority issues on the table.

In order to reach potential voters, the standpoints that address a party’s priority issues should be picked up by the media and transmitted to the public. As Holian explains, “ultimately, the media is the primary conduit for political information to the public” (2004: 100). Also parliamentary debates provide opportunities to reach potential voters by means of the media. These debates are usually not broadcast in full, but the statements made in these debates that are considered interesting enough might become a television or radio item, or the headline of a news article.

A politician who uses the debate in Parliament as an opportunity to make the news might be accused of spoiling the debate. Dutch democracy has a technocratic political tradition, which focuses primarily on verifiable data and serious discussion based on well-balanced standpoints (in contrast, for example, to the British Parliament which has a confrontation-seeking tradition that encourages polarization

\[\text{12 An example of such a “Hague trick” is to formulate a radical standpoint in an attention-getting way at a point in the debate when, due to the procedural rules, there is hardly any time for the opponents to put forward criticism (HP de Tijd, 4 April 2008).}\\[
\text{13 See, for example, HP de Tijd (4 April 2008) and de Volkskrant (18 December 2007).}\\[
\text{14 On 28 March 2008 the University of Amsterdam organized a debate on Wilders and his tone in the debate. Emeritus professor of historical Dutch literature, Pleij, was one of the participants.}\\[
\text{15 In an article in Onze Taal (December 2009), Janssen and Mulder explain which features of Wilders’s parliamentary language use contribute to his image of being a sincere politician who dares to speak plainly.}\]
The point of the criticism is that a politician’s pursuit to attract media coverage, and ultimately public support, disturbs the problem solving function of the debate. As Duursma and van den Bos indicate, some people claim that it “disturbs the negotiation process and the consensus seeking that are typical of our democracy” (NRC Handelsblad, 19 September 2008). For example, the leader of the Green Party, Halsema, criticized several parties for using Parliament merely as an electoral stage. In her opinion, the instruments of the Second Chamber are used as a cry for attention, as a result of which the power of these instruments gets eroded (de Volkskrant, 9 June 2009). In the newspaper Trouw (22 September 2008), a report on the General Debate stated that the debate had turned into a media event because the politicians’ efforts were mainly aimed at producing the best one-liner or sound-bite to make the news. The initial aim of the debate, discussing the general political outlines of the Government’s policy for the coming governmental year, got lost in the verbal violence of politicians trying to be wittier than their political opponents.

Neither politics nor parliamentary debate is solely meant to solve the problems of society. They should also provide the electorate with the information needed to judge the quality of its representatives. When taking this twofold function of politics into account, it cannot be said that addressing the electorate necessarily hinders the problem-solving function of parliamentary debate. Ideally, there is no discrepancy between the two aims. Within the democratic system a politician is a qualified representative of the people on the condition that he is able to address and solve within the institutional setting of Parliament the problems that concern society. A politician’s problem-solving performance in Parliament is also one of the ways to win the support of potential voters. If a politician’s problem-solving

\[\begin{align*}
16 \text{ In describing the (un)parliamentary practice of insulting, Illie (2004) mentions a similar distinction between the Swedish and the British political tradition.}
17 \text{ Not everybody agrees with this criticism though, especially when it concerns the General Debate. On: www.parlement.com it is said that the General Debate should pre-eminently be used for self-profiling purposes because of the media-attention it attracts. Duursma and van den Bos conclude their article in NRC Handelsblad by saying that Parliament is a public stage that should be used to win the support of potential voters.}
18 \text{ For a more detailed description of the function of parliamentary debate, see section 2.2.1.}
19 \text{ In accordance with Chilton, I view politics as, on the one hand, “a struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power” and, on the other hand, “a practice of cooperation meant to resolve clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty and the like” (2004: 3). Jacobs and Shapiro describe the two political aims as “two of the basic goals that motivate House members”. The first is reelection (or the electoral goal); the second is making good public policy (2000: 10).}
\end{align*}\]
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performance is considered as a means to reach potential voters it can therefore not be the case that addressing the electorate necessarily disturbs the problem-solving process of parliamentary debate.

Interestingly, topic shifts and polarization can be used as ‘legitimate’ means to realize a politician’s electoral goals because both maneuvers can be used to come to a resolution of the problems addressed in Parliament. A politician who shifts the topic of debate might do so in order to prevent, for example, an important issue from remaining unresolved. A politician who polarizes the parties’ standpoints might bring to light differences of opinion between parties that are of importance to resolve a problem. However, the pursuit of getting issues on the table that appeal to potential voters could also be at the expense of the problem-solving aim of a parliamentary debate. A topic shift could be problematic, for example, when it makes the debate wander off in a direction that has nothing to do with the original problem, whereas that problem really needs to be solved. And polarization might disturb the process of problem-resolution, for example, when it is used to maintain a discussion instead of coming to a solution. The difficulty is that it is not clear when exactly attempts to get a party’s priority issue on the table do indeed hinder the problem-solving aim of the discussion among political opponents, and what role, if any, formulation plays in this. In this study, I will be concerned with this specific problem.

1.2 Getting an issue on the table as confrontational strategic maneuvering

A parliamentary debate can be characterized as an argumentative practice in which standpoints and arguments are tested on the merits in a well-defined parliamentary context. In order to clarify the function that specific ways of formulating parliamentary contributions have in argumentation, one needs an approach to argumentation with quite specific characteristics. Not only must the approach be normative in order to judge the merit of contributions, it must also be capable of considering a specific context like that of Parliament, and the aspect of formulation as a means to win the listener’s support. The extended pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, which makes use of the notion of strategic maneuvering, meets these criteria (van Eemeren 2010; van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a, 2002b). The theory of strategic maneuvering views argumentation as a means to realize the dialectical aim of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits, while taking into account
the fact that arguers also pursue rhetorical aims such as initiating a discussion on an issue that appeals to potential voters. It considers the argumentative stage in which the argumentation takes place as well as the institutional context. Moreover – in accordance with the rhetorical tradition – the aspect of presentation is distinguished as one of the manifestations of strategic maneuvering. In accordance with the extended pragma-dialectical approach, I shall analyze two ways to initiate a discussion on a priority issue in Parliament, topical shifts and polarization, as instances of strategic maneuvering.

The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, as established by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, 2004), views argumentative discourse as an exchange of verbal moves ideally intended to resolve a difference of opinion. In order to judge argumentative discourse in the light of this dialectical aim, a normative (or ideal) model of critical discussion has been developed that provides a procedure to systematically test whether a particular standpoint advanced by the protagonist of a point of view is tenable against doubt or criticism of the antagonist (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 58). The model specifies analytically the stages and speech acts necessary to resolve the difference of opinion, and it indicates what rules apply to the distribution of speech acts in these different stages (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 21-2). All violations of the ten procedural rules governing the process of resolving a difference of opinion are taken as unreasonable argumentative moves, or fallacies, because they obstruct the resolution process. By using the pragma-dialectical approach, I take a resolution of the difference of opinion as the ideal outcome of argumentative exchanges that take place in Parliament. Viewed in light of this ideal outcome, it will be possible to analyze and evaluate topic-shifting and polarizing attempts meant to initiate a discussion on a specific issue as either instrumental to this aim or frustrating it.

In practice, however, arguers are not only interested in resolving a difference of opinion. In Parliament, as well as in all other argumentative situations, arguers also try to be effective and accomplish the resolution they favor most. There is, in other words, also a rhetorical aspect of effectiveness to argumentative discourse. By introducing the concept of strategic maneuvering van Eemeren and Houtlosser

20 Four stages are distinguished: the confrontation stage where the difference of opinion is defined; the opening stage where the starting points of the discussion are established; the argumentation stage where arguments and critical reactions are exchanged; and the concluding stage, where the result of the discussion is determined (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 59-62).
have integrated this rhetorical aspect into the dialectical framework. Strategic maneuvering refers to arguers’ attempts, made in all moves carried out in argumentative discourse, to keep a balance between the rhetorical aim of being effective and the dialectical aim of being reasonable (van Eemeren 2010: 40). In the case of a politician’s attempt during a parliamentary debate to engineer a discussion of his party’s priority issue that is sufficiently interesting to make the news, the rhetorical aim is most probably to discuss an issue that benefits the party’s electoral goal. The politician’s dialectical aim then is to act as a reasonable discussant in order to solve a difference of opinion in a parliamentary context.

The aim of pragma-dialectics, which takes dialectic as its norm, is to provide a tool that is of help in analyzing and evaluating argumentative exchanges. Yet, the analysis benefits from the incorporation of rhetorical points of view because it provides one with a more realistic insight into the strategic design of discourse, and it helps one to refine the analysis and to account for it; also rhetorical points of view are of use to determine more precisely whether or not an argumentative move is a fallacy (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002a: 135). Fallacies occur when attempting to achieve a rhetorical aim goes at the expense of a reasonable exchange of argumentative moves so that a discussion rule is violated. From the perspective of strategic maneuvering fallacies can be described as derailed attempts to balance the dialectical and rhetorical aim. It should be noted though that, notwithstanding the integration of rhetorical aspects, the primary interest of the pragma-dialectical approach is still the resolution of differences of opinion by putting standpoints to a (critical) test. As van Eemeren and Houtlosser explain, even when parties are solely interested in getting things their own way “they have to maintain the image of people who play the resolution game by the rules: they may be considered committed to what they have said, assumed or implicated” (1999: 481).

The notion of strategic maneuvering opens the possibility to determine the specific ways in which argumentative moves fulfill their function in actual argumentative exchanges. In the concept of strategic maneuvering, the general function of the moves is viewed as balancing between the arguer’s rhetorical aim of accomplishing the resolution he favors and his dialectical aim of being a reasonable discussant. These rhetorical and dialectical aims can be specified further by taking into account the discussion stage in which the maneuvering takes place. Each of the four stages in the resolution process is characterized by a specific dialectical aim. From the perspective
of strategic maneuvering arguers can be expected to attempt to accomplish each of these aims to their best advantage.

Trying to initiate a discussion on a specific issue – whether by shifting the topic or by polarizing the parties’ standpoints – has to be regarded as confrontational strategic maneuvering. The aim of the confrontation stage is to define the disagreement – that is, to determine what standpoint is at stake and which parties are involved in what way (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 60, 135). Initiating a discussion on a specific issue is an attempt to influence this definition of the disagreement to one’s own advantage: in the case of a topic shift the arguer tries to initiate a discussion about a standpoint that concerns a different issue than the one discussed at that particular moment in the discussion; when polarizing the positions of the discussion parties, the arguer attempts to initiate a pro/con-discussion about two opposed points of view on an issue where initially there was no difference of opinion on the matter, or where a particular standpoint was only confronted with doubt.

Confrontational strategic maneuvering is one of the four categories of strategic maneuvering corresponding to the four stages of a critical discussion. Each of these categories allows for specific discussion strategies. A discussion strategy, as van Eemeren explains, is a combination of moves that is methodically designed to influence the result of a particular stage of the resolution process (for example, the confrontation stage) or the discussion as a whole (2010: 46-47). The discussion strategies examined in this study (maneuvering by shifting the topic and maneuvering by polarizing the parties’ standpoints) are characterized by the specific strategic function they fulfill in the confrontation stage.

In order to analyze the strategic function of a particular way of maneuvering, van Eemeren and Houtlosser propose to consider four so-called parameters, according to which it should be clear 1) what kind of result an arguer can be aiming for, 2) what routes he can take to achieve that result, 3) how the institutional context constrains the strategic maneuvering and 4) what mutual commitments define the argumentative situation at the point when a certain argumentative move is made (2007: 375). By considering the first three parameters it can be explained that the discussion strategies of shifting the topic and polarization have to be analyzed as different confrontational strategic maneuvers. The last parameter stresses the importance of the commitment sets arguers have developed at a certain point in the discussion. These mutually established commitments thus vary for every specific moment in the discussion. Since these commitment sets cannot be generally established for a particular discussion strategy in a particular context, this parameter is not taken
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into consideration in the characterization of the strategic maneuvers of topic shifting and polarization. I will briefly explain the three parameters that I will use to characterize topic shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers.

(1) The kind of result an arguer might be aiming for can be systematically tracked down by considering the outcomes that can be reached in a particular discussion stage.21 For the confrontation stage, the aim of which is to define the disagreement, these outcomes consist of the different types of difference of opinion. Depending on the number of propositions involved and the positions assumed by the parties, the outcome that is aimed for is a ‘non-mixed single’, a ‘mixed single’, a ‘non-mixed multiple’, or a ‘mixed multiple’ difference of opinion.

(2) The second parameter, which consists of the possible routes to achieve a specific result (whether in the confrontation stage or any other discussion stage), can be derived from the dialectical profile of a specific discussion stage. Such a profile specifies what sequential patterns of moves arguers are allowed to make in a specific stage or at a specific point in the discussion (van Eemeren et al. 2007: 18). Determining what possible routes lead to a specific result also depends on the point in the profile from which the route departs.

(3) The third parameter can be determined with the help of the notion of communicative activity types. In the approach of van Eemeren and Houtlosser communicative activity types are “more or less institutionalized entities of verbal interaction that can be distinguished by empirical observation of communicative practices in the various domains of discourse” (2007: 376). A parliamentary debate has to be regarded as such an institutional entity of verbal interaction. The conventions that apply to this particular activity type (partly laid down in the standing orders of Parliament) constrain the strategic maneuvering that is allowed in this particular institutionalized context.

Presentational choices – the focus of this study – are one of the three aspects in which strategic maneuvering manifests itself. In each of these three aspects, arguers have an opportunity to influence the result of the discourse in their own favor. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser indicate that the balancing between the rhetorical and dialectical aim can take place by 1) making an expedient choice from the options

21 The components of the analytic overview include the different stages and their outcomes following from a reconstruction of argumentative discourse as a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 96-97).
constituting the topical potential, which best serves the speaker or writer, 2) selecting a responsive adaptation to audience demand and 3) exploiting the appropriate presentational devices (1999: 484). These aspects are also referred to in a brief characterization as topical choice, audience adaptation and presentation.

The fact that I focus on the presentational aspect of strategic maneuvering does not mean that topical choice and audience adaptation do not play a role in the maneuvers of topic shifts and polarization. Although every aspect can be analyzed separately, it should be emphasized that in practice they all work together (van Eemeren 2010: 94). Together the aspects are instrumental for the rhetorical functionality of argumentative discourse, which means that all three aspects contribute to the acceptance of a standpoint. Since every argumentative move is an instance of strategic maneuvering, every argumentative move is put forward by means of presentational devices that may be viewed as aimed at framing the move in a particular, effect-oriented way. Argumentative moves involving strategic maneuvering that are stylistically neutral therefore do not exist. As van Eemeren explains: “Even if in a certain case the presentational choice that is made gives the appearance of being stylistically neutral, this impression is just as much the result of a presentational choice as it is in more conspicuous cases” (2010: 120). The presentational aspect of strategic maneuvering, hence, does not only refer to clearly marked language in which, for instance, metaphors or hyperbolic expressions are used, but to every stylistic choice. Every stylistic choice made in strategic maneuvering may be considered to be intended as instrumental in reaching the result favored by the arguer.

Examining the function of presentational choices in a strategic maneuver could be done in different ways. A first possibility is to start with an actual piece of argumentative discourse and study the presentational choices as being manifestations of specific discussion strategies. In their analysis of the British fox hunting discussion (ensuing from an anti-hunting bill in 1997) van Eemeren and Houtlosser adopted this approach (2001). In the analysis they explain that the pro-hunters present their

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22 Van Eemeren and Houtlosser thereby distance themselves from approaches in which the presentational aspect is reduced to simply dressing up thought (as was common, for instance, during Enlightenment when rhetoric was taken as just a matter of using an appealing style and making a forceful delivery (Herrick 2001)) or complying with the audience’s wishes (an idea of audience demand which can be found in educational theories of effective speaking and writing (Ede and Lunsford 1984: 156)). Neither should the aspect of presentation be understood as encompassing all other aspects of rhetoric. Such an overriding view can be found in, for example, Reboul (1989), who questions whether means of persuasion, including arguments, are to be viewed as rhetorical figures.
standpoint by making good use of different images, such as “oppression”, “justified revolt” and “peaceful country life”. For example, when using the first image, the standpoint of pro-fox hunting is put forward as a need to protect the people’s personal rights and underscored by references to themselves as “fighters of freedom” and to the opponent as the “oppressor”. Such a choice of words might be effective, because it presents the animal unfriendly standpoint of pro-hunting as more sympathetic.

Another way to study the function of presentational choices is to start from a specific rhetorical figure and look for the functions it may have in strategic maneuvering. This kind of research is carried out, for example, by Snoeck Henkemans. In various articles, she examines the figures of praeteritio (drawing attention to something by saying that you will refrain from dealing with it), metonymy (referring to something by a word or expression which describes a quality or feature of that thing) and rhetorical questions to point at the different functions these specific figures can have in argumentative discourse (Snoeck Henkemans 2009, 2007, 2005). In my analysis of presentational choices, I take yet another approach. I will start from a specific strategic maneuver (shifting the topic or polarizing the parties’ standpoints) and then examine what kind of presentational choices may contribute in what way to accomplishing the aim of that specific maneuver.

In the actual analysis of presentational choices, I will follow the general distinction between an explicit and implicit presentation of argumentative moves as proposed by van Eemeren (2010: 120). In pragma-dialectics, argumentative moves are characterized as speech acts, and, as van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain, for a speech act to be performed correctly the arguer does not have to be completely explicit (2004: 77). It is, for example, possible to put forward a standpoint without explicitly conveying its communicative function. An utterance such as “You’d better close the windows” could, depending on the context, be meant as advice, but also as a standpoint. The explicit-implicit distinction is of importance in the analysis of presentational choices, since it helps to explain how discussants attract attention to what is beneficial to the success of the strategic maneuver and/or conceal what is not. In some way or other all presentational choices can be labeled as either an explicit or an implicit way of presenting. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize that either of these two ways can be chosen to meet the conditions of effective argumentation. As they explain,
the speaker has to display the elements on which he wishes to center attention (so that they are in the foreground of the hearer’s consciousness) and/or avoid a concrete and definite presentation of some matters (for example in favor of vaguer and more abstract notions) in order to make it easier to avoid objections (1969: 142-148).

In this study, the explicit-implicit distinction will be used to describe how specific combinations of presentational choices might serve the aim of a topic-shifting or polarizing strategic maneuver. Such combinations come into being by virtue of the fact that the specific strategic function of every argumentative move depends on what has been established by previous moves put forward by the protagonist and the antagonist of the standpoint. For example, when an arguer wants to make clear in a friendly way that it is better to close the windows, he could put forward his standpoint, wait for his opponent’s reaction, and – when it is not the preferred reaction – repeat his standpoint in a more explicit and compelling way. In such a case, the arguer may at first use an implicit (and indirect) formulation to present his standpoint such as “Look, I have goose flesh”. If his opponent does not agree with him, or does not understand the purpose of his utterance, he could repeat his standpoint in an explicit way by saying something like “I really think we should close the windows”. By making use of the notion of strategic maneuvering it is possible to examine these presentational choices as serving a specific function in combining rhetorical effectiveness with dialectical soundness. The notion therewith contributes to a systematic and empirically adequate account of presentational choices in an argumentative context, which – as will be shown in this research – is of help in examining the role of presentational choices in pieces of discourse that are meant to get a party’s priority issue on the table in parliamentary debate.

1.3 Objectives and organization of the study

This study is part of a research project that examines confrontational strategic maneuvering in institutionalized contexts. The project focuses on how arguers try

24 Within the framework of this project, van Laar published several articles on the conditions for sound confrontational strategic maneuvering (e.g. 2008a, 2008b); Mohammed examined strategic maneuvering with accusations of inconsistency in Prime Minister’s Question Time (2009); Andone examined the strategic maneuver of pointing out an inconsistency in political interviews (2010); van Eemeren published a monograph about the theory on strategic maneuvering based on his work with Houtlosser (2010).
to define the difference of opinion in their own favor by excluding the other party’s point of view from consideration, thereby taking into account the limitations of the institutionalized context in which the attempt takes place. The project’s general objective pertains to a variety of strategic maneuvers, ranging from attempts that aim at having no discussion of the other’s standpoint at all to attempts that aim at having a complicated discussion involving opposite standpoints and more than one proposition. In my study, the phenomenon of parliamentarians trying to discuss their party’s priority issue by topic shifting or polarization is chosen to examine the function of presentational choices in confrontational strategic maneuvering. The main objective of this study is to give an account of how certain presentational choices can help a politician to get a specific issue on the table in parliamentary debate without frustrating the resolution of the difference of opinion with the political opponent. In terms of strategic maneuvering, the study aims to explain how certain presentational choices function as a means to balance a politician’s attempts to achieve the rhetorical effect of winning the support of potential voters by addressing the priority issue of his party in Parliament with maintaining dialectical soundness.

To achieve its main objective, this study is divided into a theoretical part and an empirical part. In the first part, the theoretical framework is provided for the analyses conducted in the second part of the study. Here, the approach chosen is explained and justified. In this theoretical part, the following two research questions will be answered:

1. How can topic shifts and polarization carried out to get a particular issue on the table in parliamentary debate be characterized as specific strategic maneuvers within the institutionalized context of Dutch parliamentary debate?
2. How can the function of presentational choices be determined in strategic maneuvers that aim to shift the topic or polarize the parties’ standpoints in the context of Dutch parliamentary debate?

In the second part of the study, qualitative empirical research is carried out by analyzing presentational choices in parliamentary contributions that can be identified as either a topic shift or polarization meant to get the party’s priority issue on the table. In this empirical part, research question 3 and 4 will be answered.

3. In what ways do politicians in actual parliamentary practice maneuver strategically with the choice of presentational means to shift the topic of debate?
4. In what ways do politicians in actual parliamentary practice maneuver strategically with the choice of presentational means to polarize the parties’ standpoints?

Apart from the introductory and concluding chapter, the study consists of four chapters. Each chapter addresses one of the four research questions.

Chapter 2 characterizes topic shifts and polarizing the parties’ standpoints as different strategic maneuvers in a parliamentary context. To determine how this context influences the possibilities to use either of these two maneuvers, I will first characterize the institutionalized context of Dutch Parliament and describe what parliamentary conventions (rules and practices) apply to the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. Next, the General Debate on the budget of 2009 (which took place on 17 and 18 September 2008) is used to illustrate different kinds of topic shifts and polarization. These illustrations are of help to show (1) that the specific result of getting a specific issue on the table can be realized by following various sequences of argumentative moves and (2) that topic-shifting and polarizing attempts can also be aimed at realizing other results than getting a specific issue on the table. By making use of the patterns of moves that are allowed in the confrontation stage (the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage), I show that these different routes of argumentative moves and results can be distinguished analytically. For both topic-shifting and polarizing, I focus on one specific kind (mode) of maneuvering characterized by the specific result aimed for and the route that is taken, thereby taking into account how the rules and practices of parliamentary debate constrain the possibilities to conduct this specific maneuver.

Chapter 3 provides a method for analyzing the strategic, argumentative function of presentational choices in maneuvers that aim to initiate a discussion on a particular issue in Parliament. In pragma-dialectics, argumentative moves are viewed and analyzed as speech acts in which the proposition and illocution can be presented either in an explicit or in an implicit way. The method for analyzing the function of the presentational choices in strategic maneuvering is based on this explicit-implicit distinction. I first explain what the distinction amounts to in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion with respect to presentational choices that can be made. Then I discuss which of these choices would be opportune given the aim of the maneuvers and the conventions of Parliament. Next, I distinguish various combinations of presentational choices that, due to the specific function(s) presentational means could have in an argumentative exchange, serve the specific aims of the maneuver. These combinations are likely to be of help in establishing the maneuver’s specific
argumentative result according to a specific argumentative route. Such combinations of presentational choices will be referred to as presentational tactics.

Chapter 4 analyzes and evaluates actual cases of topic shifts in Dutch Parliament. The aim of this chapter is to provide an empirical account for the theoretically grounded presentational tactics distinguished in chapter 3. This chapter consists of four case studies of contributions that can be identified as topic shifts carried out to initiate a discussion on the issue of the danger of Islamisation, all stemming from the leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders. These contributions are all part of debates that attracted a lot of media attention (such as the General Debate). Therefore, Wilders is likely to have used these debates to address his electorate and win their support. His contributions are empirically interesting because he makes a real effort to address his party’s priority issue, especially by his phrasing. For each of the presentational tactics distinguished in chapter 3, two excerpts are analyzed and evaluated. The aim of the analyses is to show how the presentational tactics are of help in balancing a politician’s rhetorical aim of initiating a discussion on his party’s priority issue in a debate in which the room to move from one topic to another is limited, with the dialectical aim of being a reasonable discusssant. The aim of the evaluation is to show whether or not the politician succeeds in balancing these aims. If the rhetorical aim is favored at the expense of the dialectical aim, it can be said that the politician’s maneuvering frustrates the possibility of reaching a solution in the discussion with the political opponent because it violates one (or more) of the rules for critical discussion that apply to the confrontation stage.

Chapter 5 examines actual cases of attempts at polarizing the parties’ standpoints in Dutch Parliament. Just like chapter 4, it consists of four case studies. In these case studies excerpts of Wilders which can be identified as attempts to polarize the parties’ standpoints in order to initiate a discussion on his priority issue of the danger of Islamisation are analyzed and evaluated. The aim of the analyses is to show how the presentational tactics are of help in achieving the politician’s rhetorical aim of initiating a discussion on his party’s priority issue in a situation in which the opponent agrees or seems to agree with the politician, while at the same time being a reasonable politician willing to play the parliamentary game by the rules. The aim of the evaluation is to show whether or not the strategic maneuvering frustrates the possibility of reaching a solution with the political opponent because it violates one (or more) of the confrontational discussion rules.

In the concluding chapter, I summarize the main findings of the study and provide suggestions for further research.
2. STRATEGIC MANEUVERS TO GET AN ISSUE ON THE TABLE

2.1 Introduction

Getting a party’s priority issue on the table is just one of the aims a topic-shifting or polarizing argumentative move can have in a parliamentary debate. A topic-shifting move could, for instance, also be used to avoid a difficult question or a face-threatening accusation; a polarizing move might also serve to simplify matters for the electorate – for example when ‘we’ are described as the good guys and ‘they’ as the bad guys. These different purposes make it possible to distinguish different kinds of topic-shifting and polarization. In this chapter I will describe the different kinds of topic-shifting and polarizing moves in an attempt to characterize the move I am interested in as a specific confrontational strategic maneuver and to explain how the conventions of Dutch parliamentary debates constrain the possibilities to conduct this maneuver. Section 2.2 explains the institutionalized setting, or communicative activity type in which the topic-shifting and polarizing moves are put forward. It describes the aim of the activity type of a parliamentary debate and the parliamentary conventions that apply to the confrontation stage. Section 2.3 distinguishes between different kinds of topic shifts and provides a pragma-dialectical characterization of the kind of topic shift that will be analyzed in chapter 4. This characterization is based on the result the politician is aiming for and the route of possible argumentative moves by which the result can be established. Section 2.4 deals with the discussion strategy of polarizing the standpoints of the discussion parties. Just like the section that precedes it, it describes different kinds of a strategic maneuver, in this case polarization, and provides a pragma-dialectical characterization of one
of these specific kinds. Section 2.5 explains how the parliamentary conventions of Dutch parliamentary debate sketched in section 2.2 constrain the possibilities to realize a topic shift or polarized discussion in this particular institutionalized context.

The examples used in this chapter all stem from the General Debate on the 2009 budget held in September 2008. The reason for choosing a General Debate is that this debate provides an excellent opportunity for politicians to address the electorate since it attracts a lot of media attention. In political circles, the General Debate is even considered the highlight of the year. As a consequence, its participants can be expected to use the debate primarily for electoral reasons, which means that they will try to address the issues that benefit their party. Almost all examples used in this chapter are contributions of the politicians Geert Wilders (Party for Freedom) and Marianne Thieme (Party for the Animals). Based on their contributions to this debate there is reason to call them one-issue politicians. Almost every contribution they made to the debate was in Wilders’s case about Muslims and in Thieme’s case about animal and environmental welfare. With respect to Wilders’s contributions, thirty-four out of the forty-one remarks he made addressed directly or indirectly the topic of Islam and integration. In Thieme’s case, twenty-nine out of her thirty-two contributions were about animal and environmental welfare.25

2.2 The institutional context of Dutch parliamentary debate

2.2.1 The aims of a parliamentary debate

Dutch parliamentarians can be involved in several kinds of institutionalized parliamentary debates. All of these debates provide the Members of Parliament (MPs) the opportunity to fulfill the tasks ensuing from their function as representatives of the people. These tasks are supervising the Government and participating in the legislative process by introducing, passing or amending bills.26 In the standing

25 One year later, in the General Debate of 2009, Wilders’s party in fact addressed some other issues as well. Their main issue was still related to Islam though: the party proposed to cut back drastically on immigration (and foreign aid) in order to prevent an increase of the retirement age. Other issues were the royal family, the welfare of elderly people and the counterbudget.

26 The information in this section about the function and organization of Parliament stems from Fransen and van Schagen 1990 and www.parlement.com (an initiative of Het Parlementair Documentatie-centrum of the University of Leiden).
orders of the Dutch Parliament a distinction is made between debates that occur in so-called committee meetings and debates occurring in plenary meetings. Committees deliberate on a specific matter and are comprised of specialized MPs of the different parties. These MPs have regular meetings with a Minister or Secretary to prepare for discussions in a plenary meeting. A plenary meeting, on the other hand, is meant to realize the performance of the two tasks of Parliament. In principle, it is a meeting of all MPs. In practice, however, a plenary meeting can already take place if a majority of the Second Chamber – that is at least 76 Members – has signed the attendance list (even if not all of them will participate in the debate). In a meeting intended to make laws, parliamentarians question either a member of the Government or another parliamentarian in order to amend a bill or to introduce a law. In a meeting intended to supervise the Government, the MPs critically question a Minister or Secretary in order to come to a judgment about the way laws and other plans and actions are carried out. These debates may concern every possible activity of the Government: from a politician’s slip of the tongue in an interview, to the budget for the coming year. The excerpts analyzed in this study all stem from plenary meetings intended to supervise the Government. In principle, all parliamentary meetings are potentially interesting for my research, because a politician might use a debate to initiate a discussion on a preferred issue irrespective of the political function it has (preparing for plenary meetings, law making, or supervising the government). However, the meetings that attract most media attention appear to be plenary meetings meant to supervise the Government (such as the yearly General Debate). These meetings therefore provide a much better opportunity for politicians to address the electorate than committee meetings and legislative debates.

The possibilities to maneuver strategically within the context of a parliamentary debate are determined by the conventions regulating this practice. Van Eemeren describes parliamentary debates as a communicative practice belonging to the domain of political communication. The aim of all practices in this domain is “to preserve a democratic political culture by means of deliberation” (2010: 140). A
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parliamentary meeting meant to supervise the Government has to be viewed as a specific type of communicative activity within this domain. It has its own specific goal that is to be achieved by making use of deliberation in a clearly defined institutionalized format laid down in parliamentary procedure. However, such a debate may still serve slightly different purposes and address different kinds of topics. Parlement.com mentions among other ones the following purposes and topics: talks (and votes) about reports, letters and memoranda of the Government, declarations of the Government, interpellation debates and emergency debates. These debates are related to each other, but need to be viewed as different communicative activity types. They are related in the sense that they share the same general goal (supervising the Government), which has to be achieved according to the same general rules (chapter VIII in the standing orders). They differ from each other because each of them has a specific goal that is in its own way instrumental in contributing to realizing the institutional point associated with the activity type in question (in this case supervising the Government) (van Eemeren 2010: 141). The specific goal of the debate can be achieved by taking into account particular unofficial informal practices associated with this debate. For example, the yearly General Debate on the budget is intended to supervise the Government by discussing the budgetary policy. The debate’s particular unofficial informal practices, such as the expectation that every parliamentarian and every member of the Government is present, might affect the course of events in the debate in different ways.

In a parliamentary debate, a politician putting forward his point of view always has a complex audience. There is the political opponent, who is the official antagonist (the immediate second party audience), and the listening, reading or watching audience (the third party audience) (van Eemeren 2010: 148). The third party audience consists of potential voters who listen to the debate from the public gallery, watch it via the internet, read about it in the newspapers or hear about it.

28 Deliberation is one of the genres of communicative activity (next to, for example, adjudication, mediation and negotiation) through which the aim of an activity type can be achieved (van Eemeren 2010: 139).

29 For example, in case a Minister or Secretary is not present, emphasizing the requirement that he should have been there provides opportunities for the Opposition to attack the Government. In this study, however, I will not restrict myself to one of the related activity types. The excerpts that will be analyzed stem from all kinds of plenary meetings of which the primary aim is to supervise the Government. If particular unofficial informal practices of the specific communicative activity type affect the strategic maneuvering (as in the case just explained for the General Debate) this will be explained and taken into account in the analysis.
on the news. The third party audience may also include the media or another party in Parliament. In the latter case the discussion with the official antagonist serves, for example, to convince a (coalition) party to vote in favor of a particular motion. Depending on what the politician is aiming for in the debate, he will consider either the opponent or the third party his *primary audience*.

A politician who aims to initiate a discussion on an issue in a debate that will attract a lot of media attention can be expected to have the intention that his argumentation has primarily an effect on his electorate: the purpose of his argumentation then is to make potential voters judge his argumentative moves as acceptable and, as a secondary effect, vote for his party in the next elections. Since a great many of his potential voters will already agree with the politician, his argumentation will be mainly aimed at reinforcing the electorate's opinion. However, he will probably also intend his argumentation to have an effect on other voters, which means that his argumentation can have the additional aim of taking away potential doubt or possible objections. If the potential electorate is the politician's primary audience in a parliamentary debate, the discussion with the secondary audience (the political opponent) can be regarded as a means to reach the primary audience (van Eemeren 2010: 109). In this study, I shall analyze the discussion with the political opponent from this particular perspective because I consider an attempt to get a specific issue on the table as a means to win the support of potential voters. Hence, in the context of debates with the primary aim of supervising the Government the critical exchange with the political opponent will be analyzed as a means to address the potential electorate without frustrating the resolution of the difference of opinion with the political opponent.31

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30 As is also explained by Mohammed, politicians that use discussions in Parliament to address and appeal to potential voters attempt to employ argumentation to convince these voters that their own party is the one that deserves the voters' support (2009: 69-70). In other words: the argumentative move to initiate a discussion on a specific issue might (together with other moves in the debate) provide an argument in the implicit discussion about who to vote for in the next elections (or as Mohammed formulates it: as an argument to support the standpoint that “unlike the other party, we can provide good leadership” (2009: 139)).

31 The choice to focus on how the discussion with the opponent is used to address the public is a choice of perspective made in view of a particular analytic point. (See for a different choice of perspective, for example, Mohammed’s dissertation on Prime Minister’s Question Time (2009)). In this study, my aim is to examine how the discussion with the opponent can be used to address potential voters and how doing so affects the discussion with the political opponent.
Some authors believe that the dialectical objective of resolving a difference of opinion with the political opponent cannot play a role in an institutionalized political discussion aimed at promoting the party’s interests. Edwards, for example, claims that sound arguing is always subordinate to the strategies and tactics that are involved in the struggle for power, because parliamentarians hardly ever have the intention of convincing their opponent (1993: 62). However, the lack of intention to convince the political opponent is not a sufficient reason to conclude that the dialectical objective is irrelevant to a politician. Although it is not his primary aim (and maybe even not his aim at all) to convince the political opponent of his standpoint, a politician can be expected to at least portray himself as a reasonable discussant willing to play the parliamentary game by the rules. As van Eemeren explains: “In order not to be perceived as non-cooperative, unresponsive, impolite or even rude by their primary audience, the participating parties cannot afford to ignore each other’s questions, statements and other contributions to the exchange” (2010: 154).

The following contribution to the General Debate illustrates how the dialectical objective may play a role in a parliamentary debate. In this example, left-wing politician Halsema accuses Wilders of practicing politics with the sole aim of engaging in party politics. Halsema bases her accusation on the observation that Wilders introduces the problem of disadvantaged neighborhoods without offering any feasible solution. She blames him for not seriously participating in the debate.

Halsema (Green Party): “The reason that you are here [in Parliament] is not at all because you sympathize with the people in these neighborhoods. It is because you hope that next Friday you will go up in the polls from 10 to 11 seats.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Whether Halsema is correct or not, the accusation is certainly not in the interest of Wilders: even if he is only in Parliament to increase his own political power, he still needs his potential voters to believe that he is there to solve their problems. In his response to Halsema, Wilders therefore attempts to repair the damage the accusation might have caused to his relationship with his electorate.

32 Edwards refers to van Braam as an author who holds the same point of view (1993: 63).
33 Grootendorst explains: “Whatever their secret motives may be, in a democracy such as ours, politicians are bound by the rules of the democratic game. This means, at the very least, that they have to act as if they wish to solve their differences of opinion in a reasonable way” (1993: 53).
Wilders (Party for Freedom): “We are here first and foremost for the Dutch who live in these neighborhoods [...], to give them a voice and to stand up for them. Even if you go to the interruption microphone a thousand times with I do not know how many words, I will keep on doing it, until the last word I will ever speak in this house.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

This fragment of dialogue shows that being seen to be engaged in a problem-solving process with the political opponent is of importance to a politician. As a consequence, the politician can be expected to make an effort to keep up a rhetorical aim as well as a dialectical aim. The politician can be expected to try to get an issue on the table that serves his party best (his rhetorical aim), while at the same time remaining a reasonable discussant willing to solve problems that matter to society in the context of parliamentary debate (his dialectical aim).

2.2.2 The conventions of parliamentary debate

In order for a parliamentary debate to proceed as productively and efficiently as possible, the standing orders of Parliament (Reglement van Orde van de Tweede Kamer) contain specific rules that serve to further the aim of the debate. These rules concern the delivery of speeches and the making of interruptions (turn sequencing, speaking time, the amount of interruptions, etc.), the way of voting, and the maintaining of order. Next to these rules, specific practices that are not laid down in the standing orders have developed over time. The interpretation of whether these conventions (rules and practices) are respected is up to the Chair and is, to some extent, based on common practice. If the Chair thinks that the participant ignores the conventions, he is entitled to interrupt or even make this participant withdraw a certain word or phrase.

In terms of confrontational strategic maneuvering, what is of importance are the roles that participants are allowed to assume and the conventions concerning the kinds of standpoints that can be advanced. I will discuss four conventions of plenary meetings that affect the confrontation stage because they either affect the proposition that can be put forward or the positions that can be taken towards that proposition.
(1) A first convention determines that participants have to stick to the agenda as set by the Chair. This convention is formulated as a rule in the standing orders of Parliament and originates from the Chair’s function to regulate the work of Parliament (Reglement van Orde 2008, article 58, section 1). It says that: “In case a speaker deviates from the topic at issue, the Chair requests him to get back to the topic at issue”. An example of such a request is the following intervention of Chairwoman Verbeet.

“Verdonk (one-woman party Verdonk): “Yesterday on public television, I was accused of having agreed in 2005 on a proposal for a general pardon, […] which was meant to save the cabinet.” […]
Chairwoman Verbeet: “Mrs. Verdonk, please let us talk about the subject that is on the agenda. […] We already have enough on our plate as it is.”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

The criteria for determining whether an issue deviates too much from the agenda are determined by the Chair. He or she can decide at any given moment in the discussion and without giving a detailed justification, that a shift of topic is undesirable.

(2) A second convention affecting the confrontation stage formulated as a rule in the standing orders is that participants “cannot use offending expressions or urge anyone to act illegally” (Reglement van Orde 2008, article 58, section 2).34 This means that a politician is not allowed to offend his opponents, nor to urge them (or other audiences) to act illegally (for example by inciting his audience to discrimination or hatred). An example that illustrates the implications of this rule is the following intervention of Chairwoman Verbeet.

Wilders (Party for Freedom): “I did not call you a stupid goose; at most I had the thought.”
Hamer (Labor Party): “I take that as a compliment.”
Chairwoman Verbeet: “But I don’t and I really want us to try to maintain the quality of our exchanges.”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

34 This rule is part of the section that explains when the Chair should make participants take back their words.
In order to protect free speech in Parliament, parliamentarians possess great freedom to put forward a standpoint, including those standpoints that outside Parliament could be judged as illegal. This applies, for example, to standpoints that contain discriminating expressions. Parliamentary immunity, however, does not mean that the parliamentarian’s freedom of speech is absolute. As Nieuwenhuis explains: “In Parliament a *regulated* forming of opinion and decision making takes place” (my italics, YT), which means that the rules laid down in the standing orders should be of higher order than the right to freedom of speech (2010: 11). As a consequence, parliamentarians have to take into account that some specific utterances might not be tolerated because they are offensive. How this rule will be maintained, though, is not laid down in the law, but determined by the Chair. Nieuwenhuis emphasizes that the possible consequences of maintaining the rule that participants are not allowed to use offending expressions are vague. The rule obviously pertains to insults directed at the opponent, but insulting a community seems to be inadmissible only if it urges others to act illegally. However, when the politician is not urging for action but proposing an amendment to a law or policy, it is not transparent where the Chair will draw the line (Nieuwenhuis 2010: 12).

Bootsma and Hoetink have shown that the interpretation of the rule that politicians should not be offensive indeed depends highly on the Chair. Different Chairs, even within one and the same cabinet period, appear to have different judgments about parliamentary language use (2006: 183-185). During the period of 2006-2010 (the fourth Cabinet of Christian Democratic Prime Minister Balkenende) there has been a lot of discussion about whether or not Chairwoman Verbeet was too lenient in applying the rule. Critics say that she allowed too many insulting and even discriminating remarks. The Dutch journalist Elsbeth Etty, for example, wrote a column in which she questions why Verbeet did not intervene when Wilders called Islamic immigrants “colonists” and their coming to the Netherlands “an Islamic intifada”. Bootsma and Hoetink, however, explain that although some

35 In addition to this formal reason, some people say that a parliamentarian’s freedom of speech is also limited because he has a bigger social responsibility and has to set a good example to others. A related reason for a politician to mark his words is that he has to keep up the dignity of Parliament. (Nieuwenhuis 2010: 4, Grootendorst 1993: 41)

36 The column is from 24 September 2008 (*NRC Handelsblad*). In January 2009 Wilders was prosecuted for discrimination for making these kinds of remarks outside Parliament (where he does not enjoy parliamentary immunity).
people think that such unparliamentary language use is indicative of diminishing Parliamentary standards, no evidence can be found for such a claim (2006: 185).

(3) A third convention affecting the confrontation stage can be derived from the right of information: parliamentarians need to have enough information to judge the performance of the Government (parlement.com). Although this rule is not explicitly mentioned in the standing orders, the Chair is allowed to intervene when a member of Government evades the obligation to provide this information. Therefore, it can be said that, as a rule, the Government has to provide the information asked for by the Parliament, which means that its members have to respond to the questions that are asked. 37 Often the Chair’s interventions concern the fact that no answer was given at all; sometimes he or she will also intervene when he or she considers the answer irrelevant. 38 An example of the first kind of intervention is the following remark of Chairwoman Verbeet.

Prime Minister Balkenende: “I will now start with part 8.”
Rutte (Liberal Party): “I thought you would come back to the asylum policy, for I did not get an answer to my question yet.” […]
Chairwoman Verbeet: “Part of the asylum policy has been addressed in an earlier stage of the debate, but not your question. […] You are right.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

This rule does not apply to a discussion between MPs though. Nevertheless, in practice parliamentarians always seem inclined to provide answers, especially when the question is an invitation to take a stance on matters. In case of such questions, parliamentarians hardly ever say that they do not have to answer a question. The

37 Chairwoman Verbeet stresses the importance of this particular rule on her personal webpage. She says that she will support the MPs in their pursuit for clear and relevant answers (www.tweedekamer.nl). In a phone call I had with Verbeet on 16 February 2009 she explained that, although Parliament has a right to information, this right cannot be enforced. When a member of Government refuses to give answers the only means left for the Parliament is to vote this member of Government out of office and hope that his/her successor will be more responsive.

38 The rule only stipulates that the information should be given and that it should be relevant. The Chair is actually allowed to break off a contribution in which a parliamentarian wrongly claims that his question has not been answered. In this respect Chairman Weisglas once said: “The standing orders do not stipulate that every question can and needs to be answered satisfactorily” (Bootsma and Hoetink 2006: 183).
reason is that because of their representative role, they are expected to take a position in matters that concern society—an expectation shared by the MPs and the electorate. Hence, it can be seen as common practice for parliamentarians to be responsive to questions put forward by their fellow MPs. It should be noted, however, that in these discussions the role of the Chair is quite restricted. The Chair can only intervene when he or she does not understand a contribution, whether it is a question or an answer. The rationale for making such interventions is, as Chairwoman Verbeet explains, that misunderstandings should be avoided or quickly resolved in order for the debate to proceed as efficiently as possible. Hence, it is only on the ground of lack of comprehensibility that the Chair is allowed to say something about the quality of an MP’s contribution.

(4) The fourth and final parliamentary convention affecting the confrontation stage requires that participants direct their contributions to others actively participating in the debate by formally addressing the Chair. This convention actually comprises two articles of the standing orders. The first part is laid down in article 55 (Reglement van Orde 2008), which says that participants are only allowed to speak after having been granted permission by the Chair to do so. The fact that the Chair will only give this permission to those actively participating in the debate can be found in a different article. This article stipulates that only MPs or Government members are allowed to make a contribution to the debate. The gallery is explicitly forbidden to give any sign of approval or disapproval (Reglement van Orde 2008, article 152), which means that the Chair can ask the audience to remain quiet. Hence, this fourth convention makes clear that the public watching the debate (whether it is the media or the electorate) is not a party in the discussion. The public is considered to already have a voice in the debate by means of the parliamentarians they have chosen as their representatives. Although a parliamentarian will not be given permission to address the public, he does, of course, have the opportunity to involve them in the debate by making claims on behalf of them. An example of such a claim is the following question of Bos, the leader of the Labor Party, by which he tries to elicit a reaction of his opponent Prime Minister Balkenende: “The main point is that the people who are following this debate want to know what you intend to do with this country” (Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79).

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39 This remark was made by Verbeet in a phone call I had with her on 16 February 2009.
2.3 Shifting the topic of debate as confrontational strategic maneuvering

2.3.1 Topic shifts in parliamentary debate

In chapter 1, I gave an example of which the first part can be identified as a topic shift. The leader of the Party for the Animals tries to shift the topic of debate from the national debt to environmental welfare by putting forward the following contribution:

[2.1] Thieme (Party for the Animals): “Everything is about money, money, and again, money. […] I would like to turn things around: what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the rest of the world?”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

This particular shift of topic is of interest to this study because the shift aims at initiating a discussion on the party’s priority issue. A more precise description of the shift is that it is a critical response to the initially introduced issue. It is meant to exclude the original issue from the discussion and immediately initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue. Thieme’s reaction should be called critical, because the remark that “everything is about money, money and again money” makes clear that she considers the national debt (or its cause, the economic recession) an issue that is less important than environmental welfare. The shift is established by excluding the initial issue from the discussion, because Thieme suggests that her critical remark is sufficient reason to end the discussion on the national debt and immediately start a new discussion on the issue of environmental welfare. Finally, the issue introduced by Thieme is different from the initial issue because the national debt is a different subject than environmental welfare. In chapter 4, I will analyze topic shifts that meet the characterization just described. In sum, these shifts have the following four characteristics: (1) the shift is made to discuss the party’s priority issue, (2) this issue is different from the initial issue proposed by the opponent, (3) the shift excludes the

40 Based on the felicity conditions for putting forward a standpoint, the listener has different grounds for not accepting a standpoint. One of them is that he believes that p is not important (Houtlosser 1995: 107).
initial issue from the discussion and starts a new discussion (4) by means of a move that can be interpreted as a critical reaction towards the opponent’s standpoint. Each of these characteristics will now be explained in more detail.

(1) Wanting to initiate a discussion on a party’s priority issue is just one of the reasons to shift the topic. The following example illustrates a shift that is solely carried out to put the opponent in an awkward position. The example is a response of the leader of the Liberal Democrats (D66), Pechtold, to a speech of Verdonk, who at that time had a one-woman faction in Parliament. In her speech, Verdonk addressed only the topic of the costs of the amnesty for 27,500 asylum seekers. Pechtold uses the issue of the asylum seekers to introduce the issue of traffic jams, which Verdonk once promised to solve, but did not address in her speech.

[2.2] Pechtold (Liberal Democrats): “Mrs. Verdonk forgets that these 27,500 [asylum seekers] will also be in traffic jams soon. How is she going to solve those traffic jams?”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Next to topic shifts that serve a different aim than getting a priority issue on the table (such as example [2.2]), there are also ‘double-motivated’ shifts. These topic shifts aim to introduce the party’s priority topic next to having some other aim. In particular, the wish to evade a difficult question seems to induce politicians to introduce an issue by which they can engage in party-politics.41 Bull and Mayer show that politicians seek safety in raising such an issue when they are confronted with a difficult question. From their research into evasive answers of British politicians it transpired that “making political points is a frequent form of non-reply used by politicians” (1993: 651).42 An example in which both motives (making a political point and evading replying) play a role is the following response from Wilders to a question of Pechtold. In this example, Wilders tries to steer the topic of discussion

41 Polcar describes an evasive answer as a form of non-straightforward communication which is “a viable communicative move, since an interlocutor can maintain the appearance of openness and cooperativity to an overall discourse goal, while not committing herself to unwanted positions, allowing unwelcome conclusions, or otherwise appearing to thwart the point of whatever discourse activity in which she is engaged” (2002: 215).
42 Bull and Mayer examined evasive answers of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock in eight televised political interviews.
away from an accusation of inconsistency by introducing the issue of Muslim immigration.

[2.3] Pechtold (Liberal Democrats): “You want to shout [that the political establishment is no good] after having contributed to it yourself for over twenty years?”

Wilders (Party for Freedom): “Mr. Pechtold will have to listen to very concrete proposals of the PVV for twenty years or longer. Again, it is not D66, but the PVV which is standing up for the average man who is bothered by the multicultural society.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

A ‘double-motivated’ topic shift such as example [2.3] is part of this study because the shift is also intended to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue.

(2) I will use the term ‘topic shift’ to refer to a discussion that is about an issue that is different from the initial issue introduced by the political opponent. This interpretation corresponds with the use of the concept of ‘topic’ in the pragma-dialectical approach to strategic maneuvering. When making a selection from the topical potential, the word ‘topical’ refers to a range of options available at a certain point in the discourse. In the confrontation stage, for example, the topical potential comprises of the possible choices for issues for discussion and standpoints (van Eemeren 2010: 100). Comparable interpretations of the word ‘topic’ can be found with Greatbatch (1986) and Goodwin (2002). In Goodwin’s view, a topic (or issue) is “a more or less determined object of contention that is, under the circumstances, worth arguing about” (2002: 86). Greatbatch uses the word ‘topic’ when speaking of ‘topical focus’. In case of a topic shift, “speakers ignore the precise topical agenda established by a prior contribution and proceed to direct their talk along an alternative track” (1986: 445).43

43 Greatbatch writes about agenda-shifting procedures as an aspect of topical organization in news interviews. The term agenda-shifting (or topic-shifting as I define it) is not to be confused with agenda-setting, a term which is also frequently used with respect to political discussions. Agenda-setting refers to the role of the media. As Jacobs and Shapiro explain, studies of agenda-setting address the phenomenon that the press affects what subject or issue politicians consider important (2000: 56).
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What might be confusing is that the word “topic” could also refer to the subject of the discussion. In speech analysis, for example, the expression “topical shift” is used to refer to a shift of subject (Haft-van Rees 1989: 85-99).\(^{44}\) In this study, a shift of topic could mean that the discussion is about another subject, but this is not by definition the case. The difference between “subject” and “topic” as applied in this study can be explained by means of the Thieme example (example [2.1]). In this example, Thieme shifts the topic from the national debt caused by the economic recession to environmental welfare. Since environmental welfare is not directly related to the economic recession, it can be said that the discussion is about a different subject than the one proposed by her opponent. If the new topic merely addressed a different aspect of the same subject, the discussion would in some way or another still be about the economic recession. In that case the topic could have changed, for example, from considering possible solutions for the recession to determining what caused the recession. My definition of topic shifts thus includes not only big shifts in which a discussion on the recession changes, for example, into a discussion on Islamisation or animal welfare, but also minor shifts in which the subject of discussion remains (more or less) the same.

In some cases, a minor shift has to be explained as an elucidation or precization of the primary issue of the debate as formulated by the Chair. An example of a precization is the following reformulation of what the General Debate is about. The Chair always starts this debate by saying: “under discussion is the General Debate on next year’s budget”. When it is Wilders’s first turn to address the issue, he reformulates this description of the debate in such a way that he is able to introduce the issue of Islam:

\[^{2.4}\] Wilders (Party for Freedom): “Today we are not only talking about the budget, we also talk about the state of the country. What does Holland look like? […] Also, there is no longer one Holland, there are two.”

*(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)*

\(^{44}\) Haft-van Rees (1989) points at several definitions of the term *subject* as they are used in speech analysis, one of them is the following definition by Levinson (1983): “a subject is a by the interactional context of referents determined class”. That means that what belongs to one class (or subject) in a specific conversation could belong to different classes in another conversation.
Wilders’s reformulation incorporates the state of the country as part of the primary topic. By means of this extension he is able to describe the state of the country as consisting of two Hollands, which provides (a bit later on in the speech) the opportunity to introduce a Holland that consists of “the elite with its ideals of a multicultural society” and one that consists of “the people paying the price”. Such a reformulation has to be interpreted as a precization because it is actually a more accurate description of what the General Debate is about. In case of the General Debate, such a precization is generally accepted (and even expected) because this particular debate is about more than just the parties’ opinions about the budget (van Schagen 1994: 26). Cases in which the reformulation of the primary topic has to be explained as a generally acceptable precization will not be part of this study because then the discussion is not really about a different issue than the one initially proposed.45

(3) In this study I focus on topic shifts carried out to immediately start a new discussion on the preferred issue. The intention of starting a new discussion is not inherent in topic shifting attempts though. In some cases the arguer may introduce the issue without having this intention. Such a shift addresses in most cases a new subject that has nothing to do with the agenda as set by the Chair.46 An example is the standpoint by which the two members of the Party for the Animals always conclude their speech, also the one in the General Debate. In the tradition of the

45 Example [2.1] of Thieme can also be explained as a precization of the primary issue of the debate. In relation to the overall topic of the debate as introduced by the Chair, this topic shift should be explained as meaning that the General Debate is about more than just money (that is: the budget). It is only as a reaction to the contribution of van Geel (see section 1.1) that Thieme’s utterance can be explained as shifting the topic by excluding the original topic (the national debt) of the debate.

46 In some cases the introduction of a topic that has nothing to do with the initial agenda is in fact seriously meant to discuss this new topic. An example is the following parliamentary contribution of the Party for Freedom. In this contribution Mr. Brinkman (PVV) made a serious attempt to introduce the issue of Islamisation in a debate on the Law on the disposal of the dead. He stated that a specific exception to the law was, in practice, most used by Muslims (an exception to the rule that bodies may not be buried within 36 hours after death). Brinkman used this fact to introduce the following standpoint: “The PVV has problems with giving Muslims a preferential treatment. This is the next proof of the Islamisation of the Netherlands and the weak attitude of the Dutch legislator to which the PVV will not bend.” (Parliamentary Proceedings, 4 September 2008)
Roman senator Cato, their last line always contains the same standpoint about animal welfare, whatever the subject of the debate. In the General Debate of 2008 this standpoint was phrased as follows:

[2.5] Thieme (Party for the Animals): “In the interest of the animals, the bio-industry should be stopped soon.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

It is not very likely, though, that the Party for the Animals seriously believes that the issue of the bio-industry (factory farming) is going to be discussed in every parliamentary debate. This kind of move is, therefore, not an attempt to exclude the original topic of debate, but rather a way of drawing attention to the topic the party finds most important. By ending every discussion with the same standpoint, the politician lets everyone know, including the electorate, that this topic has the party’s highest priority.

(4) Topic shifts can be established by different combinations of argumentative moves. Every combination includes at least the move that introduces the new issue. The way in which these moves put forward by the politician react to the opponent’s initial standpoint, however, may differ. The politician can make clear that he agrees with the opponent’s standpoint, that he disagrees, that he questions whether the standpoint is true, or refrain from giving any reaction at all. In this study I confine myself to topic shifts established by means of a move that can be interpreted as a critical reaction (expressing doubt, or the opposite standpoint). Topic shifts in which the politician agrees with his opponent’s standpoint will not be part of this study, even though, as the next example shows, these shifts are interesting strategic moves. The example of an ‘agreeing’ shift is an excerpt in which Wilders responds to a standpoint of Christian Democrat van Geel on the importance of the constitutional state. By

47 I am referring to Cato’s famous line: “Furthermore, it is my opinion that Carthage must be destroyed.”

48 The Party for the Animals makes this kind of drastic topic shift more often. Another striking example is the following contribution to a debate about the trustworthiness of the Minister of the Environment, Jacqueline Cramer. Some parliamentarians wanted the Minister to resign, but Thieme was of a different opinion. She said: “We support the Minister in these times in which hate-spreading parliamentarians, as in the old days, would like to drive her around in their villages in a dung cart. This is again a reason why the dung-issue should be put on the agenda with priority.” (Proceedings Second Chamber 2007/2008, 106, 7727-7750)
agrees with van Geel, the discussion on the initial issue ends. Wilders then uses the agreement to elicit agreement on a new discussion issue, the double nationality (especially Turkish or Moroccan next to Dutch) of people in public functions.

[2.6] Van Geel (Christian Democrats): “The core values of the democratic constitutional state are not negotiable for the Christian Democrats.”
Wilders (Party for Freedom): “I agree with Mr. van Geel that our constitutional state is something very important. […] Do you think then that the PVV was right when it said in the past that not only secretaries of state but also policemen ought to have only the Dutch nationality?”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

In this example the issue that was initially introduced is excluded from the discussion by making it seem as if the parties agree on the matter. In this study, I will only analyze topic shifts intended to get a party’s priority issue on the table in which the exclusion of the initial issue is established by means of response that can be taken as a critical reaction (as, for instance, in example [2.1]).

2.3.2 A pragma-dialectical characterization of topic shifts

Shifting the topic is a way of confrontational strategic maneuvering because it aims at defining the result of the confrontation stage in the way favored by the politician. The confrontation stage results in a specific type of difference of opinion. In case of a topic shift the favored type of difference is one about a different proposition than the original type of difference. From an analytic point of view two kinds of propositions can be distinguished that differ from proposition p. The first kind of proposition is an elucidation or precization of proposition p (as mentioned in example [2.4]). In such a case, the shift concerns only a minor reformulation of the initial proposition, which means that the participants continue the original discussion. Such a reformulation

49 Wilders assumes that the issue of the constitutional state needs no further discussion, because van Geel and he agree. However, his formulation of the issue (“the constitutional state is very important”) is different from van Geel’s formulation (“the core values of the democratic constitutional state are not negotiable”).

50 From now I use the word politician (or ‘P’) to refer to the politician trying to get his party’s priority issue on the table and political opponent (or ‘PO’) to refer to the party he is having a discussion with in Parliament.
can be characterized as proposition p'. The second kind of proposition that is analytically different from proposition p is a proposition r referring to a specific issue preferred by the speaker. A discussion about proposition r has to be analyzed as a new discussion with a new confrontation stage. The excerpts [2.1], [2.3], [2.5] and [2.6] are all examples of topic shifts intended to initiate a discussion about a proposition r. However, not all examples follow the exact route from p to r that I am interested in. In example [2.5] (the Cato-like remark of Thieme concerning the bio-industry) proposition r is not introduced by excluding the initial proposition p; in example [2.6] (about the core values of the constitutional state) the exclusion of the initial proposition p is not established by means of a critical response, but by means of a response that involves agreement.

The different results and routes of a topic shift can be made clearer with the help of a dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. Figure 2.1 is a representation of this profile. The result and the route of the topic shift I am interested in are shown in grey. It concerns a shift that aims for the exclusion of the original proposition p and the start of a new confrontation stage about a proposition r by means of a critical response towards p (see example [2.1] and [2.3]). The route towards this new confrontation stage always departs from the standpoint expressed by the protagonist (PO in the figure); the one who changes the topic is the antagonist (P in the figure), who has (at least) doubt regarding the tenability of the standpoint put forward by the protagonist.

51 This profile is based on the profile of the confrontation stage as used by Mohammed (2009: 31).
FIGURE 2.1  Preferred route of P from a discussion about p to the preferred result of a discussion about r

![Diagram of the preferred route from p to r]

According to this dialectical profile, excluding proposition p from the discussion and initiating a discussion about proposition r could be perfectly reasonable. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain, all arguers are at any time entitled to put forward any standpoint and they may in no way prevent other discussants from doing the same (2004: 136). However, a topic shift could frustrate the discussion with the political opponent. When the new proposition is introduced by means of an unclear or ambiguous formulation, by personally attacking the opponent, or by wrongly ascribing a position to the opponent, the topic shift frustrates the confrontational aim of externalizing the difference of opinion that truly exists, and becomes a fallacious move.52

52 These fallacies refer to the different rules applying to the confrontation stage: the freedom rule, the standpoint rule and the language use rule (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004).
Accusations of changing the topic imply very often that the confrontational aim of externalizing the difference of opinion is at stake. Politicians then suggest that the shift of topic is in fact a devious and veiled attempt to evade taking a stance on a specific matter. An example of such an accusation is the following response of Christian Democrat van Geel, which makes clear that he is not satisfied with the answer of Rutte, the leader of the Liberal Party. Van Geel has asked Rutte which people have to pay the bill for the reorganization of Government spending. In different phrases Rutte answers that, in contrast to the Christian Democrats, the Liberal Party favors a smaller Government in order to help the weaker to participate in society again. Van Geel responds as follows:

Van Geel (Christian Democrats): “I observe that I have asked already three times who is paying the bill. I get a general answer that I have heard three times now. So let me indicate who according to the VVD has to pay the bill.”
*(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)*

Although van Geel could be right that Rutte’s answer is evasive and unclear, it should be noted that accusations such as van Geel’s could also be intended strategically. When a politician does not get the answer he prefers, he might feel tempted to say that the answer is unclear and therefore not an answer at all.

### 2.4 Polarizing the parties’ standpoints as confrontational strategic maneuvering

#### 2.4.1 Polarization in parliamentary debate

The second part of the Thieme-example mentioned in the introductory chapter can be identified as an attempt to polarize the parties’ standpoints. After the leader of the Party for the Animals has tried to shift the topic of debate from the national debt to environmental welfare, she suggests that she and her opponent disagree on the issue of environmental welfare. In so doing she challenges her opponent to participate in a different discussion. Thieme said the following:
This particular polarizing move is of interest for this study because its aim is to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue. A more precise description of this particular way of polarizing is that the move aims to change a situation of agreement (in this case presumed agreement) between the politician and the opponent on an issue favored by the politician into a situation of disagreement. Earlier in his speech, van Geel has emphasized the measures taken by the Christian Democrats to protect the environment. Thieme wants to make clear that although van Geel claims to be concerned with the environment, it is her party, not the Christian Democrats, who takes the problem seriously. In chapter 5, I will analyze polarizing attempts that meet the characterization just described. In sum, these attempts have the following three characteristics: (1) the polarizing move is made to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue, (2) between the politician and the opponent by (3) changing a situation of (presumed) agreement into a situation of disagreement. Each of these characteristics will now be explained in more detail.

(1) This study focuses on polarization intended to initiate a discussion on a specific issue. However, polarizing actions in Parliament are not always meant to initiate a discussion. The following example from Thieme shows how she suggests that the leader of the Liberal Party Rutte disagrees with his party members in order to make him agree (and not disagree) with her on the issue of environmental welfare:

[2.8] Thieme (Party for the Animals): “When I hear Mr. Rutte speak of the environment, I think: he cannot really mean this, can he? I know him as someone who wants to be ‘green’. In the corridors, I have also heard him say that he wants to eat less meat. But now I hear him talk about the environment in this way and I think by myself: his parliamentary party makes him say this.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

By saying that Rutte disagrees in fact with his party’s standpoint, Thieme claims that Rutte is inconsistent. This claim seems to be meant not only as an argument to convince Rutte (and maybe his party) to take a more environment-friendly
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standpoint, but also to show potential voters that he is in fact a rather unreliable politician: at one point he may portray himself as willing to be ‘green’, at another point he defends a completely different standpoint.

In some cases though, the polarizing move which appears to be an argument meant to convince the opponent has to be reconstructed as an attempt to establish disagreement. In such a case the polarizing move can be reconstructed as an argument supporting the politician’s standpoint, but without in any way adapting it to the opponent’s demands. Example [2.9] illustrates this way of polarizing. In the excerpt, Wilders claims that the Socialists and their electorate have a disagreement on how to handle violent young Moroccans. The reason for claiming this is that in the past the party has not been able to solve the problem of increasing crime by these Moroccans; a problem that bothers a large part of their electorate. Wilders then makes it seem as if this claim (that the socialists and their electorate disagree on how to handle violent young Moroccans) is an argument that has convinced the Socialists to now support his standpoint to introduce stronger punishments. In the excerpt he asks the leader of the Socialist Party whether this is indeed the case.

[2.9] Wilders (Party for Freedom): “The people in your neighborhoods are troubled by crime. Beautiful as a policeman on the beat might seem, a policeman and a community centre do not solve the problem. What are you really going to do for the socialist voter? Will you let them down as in the previous years? […] [or] Are you, in contrast to previous years, now in favor of more severe punishments for the scum that makes those neighbourhoods unsafe? Is there a new wind blowing or do we continue on the old, wrong track?”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

The way in which the argument – that in the past the party has not been able to solve the problem of increasing crime by Moroccans – is put forward does not make it really convincing for the Socialists though. If their leader, Kant, were to agree with Wilders that they are now in favor of more severe punishments, she would acknowledge that the measures proposed by her own party turned out to be worthless and, as a consequence, that they let down their voters (they were on the wrong track, leaving their voters out in the cold). The Socialist Party, therefore, is left no other choice than to disagree with Wilders: all his questions require a non-approving answer. Hence, the move is not meant to solve the issue of the violent
young Moroccans, but to bring back the discussion on this matter.\textsuperscript{53} Since this kind of polarizing move is meant to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue, it will be part of this study.

(2) I use the term polarization to refer to the act of creating two separate groups with opposite opinions or positions.\textsuperscript{54} What initially seems to be one group (or a collection of different groups), should, according to the person who polarizes, be divided into two groups. This is a neutral definition because no judgment is given on the rightness or desirability of the division. Dascal explains how polarization can be explained both negatively and positively in deliberative thinking: “sticking uncompromisingly to a dichotomy may lead to sharp disagreement and paradox, but it can also sharpen the issues at stake and help to find a solution” (2007: 299).\textsuperscript{55} In this study, I use the neutral definition of polarization, which means that I look at how the politician and his political opponent can be portrayed as different groups holding opposite opinions irrespective of the positive or negative consequences this separation may have for the development of the discussion. I will mention two possible options for portraying the political opponent as (part of) the group holding the opposite opinion.

The first option is to address the opponent in his capacity as a problem solver\textsuperscript{56} and to claim that the parties have different solutions. Example [2.10] shows how

\addcontentsline{toc}{section}{References}

\textsuperscript{53} The word “crime” used by Wilders refers to crime committed by young Moroccans. A bit earlier in the debate, he talked about crime committed by “little Moroccan boys of two crates high”. A day later he said (in the same General Debate): “Community Centers? Cameras? The whole Government and the Prime Minister evade the cause of this misery. The cause of this misery is that Moroccan scum that has to be put out of the country.”

\textsuperscript{54} See Cambridge English Dictionary.

\textsuperscript{55} In everyday language, polarizing is often used as a negative term. It then refers to generalizations that are aimed at creating undesirable tensions and driving people apart. Also, the political definition of polarization can be evaluated both positively and negatively. In politics, polarizing is viewed as an action of power, because it is aimed at dominating the political opponent. A positive explanation is that polarization is an inevitable aspect of politics, and could have a salutary effect on society. From that point of view it is a means to bring to light and, in the end, solve so-called “hidden conflicts”. The negative explanation would be that a politician whose only aim is to dominate the opponent probably has no interest in the concerns, views and insights of his opponent. Such an attitude is not constructive for resolving the conflict. These views on polarization can be found in a discussion in de Volkskrant of 28 February 2009 between Ellian (professor of social cohesion, citizenship and multiculturalism) and de Dreu (professor of psychology). See also Ellian 2009.

\textsuperscript{56} By “problem solver” I refer to the politician’s function to cooperate with other politicians in order to resolve the conflicts and problems that matter to society.
Thieme attempts to initiate disagreement in this way. In this part of the debate Balkenende thinks that he agrees with Thieme on the importance of paying attention to environmental welfare. Thieme, however, tries to make clear that she takes the problem much more seriously.

[2.10] Thieme (Party for the Animals): “The Prime Minister makes it seem as if he is sailing with a small boat on a rippling stream. We are, however, involved in a worldwide food crisis. […] This is an emergency.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

By describing the situation as an emergency and Balkenende’s solution as suitable only for circumstances far less critical, Thieme tries to show that her approach to the problem is effective, while Balkenende’s is not.

A second way for a politician to establish disagreement between himself and his political opponent is to approach the opponent in his role as representative of the people and divide the electorate into two groups: a group represented by the opponent, and a group not represented by the opponent. The following remark from Wilders addressed to the “leftist” Labor Party illustrates this way of polarizing.

[2.11] Wilders (Party for Freedom): “We could have been swimming in money and instead of doing so we follow the leftist’s dream to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands. […] Henk and Ingrid are paying for Mohammed and Fatima.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

This provocative remark is an attempt to make the Labor Party explicitly say that it disagrees with Wilders’s party. Wilders knows that he is putting forward a standpoint about Islam that is generalizing and, therefore, unacceptable to the other parties. He is able to do this by exploiting the representative role of the parliamentarian. By dividing the electorate in two opposing groups, Muslims and non-Muslims, Wilders implies that the group he wants to represent is not represented well by the Labor Party.57

57 Polarizing is often referred to as creating a ‘we against them’ situation. People are referring to this specific type of polarizing when, for example, the electorate is divided into a group consisting of ‘our own people’ and a group consisting of immigrants (a strategy used by extreme rightist
The polarizing moves that will be analyzed in this study aim to change an *undesirable situation of agreement or presumed agreement* into a situation of disagreement (in this case: a pro/con-discussion). However, it is also possible that the initial situation is not a situation of (presumed) agreement but of doubt: in that case the political opponent has cast doubt on the politician’s standpoint. In these situations polarizing might also be a helpful tool to heighten disagreement, because though initially the two parties hold different positions, these positions are not yet opposites. An example of polarization that starts from a situation in which the opponent has put forward a reaction of critical doubt is the following passage from a discussion between Wilders and Prime Minister Balkenende. In the excerpt Wilders divides (just as in example [2.11]) the electorate in two opposing groups (the prisoners and the elderly people) in order to establish a disagreement between himself and the Prime Minister. At the end he claims that the Prime Minister, in contrast to Wilders’s party that stands up for the elderly, prefers to take care of the prisoners.

[2.12] Wilders (Party for Freedom): “Yet it remains a shame that in this country prisoners are treated better than our elderly.” […] Balkenende: […] “I think we have to be careful when comparing the one with the other, because it is not a black and white story. Of course it is interesting to hear what Mr. Wilders has to say about the rights of prisoners. They also have rights, but I am not sure whether the one can be compared with the other just like that.” Wilders: “I want everyone of the elderly to be showered every day. I want them to go outside everyday. I want them to be surrounded by enough nurses. I want them to be able to smoke in their own room. The rights that now hold for criminals, rapists, pedophiles and murderers do not hold for the elderly.” Balkenende (PM): “Chairwoman, we have exchanged our views. Of course we will make inquiries, but I am not going to make the comparison Mr. Wilders makes and I will for sure not attach any conclusions to it.”

Another well-known ‘we against them’ situation arises when a division is created between the people and the political establishment (a strategy used by populist politicians (D’Anjou 2005, Abts 2004)). In that case a politician separates the politician’s roles as problem solver and representative of the people by claiming that in their tendency to resolve problems the established politicians forget which problems really matter to the people.
Wilders: “Unfortunately then, no other conclusion can be drawn than that the Prime Minister of The Netherlands chooses for the prisoners and not for the elderly people. That is a shame.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2009/2010, 2, 2-100)

The Prime Minister responds by saying that he will investigate whether Wilders is right in claiming that elderly people do not have the rights that prisoners have. This response has to be taken as a reaction of critical doubt: Balkenende does not accept right away that Wilders is right, but neither does he claim that Wilders is wrong. As can be noted, the example does not really fit in with the corpus used so far: it is not an example from the General Debate of 2008 like all other examples used in this chapter (but from the General Debate of 2009), and the polarizing move is not about the issue of Islamisation. The reason that it is different is that in the General Debate of 2008 no examples could be found in which either Wilders or Thieme encountered critical doubt when trying to initiate a discussion on their preferred issue. Since these cases of polarizing in which the politician is confronted with (presumed) doubt do not seem to be representative of the polarizing moves used in Parliament, they will not be further discussed in this study. The polarizing moves analyzed in this study are all made to initiate a discussion on the party’s priority issue between the politician and the opponent by changing a situation of (presumed) agreement into a situation in which parties hold opposite standpoints.

58 It is often extremely difficult to differentiate between a negative standpoint and an expression of doubt. As van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Snoeck Henkemans explain: “out of politeness expressions of doubt are often thinly disguised negative standpoints” (2002: 8). In this example too it could be doubted whether Balkenende’s expression of doubt is in fact a negative standpoint since he has objections to the comparison between prisoners and elderly people. However, in this part of the debate no indications can be found that Balkenende disagrees with Wilders on the standpoint that elderly people should be treated better.

59 A possible explanation for why these polarizing moves are rarely found in parliamentary debates is offered by the circumstance that, due to their representative role, parliamentarians are expected to take a position on matters, especially when their political opponents invite them to do so (cf. section 2.2.2 (3)). Just casting doubt is therefore not a common reaction when an opponent puts forward a standpoint.
2.4.2 A pragma-dialectical characterization of polarization

Polarizing the positions of the discussion parties is – just like shifting the topic – a way of confrontational strategic maneuvering because it aims at defining the type of difference of opinion in a way favored by the politician. In the case of polarization the favored type of difference is a mixed difference of opinion: polarizing implies that there are two opposing poles, which means that the difference of opinion is more serious than a difference that involves just doubt about the tenability of a specific standpoint. From an analytic point of view there are two situations in which there is no mixed difference of opinion: when the parties agree on a standpoint (which means that there is no difference of opinion), and when the opponent only casts doubt on the standpoint (a non-mixed difference of opinion). The aim of a polarizing move is to make the opponent take the opposite position in order to prevent either of these two undesirable situations from occurring. The difference between a topic-shifting strategic maneuver and a polarizing strategic maneuver can now be explained. In topic shifts the aim is to change the proposition that is under discussion when the discussion is not about a proposition that concerns the preferred issue. When polarizing the parties’ positions the aim is to change the positions taken by the parties towards this proposition because then the proposition put forward concerns the preferred issue but there is initially no mixed difference of opinion. Based on this argumentative explanation of topic shifts and polarization, it can be deduced that every attempt to get a specific issue on the table can be characterized as either a topic shift or a polarization. A topic shift is concerned with the propositional content of the standpoint about the issue the politician wants to discuss, and polarization with the communicative function of this standpoint.

Polarizing moves start from a situation of (presumed) agreement or doubt: the opponent has put forward a reaction of agreement or critical doubt, or is expected to do so. These different options can again be made clearer with the help of a dialectical profile of the confrontation stage. In case both parties initially agree on a standpoint about proposition r, the polarizing party (the politician (P)) can start a new discussion on the same proposition r.60 This option is represented in figure 2.2 by starting at the top of the route; this route corresponds with example [2.7], [2.9],

60 As van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain, rule 1 grants the right to put forward the same standpoint to the same discussant again (2004: 136-7).
[2.10] and [2.11]. The second option, in which the political opponent (PO) casts doubt on the standpoint, is represented by taking just the second half of figure 2.2. Example [2.12] corresponds with this option.

FIGURE 2.2 Preferred route of P from no difference of opinion or a non-mixed difference of opinion to the preferred result of a mixed difference of opinion about a proposition r

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{1 P} \\
\text{2 PO rud/r} \\
\text{3 P} \\
\text{4 PO}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
+/r & \quad \text{maintain } +/r & \quad \text{retract } +/r \\
\text{PO rud/r} & \quad ?(+/r) & \quad +/r \text{ [no discussion]} \\
\text{PO maintain } ?(+/r) & \quad -/r & \quad \text{retract } ?(+/r)
\end{array}
\]

CF stage: confrontation stage
P = the politician who tries to polarize the parties’ standpoints
PO = the political opponent
+/r = advancing a positive standpoint concerning proposition r
rud/r = requesting a usage declarative concerning proposition r (elucidation or precization)
?/(+/r) = casting doubt on +/r
maintain +/r = expressing the will to defend +/r
retract +/r = expressing that one refrains from defending +/r
-/r = advancing a negative standpoint concerning a proposition r
maintain ?(+/r) = expressing the will to defend ?(+/r)

61 It should be emphasized that in many cases parts of this route remain implicit. It is, for instance, possible that the first part of the route in which the parties agree is not expressed. In that case the politician only assumes that the opponent agrees (see, for instance, example [2.11]).

62 The fact that I am only concerned with polarization intended to establish a mixed difference of opinion between the politician and his political opponent, excludes example [2.8]. In this example the polarizing move is meant as an argument (and not as a (sub)-standpoint), which means that the move has to be analyzed as part of the argumentation stage.
Getting an Issue on the Table

retract (+/r) = expressing that one refrains from defending (+/t)

According to this dialectical profile, initiating a discussion on a standpoint on which the arguers agree or seem to agree could be a perfectly reasonable move. In such a case, polarizing the parties’ discussion positions is a way to externalize the difference of opinion that truly exists between the parties. However, polarizing moves can frustrate the discussion with the political opponent. When a mixed difference is accomplished by imposing a position on someone who does not hold this position, such a move is regarded a straw man fallacy (a violation of pragma-dialectical rule 3).  

Accusations of polarization often state that a straw man fallacy has occurred. This also happened in the follow up of the discussion Wilders tried to initiate about the violent young Moroccans (example [2.9] in the previous section). In the excerpt, Wilders tried to establish disagreement with the leader of the Socialist Party by asking her whether her party now agreed with more severe punishments for “that scum”. Kant then accuses Wilders of a straw man fallacy.

Kant (Socialist Party): “Here, a difference is created that does not exist. Do you really believe that I think that we should not be tough on these firebrands?”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Although Kant could be right in saying that there is no difference of opinion, it should be noted that such accusations can also be used strategically. When trying to conceal a difference of opinion, for example about an important electoral issue as how to deal with violent young Moroccans, accusing someone of wrongly polarizing the discussion might be an advantageous discussion move.

63 Comparable to topic shifts, polarizing moves can frustrate the externalization of the difference of opinion by violating any of the three confrontational discussion rules (the freedom rule, the standpoint rule and the language use rule).
2. STRATEGIC MANEUVERS TO GET AN ISSUE ON THE TABLE

2.5 How parliamentary conventions constrain topic shifts and polarization

The parliamentary conventions described in section 2.2.2 affect the party’s possibilities to maneuver strategically in the confrontation stage. In this section I will explain what that means for the confrontational maneuvers of topic-shifting and polarization. The first two conventions affect the standpoint a politician may advance. They stipulate that participants in a parliamentary debate are not allowed to put forward just any standpoint: the standpoint has to relate to the topic as set by the Chair (convention 1) and should not be offending (convention 2). The third and fourth convention determine the division of the participants’ tasks, which means that participants are not allowed to take just any position. The rules determine that there is a fixed set of tasks, and that each of these tasks is assigned to a specific participant: the Parliament’s task is to ask critical questions about bills or the performance of the Government; the Government’s task is to account for that bill or their performance by answering those questions. For parliamentarians it is not a rule but rather common practice to answer questions when asked to do so, because they are expected to take a position on matters that concern society (convention 3). The voters are not assigned any role in these debates (convention 4).

The different tasks of the participants lead to different discussion positions. The Government always holds a positive standpoint concerning the main point of view that the performance of the Government was up to standard or that a bill proposed by the Government should be accepted. These points of view are always positively formulated in order for the burden of proof to fall on the Government, which makes the Government the protagonist of the positive standpoint. The task of the MPs is to question the tenability of this positive standpoint. Hence, they hold the neutral position of casting doubt (which makes Parliament the antagonist of the positive standpoint). However, at the end of the debate MPs also have to give their judgment. By voting they indicate whether they think the performance of the

64 There is one exception to this rule: when a parliamentarian introduces a bill, he is assigned the task to defend it as well (www.parlement.com).

65 Houtlosser explains that in the traditional debate literature (for example Freeley’s *Argumentation and debate*) these roles are called the “affirmative side” and the “negative side”. Confusing about the latter name is, as Houtlosser points out, that it wrongly suggests that the party questioning the positive standpoint always holds a negative position towards the point of view that is at issue (1995: 43).
Government was up to standard or whether a law should be introduced. This means that in the end they have to adopt a negative or a positive position towards the point of view at issue: they either agree with the Government or they take an opposite point of view. A consequence of this double task of questioning and judging is that the initial position held by the MPs often already contains a judgment, a negative or a positive position. Then their questions do not serve the aim of seeking information to come to a judgment, but of eliciting premises to support their own standpoint.

The conditions for putting forward a standpoint and the division of the discussion tasks are institutional preconditions for confrontational strategic maneuvering. The conditions impose restrictions on a right laid down in one of the pragma-dialectical rules for conducting a critical discussion, namely the freedom rule. This rule stipulates that in the confrontation stage no specific conditions apply to the content of the standpoint that is advanced, the person to whom it is advanced, or the person who advances it (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 190-191). Hence, according to the freedom rule, each party can put forward the proposition he prefers to discuss and each party can take any possible position towards that proposition. However, due to the parliamentary conventions this freedom is restricted; not every proposition is allowed and not every politician can take any position towards a standpoint. These restrictions have an effect on the options for choosing from the topical potential, adapting one’s move to audience demand and for exploiting the appropriate presentational devices. I will briefly indicate what seem to be the most important constraints these parliamentary conventions enforce on the possibilities to establish a topic shift and to polarize the parties’ standpoints.

66 In most cases this point of view does not concern the initial standpoint whether the performance of the Government was up to standard, but a sub-standpoint on why that is or is not the case.
67 This way of doing politics is often criticized as backroom politics: parliamentarians then have their judgment defined outside the appropriate and public channels before entering the debate.
68 MPs are supposed to address the Government via the Chair by means of critical and informative questions. Such contributions, however, can easily be used to put forward a standpoint. Quintilian already explained that ‘question and answer’ is just a means to come to a judgment. He says: “In a debate the things people say are no different than in ordinary arguments, only the way in which things are said is different, namely by means of questions and answers” (Quintilian 2001: 333). Many authors have pointed at the assertive function a question can have. See, for example van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987: 162-163), van Rees (2006; 84) and Walton (1989: xiv). Walton uses the term adversarial question to refer to a question that entails opposition (as is the case with most critical questions put forward by MPs).
69 The rules can be viewed as primary conditions, and the unofficial informal practices as secondary conditions (van Eemeren 2010: 152).
In section 2.3.2, I have defined a topic shift as a critical response to the issue initially introduced by the opponent meant to exclude this issue from the discussion and to initiate a discussion on an issue preferred by the politician. The easiest way to establish such a topic shift would be to break off the initial discussion and to start a new discussion on the issue preferred by the speaker. In everyday discussions, this could be a perfectly reasonable way of proceeding – for example, if someone claims that “Obama is not the best president of America”, the listener could respond by saying “It is high time that you put out the garbage” (thereby implying that he finds the garbage a more important issue than the American presidency). In a parliamentary context, however, such an evading response might be problematic due to the restrictions applying to the topical potential. The practice that politicians take a position in matters (convention 3) restricts the potential of possible responses to a standpoint. Refraining from taking a position would, therefore, be a politically weak move that could easily be exploited by the opponent. The convention that politicians have to stick to the agenda (convention 1) restricts the possible propositions than can be put forward as the new issue. Only the issues that relate to the initial agenda will be allowed by the Chair. Also, the possibilities to adapt a move to the audience’s demands are restricted when aiming for a topic shift in Parliament. The convention (4) that politicians are not allowed to address the public means that a politician can only appeal to potential voters by means of contributions that are – via the Chair – addressed to the opponent. In a presidential election debate, for example, it would be possible to shift to a preferred issue by saying “We can keep on talking about economic facts and figures, but those of you who are listening at home are probably more interested in how we get you or your family back to work”. In Parliament, the Chair will most likely break off such a contribution.

In section 2.4.2, I have defined polarization as putting forward a standpoint in such a way that a situation of agreement on a preferred issue changes into a situation of a mixed difference of opinion. A way to establish such a disagreement would be for an arguer to describe his own standpoint or his opponent’s standpoint in a rather extreme way. Such extreme formulations, however, could be regarded as offensive and even discriminating. An offensive example would, for instance, be to say that

70 When responding in this way the arguer violated the rule of language stipulating that “you must not perform any speech acts that are not in an appropriate way connected with previous speech acts” (the Gricean maxim of relevance) (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 76-77). However, no rule for critical discussion is violated.
“Roma are not a protected animal species, but a criminal bunch of primitives who should be thrown out of the country”. Such a claim will most probably help to initiate disagreement on the position of Roma. Also, its content does not make the standpoint fallacious. In specific contexts (for example an internet forum), such a controversial, and in this case even discriminating standpoint might be pre-eminently debatable and can thus provide good reason for discussion.\textsuperscript{71} However, in a parliamentary context such standpoints are problematic due to the convention that a contribution should not be offensive (convention 2). This convention restricts the potential of standpoints that can be put forward and the way in which they can be presented.\textsuperscript{72} In case of polarizing, also the possibilities to adapt a move to the audience’s demands are restricted. These restrictions are the same as explained for a topic shift: the convention (4) that politicians are not allowed to address the public means that a politician can appeal to potential voters only by means of contributions that are – via the Chair – addressed to the opponent.

\textsuperscript{71} This example was found on an internet forum that discussed the topic of the position of Roma in Europe.

\textsuperscript{72} The Roma example is an offensive standpoint presented in an offensive way. Saying that Roma are a group of criminals is a standpoint that is generalizing and therefore offensive to the whole group; Describing the Roma as “primitives who are not a protected animal species” is an offensive formulation, because it describes these people as inferior to non-Roma and indirectly even as animals.
3. PRESENTATIONAL CHOICES IN TOPIC SHIFTS AND POLARIZATION

3.1 Introduction

In chapter 2, I characterized particular topic shifts and polarizing maneuvers by specifying the results they aim for and the routes according to which this aim can be realized. The parliamentary conventions applying to the confrontation stage were seen to impose restrictions on conducting these strategic maneuvers. This chapter concentrates on developing a method for determining the strategic function of the presentational choices made in such confrontational strategic maneuvers. It focuses on the possibilities to effectively formulate the argumentative moves necessary to establish the maneuver. This means that for each move, the presentational choices will be analyzed according to how they contribute to realizing the aims of a maneuver within the limitations imposed by the context of parliamentary debate. In accordance with the ideas developed by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (van Eemeren 2010), I view presentational choices as one of the aspects of the argumentative moves in which strategic maneuvering manifests itself: when making an argumentative move there is a choice to be made from the options constituting the topical potential, from the options to adapt the move to meet audience demand, and from the presentational devices.

In section 3.2 it will be explained how the distinction between an explicit and an implicit presentation of (parts of) an argumentative move can be used to identify different tactics for realizing the aims of a confrontational maneuver. First, I shall describe what the distinction between an explicit and an implicit presentation amounts to with respect to the different moves of the confrontation stage. Second, I
shall explain how this distinction can be used to distinguish specific combinations of choices that might be advantageous to the politician in view of the aims he wants to achieve in a particular situation. Such an opportune combination of presentational choices I shall call a *presentational tactic*. In section 3.3, I shall describe two tactics that can be used to establish the topic shift characterized in chapter 2 (section 2.3.2). I shall define the argumentative sub-aims of topic-shifting maneuvers and then explain how in each tactic the choice of presentational devices is of help in realizing these aims. In section 3.4, I shall describe two presentational tactics that may be advantageous when the aim is to conduct the polarizing maneuver characterized in chapter 2 (section 2.4.2). I shall again explain how these tactics contribute to realizing the sub-aims of a polarizing maneuver.

### 3.2 Presentational choices in the confrontation stage

To explain the contribution that presentational choices in argumentative moves may make to the realization of arguers’ aims, I will start from the general distinction between an explicit and an implicit presentation as proposed by van Eemeren (2010). For each argumentative move choices have to be made between implicit and explicit formulations. This distinction reflects the fact that the intended meaning of each (part of an) argumentative move can be expressed literally or merely suggested. When the meaning of a move is suggested, the arguer expects his listener to infer the intended meaning of the move from what has been literally expressed, the surrounding discourse and the context in general. The argumentative moves that are relevant for resolving a difference of opinion are realized by means of specific speech acts. The explicit-implicit distinction applies both to the presentation of the communicative function of the speech acts and the presentation of their propositional content. Neither the function nor the content of a speech act has to be conveyed explicitly for this speech act to be performed correctly. Arguers may choose to perform speech acts partly or fully implicitly. When an arguer is of the opinion that someone should close the windows, he could, for example, use an

73 The explicit-implicit distinction is just one of the possibilities to classify presentational choices. Other possibilities are, for example, to describe them in terms of rhetorical figures, word choice, or by means of Gross and Dascal’s (1999) distinction between registers and variations within a register.
explicit formulation such as “My opinion is that the windows should be closed”, but he could also use an implicit (and indirect) formulation such as “I have goose flesh”.\footnote{This example can be identified as an indirect expression, because its primary function is indicated by means of an expression with a different meaning. My use of the term \textit{implicit} covers both cases in which an argumentative move is (partly) not expressed, and cases in which the move is (partly) conveyed indirectly (see also section 3.2.2).}

Depending on which speech acts are (partly) presented implicitly, these choices can be situated at different ‘levels’ of argumentative discourse: the discourse as a whole, the discussion stage and the argumentative move. At the level of the discourse as a whole, different stages in a critical discussion (the confrontation, opening, argumentation and concluding stage) may be distinguished. The choice of whether to present a discussion stage explicitly or implicitly is situated at this particular level. In argumentative practice, choosing to leave a stage unexpressed is not uncommon. The opening stage, for instance, in which the parties establish how much relevant common ground they share, often remains implicit. But the other three stages need not always be passed through explicitly either. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst indicate, “the stages can be properly dealt with, whether explicitly or implicitly” (2004: 60).

At the level of the discussion stage, the argumentative moves can be distinguished which are instrumental at that particular stage. These moves are represented in the dialectical profile of the stage concerned. The choice to present a move explicitly or implicitly is situated at this particular level. Leaving entire moves unexpressed is something that occurs regularly in practice. In a monologic discussion, for example, the reader’s or listener’s (presumed) position (doubt or counterstandpoint) is always taken into account, but most often without mentioning it.

At the level of the discussion move, it is possible to distinguish between the different parts of a speech act (the \textit{communicative function}\footnote{The term \textit{communicative function} (as an equivalent of Austin’s \textit{illocutionary force}) has been coined by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992: 27).} and the \textit{propositional content}). In practice, expressing all parts of a speech act is the exception rather than the rule. For example, an arguer does not have to introduce his standpoint by saying “I am of the opinion that…” for the standpoint to be recognized as such; usually just putting forward the propositional content (for example “Peter is a good father”) will suffice.
In this study I only discuss presentational choices made at the level of the discussion stage and at the level of the discussion move. In order to explain what these presentational choices involve, I will describe them in relation to choices concerning the content of the move. This distinction corresponds roughly to the difference between content and form – or, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain it, between “the elements to be used” and “the technique for their presentation” (1969: 119). From “the elements to be used” a speaker or writer can choose those elements which he thinks to be most opportune considering 1) his own position and the actual state of affairs in the discourse, and 2) the preferences, wishes and beliefs he expects the addressee to have. The first is what van Eemeren and Houtlosser refer to as an “opportune selection from the topical potential”, while the second is what they call “adaptation to audience demand”. The presentational aspect of strategic maneuvering refers to the ways chosen to realize in the most effective way an opportune selection of topics and audience demand. For both the level of the discussion stage and the level of the discussion move, I will briefly indicate what “elements” can be used. Then, I will explain the choices that can be made to present these elements explicitly or implicitly (“the technique for their presentation”).

3.2.1 The level of the discussion stage

At the level of the discussion stage a speaker or writer can choose between the different routes of discussion moves calculated to lead to the preferred result of the confrontation stage (definition of the disagreement). Based on the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, different routes can be distinguished that lead to a specific definition of the disagreement. Figure 3.1 is a representation of this profile.

76 Choices at the level of the discussion as a whole (to convey a stage explicitly or implicitly) are not taken into account because I focus entirely on the confrontation stage (in which topic shifting and polarizing maneuvers take place).
3. PRESENTATIONAL CHOICES IN TOPIC SHIFTS AND POLARIZATION

![Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 3.1** Dialectical profile of the confrontation stage

1A

2B rud/p ?(+/p) +/p [no discussion]

3A +/p' maintain +/p retract +/p [exit discussion]

A = party A
B = party B
+/p = advancing a positive standpoint concerning a proposition p
?(+/p) = casting doubt on +/p
rud/p = requesting a usage declarative concerning proposition p (elucidation or precization)
+/p' = advancing a reformulation of +/p
maintain +/p = expressing the will to defend +/p
retract +/p = expressing that one refrains from defending +/p

For example, in case party A aims for a non-mixed difference of opinion about a proposition p, he could try to realize the route that leads most directly to the preferred result, which is the route in which party B casts doubt on the standpoint.77 However, when he does not expect party B to put forward the preferred reaction of casting doubt, it might be more effective to take a route that leads to the same preferred result but consists of more or other argumentative moves.78 Which route

77 This preference of the protagonist could be explained by means of the Principle of Least Effort as formulated by Zipf (1972). Given that the protagonist wants to have a discussion, he or she can be expected to minimize articulatory effort and hence encourage brevity (the most straightforward route).

78 Two remarks should be made in relation to the profile (figure 3.1):
1. In principle, every reaction of party B that is allowed according to the dialectical profile could in the end lead to a non-mixed difference of opinion about a proposition p (or p'): in case party B asks for a usage declarative the result could be a single non-mixed difference of opinion about +/p', in case party B agrees, party A could introduce +/p' himself hoping that party B will cast doubt on this standpoint. The result is then, again, a non-mixed difference of opinion about +/p'.
2. In the dialectical profile it is only necessary to represent the simplest type, or “elementary form”, of a difference of opinion, because all types of difference of opinion can be decomposed into a constellation of single non-mixed differences (van Eemeren et al. 2002: 8-9). Hence, this profile does not exclude the other possible definitions of the difference of opinion (single mixed, multiple non-mixed and multiple mixed).
a speaker or writer chooses to take depends on what he considers to be the most effective choice in view of the aim he wants to achieve, the actual state of affairs in the discourse, and the addressee’s expected preferences, wishes and beliefs.

Apart from choosing a route, the speaker or writer must also (and at the same time) choose a way of presenting the moves he makes along this route. This presentational process amounts from my perspective to making a choice between expressing the moves of the preferred route and ‘skipping’ specific moves by only suggesting how the route should be filled in. The option of suggesting the content of a move exists for all moves in a specific route: the moves that have to be realized by the arguer himself and those that need to be realized by the opponent. In the latter case a discussant actually attributes a specific move to his opponent.

Let me illustrate these possibilities by means of an example. When party A aims for a non-mixed difference of opinion he can put forward argumentation immediately before or after expressing his standpoint. He then suggests (rightly or wrongly) that party B doubts his standpoint and that he (that is party A), despite this doubt, maintains his standpoint. By immediately putting forward argumentation, party A thus ascribes the second move in the profile to party B and suggests how the third move has to be filled in. The following formulation illustrates how this might work: “I think we should close the windows, because otherwise we will all get sick”. Here, the standpoint (we should close the windows) is formulated in combination with an argument (otherwise we will get sick). Such a way of formulating indicates that despite the possible doubt of the opponent (is it really necessary to close the windows?) party A maintains his standpoint that the windows should be closed. This option of anticipating doubt can be used if party A wants to go through the confrontation stage as quickly as possible when he expects his opponent not to accept his standpoint.

3.2.2 The level of the discussion move

The options to choose a specific content for each move depend, at least to a certain extent, on the speech acts allowed in a specific context to realize that specific move. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) have explained which speech acts are allowed in a critical discussion: for each discussion stage, and for all moves constituting that stage, they have indicated the type(s) of speech acts that are instru-
mental in realizing the aim of that particular stage. Concerning, for example, the slot in figure 3.1 in which party B puts forward critical doubt (+(+/p)), the pragma-dialectical theory stipulates that the utterance used to fill in this slot has to be an assertive by means of which non-acceptance is put forward, or that the utterance should be reconstructable as such. The correctness conditions for putting forward a standpoint can be used to identify the different kinds of obstacles for not accepting the protagonist’s standpoint. Houtlosser, who has distinguished these obstacles, mentions for example, the possibility to doubt whether p is true, whether p is of importance, and whether the speaker will be able to produce reasons in support of p (1995: 193-194). From these options for putting forward critical doubt, a speaker or writer can choose the one he thinks to be the most opportune considering the actual state of affairs in the discourse and the preferences, wishes and beliefs he expects the addressee to have.

Apart from choosing a specific content for each move, the speaker or writer must (at the same time) choose an effective way of presenting that content. At the level of the move he can choose to leave parts of the speech act by which the move is performed implicit. These parts may be the communicative function or the propositional content of the speech act. In accordance with Clark (1991: 207) and Houtlosser (1995: 99),

79 The speech acts instrumental in realizing the aim of the discussion stage are those relevant to resolving the difference of opinion and relating to the utterance of the previous speaker. This kind of relevance makes the piece of discourse concerned analytically relevant. Van Eemeren refers to the latter kind of relevance as conditional relevance, in which the one speech act is dependent on the presence of the other (1986: 206).

80 The pragma-dialectical theory stipulates that putting forward a reaction to a standpoint of acceptance or non-acceptance has to be done by means of a commissive. However, as van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain: “the negative variants of the commissives are themselves strictly speaking to be regarded as assertives rather than commissives” (2004: 65).

81 When putting forward a move of non-acceptance with regard to a proposition p, p is determined by the previous speaker. In case a discussant introduces p, the topical options for p are to a certain extent determined by the context in which the move is put forward. In case of a parliamentary debate, for example, p has to express the debate’s initial standpoint that the Government’s performance is up to standard (p then refers to the main standpoint of a parliamentary debate — in case of a sub-discussion, other options might exist).

82 The available options vary for every slot in the profile. This can be made clearer by comparing the slot in which the antagonist casts doubt on +(+/p) (as mentioned in the text) with, for example, the slot in which the protagonist puts forward +(+/p). The pragma-dialectical theory stipulates that the utterance used to fill in the slot of +(+/p) has to be an assertive by means of which a standpoint is put forward, or should be reconstructable as such. Such an assertive is always an instance of the standard paraphrase ‘My standpoint concerning p is that p is the case’ (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 298). The options for the content of p depend on the context in which the standpoint is put forward.
I presume that the assertive by means of which a standpoint is put forward consists of four parts, which can be distinguished by referring to the standard paraphrase of putting forward a positive standpoint “My standpoint (concerning p) is that p is the case”: (1) My (2) standpoint concerning p is that (3) p (4) is the case. The first part refers to the person who is committed to the assertion, the second to the illocutionary force or communicative function of the utterance, part three is the proposition and part four indicates in which way the speaker is committed to the proposition.

The first presentational choice to be made regarding each of the parts of a speech act is whether or not to express it. A discussant can put a specific part into words, or suggest it by means of the other parts of the speech act or by the surrounding discourse. Compare, for example, the utterance “I believe p is the case” with “p is the case”. When “p is the case” is put forward as a standpoint, both the person who is committed and the communicative function are left implicit. Yet, the speaker is strongly committed to the assertion, because p is presented as if it were a fact. This effect of certainty is accomplished, as Hooper explains, “by suspending the implication that the speaker knows the proposition to be true” (1975: 101). In case the speaker presumes it to be advantageous to emphasize that a standpoint is only his opinion, saying “I believe p is the case” might be the best option; in case he thinks that it is more effective to present his standpoint as a fact, saying that “p is the case” might be a better choice.

A second presentational choice to be made regarding each of the parts of a speech act is that between a direct and an indirect presentation. The parts of a speech act are presented in a direct manner when their primary function is indicated literally, and in an indirect manner if it is presented by means of an expression with a different meaning than the literal one. Consider, for example, the difference between “p is a good idea” and “don’t you think that p is a good idea?” The first utterance contains a standpoint expressed by means of an assertive, whereas the second utterance contains a question that is a directive that can be reconstructed as an assertive used to express a standpoint. The first utterance is presented in a direct manner. The second utterance is expressed in an indirect manner since it can only be reconstructed as an assertive by reference to the context: when in a given context a question cannot be what the speaker may be regarded to have intended

83 Explicitly formulated speech acts are by definition put forward in a direct manner, but as van Eemeren explains, specific implicit presentations of argumentative moves can also be direct (2010: 120).
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to put forward, the listener will reconstruct it as a different speech act by treating it as a conversational implicature. Depending on the circumstances of the case, each of these possibilities can have its own strategic advantages. In case the speaker presumes it to be advantageous to emphasize that he is pretty certain of his opinion, he may choose “p is a good idea”; in case he thinks that it is more effective to address his opponent cautiously, “don’t you think that p is a good idea?” is the better option.

Based on the two kinds of presentational choices mentioned in this section (choices at the level of the stage and choices at the level of the move), it is possible to distinguish different presentational tactics in realizing the aims of a maneuver. At the level of the stage, the choice amounts to expressing the moves constituting a specific route or only suggesting their content by using other moves. Since in the confrontation stage a route consists of just a few moves, the options to suggest the content of a move by means of another move are limited. As a consequence, a limited amount of patterns of expressed and suggested moves that lead to a specific result can be distinguished. Each of these patterns could, in its own way, be opportune for conducting a maneuver. Yet, in order to speak of a ‘presentational tactic’, the presentational choices at the level of the move should also be taken into account. The choices at this level, which consist of a very large set of options for formulating the parts of a specific move implicitly or explicitly, complement the effect of the strategic pattern that is chosen. Together, the choices at the two levels constitute the presentational aspect of a specific confrontational strategic maneuver.

3.3 Presentational tactics to shift the topic of debate

This section explains two presentational tactics that politicians can use in a parliamentary debate to initiate a discussion on a specific issue by shifting the topic. In section 2.3.2, I identified the topic shift I am interested in as a critical reaction of the politician (P) to the proposition p initially introduced by a political opponent (PO) followed by the introduction of a proposition r, which is preferred by the politician. An example mentioned to illustrate this kind of topic shift was Thieme’s reaction in the General Debate to a contribution of van Geel on the national debt (see sections 1.1 and 2.3.1 [2.1]). She responded by saying: “Everything is about money, money and again money. I would like to turn things around: what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare
for the rest of the world”. In this example, Thieme gives a critical reaction (everything is about money…) to her opponent’s standpoint concerning a proposition on the national debt, followed by the introduction of her party’s priority issue of environmental welfare. The preferred route towards the preferred proposition \( r \), in which the politician responds to the initial standpoint \(+/p\) by means of a critical reaction, is represented in figure 3.2.\(^{84}\)

**FIGURE 3.2 Preferred route of P aiming for a discussion about a proposition \( r \)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CF stage</th>
<th>1 PO</th>
<th>(+/p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 P</td>
<td>(-/p)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 PO</td>
<td>retract (+/p)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New CF stage**

| 1 P | \(+/r\) |

**CF stage** = confrontation stage  
**P** = the politician who tries to shift the topic  
**PO** = the political opponent  
**+/p** = advancing a positive standpoint concerning a proposition \( p \)  
**-/p** = responding by advancing the opposite standpoint  
**retract \(+/p\)** = expressing that one refrains from defending standpoint \(+/p\)  
**\( r \)** = starting a new discussion about a proposition \( r \) preferred by the politician

If the politician manages to give the impression that the final aim (a discussion about \( r \)) is realized by following this allowed sequence of moves, the audience might consider this topic-shifting maneuver involving \( r \) as reasonable. Taking into account the institutional constraints of a parliamentary debate, the instantiations of the moves constituting this allowed sequence can be described as *sub-aims* (listed below) the achievement of which is necessary for realizing a topic shift. This means that in case of a topic shift conducted in Parliament, the politician should formulate

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\(^{84}\) Figure 3.2 is similar to figure 2.1, but shows only the slots of the preferred route of critical doubt (in this case the opposite standpoint \(-/p\)), whereas 2.1 shows all slots necessary to explain that there are several routes to establish a topic shift.
3. PRESENTATIONAL CHOICES IN TOPIC SHIFTS AND POLARIZATION

his contribution in such a way that there is reason to believe that the following five sub-aims are established:

1) P provides a critical response by putting forward a standpoint \(-/p\) (turn 2);
2) putting forward \(-/p\) is institutionally acceptable (turn 2);
3) PO retracts his standpoint \(+/p\) (turn 3);\(^{85}\)
4) P introduces \(+/r\) (turn 4);
5) putting forward \(+/r\) is institutionally acceptable (turn 4).

The institutional constraints of a parliamentary debate as formulated in section 2.5 come back in sub-aims 1, 2, 3 and 5. The first sub-aim, that the politician’s critical reaction will be understood as the opposite standpoint, is enforced by the parliamentary practice that politicians are expected to take a stance. This practice prevents the politician from responding by casting doubt or not taking a position. The second sub-aim is to make \(-/p\) institutionally acceptable. In case of a topic shift, politicians might be inclined to portray the opponent as an incompetent politician in order to end the discussion about \(+/p\) immediately (sub-aim 3). The convention that politicians should not use offensive language restricts the possibilities for using this option. The fifth sub-aim, to make the new standpoint \(+/r\) institutionally acceptable, is enforced by the conventions that parliamentarians have to stick to the topic set by the Chair, have to refrain from using offensive language, and are not allowed to address the public.

The political opponent (PO) or the Chair might put forward a move that frustrates realizing one of the sub-aims. The non-preferred moves of the political opponent or the Chair are the following:

1) PO accuses P of evading an issue because P is not explicitly taking a stance;
2) PO or Chair considers \(-/p\) institutionally unacceptable and breaks off the maneuver;
3) PO is not willing to retract his standpoint \(+/p\);
4) PO brings forward a standpoint on a proposition q (it is not guaranteed that P will be the one to propose the new proposition);
5) PO or Chair considers \(+/r\) institutionally unacceptable and breaks off the maneuver.

\(^{85}\) Sub-aim 3 can be identified as the preferred interactional (perlocutionary) effect of the speech act put forward by the speaker (in this case P): the speaker wants the listener (in this case PO) to accept the speech act and to respond in a certain way (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 27).
The politician can be expected to try to prevent these non-preferred moves of the political opponent or the Chair from occurring, or to make at least the audience believe that making such a non-preferred move is unreasonable. Starting from the five sub-aims and the non-preferred moves of the political opponent and the Chair, it is possible to distinguish two presentational tactics that could be opportune when shifting the topic in a parliamentary context. The first is critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint, the second as implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint. Both tactics consist of a combination of presentational choices for conducting the maneuver of a topic shift in such a way that the primary audience is given the impression (rightly or wrongly) that the politician has made a reasonable attempt to initiate a discussion on his party’s priority issue. First, I will describe the pattern of expressed and suggested moves that distinguishes each tactic. Next, I will indicate what effect the presentation of the expressed moves needs to achieve to be considered a presentational tactic that realizes the aims of a topic-shifting maneuver.

3.3.1 Tactic 1: Critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint

The main advantage of using the tactic of critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint to a politician is that when introducing the preferred issue he also takes a position on the issue proposed by the opponent. The pattern of moves constituting this tactic consists of a critical reaction to the standpoint of the political opponent, immediately followed by the introduction of a new standpoint. In the example of Thieme mentioned in the previous section, this specific tactic is used: first Thieme puts forward a response that should be interpreted as a critical reaction (“Everything is about money, money and again money”), and this response is then immediately followed by the introduction of a standpoint on the party’s priority issue.

86 From an analytic point of view more than two tactics can be distinguished. When starting from the five sub-aims for a topic shift, however, the other tactics seem less opportune than the two described in this section. This theoretically based assumption is confirmed empirically by the fact that all topic shifts found in the analyzed debates (see chapter 4) could be identified as making use of one of the two tactics described in this section.

87 Greatbatch (1986), who examined agenda-shifting strategies in political interviews, distinguishes two strategies similar to these two topic-shifting tactics. These strategies are referred to as pre-answer agenda shifts and post-answer agenda shifts.
issue of environmental welfare (“What do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the rest of the world”). Figure 3.3 represents the pattern of moves constituting this tactic: the moves without parentheses are expressed by the political opponent (PO) or the politician (P), the move in parentheses is suggested by the politician by first putting forward -/p and then +/r.

**FIGURE 3.3** Topic shift pattern for tactic 1

```
CF stage 1 PO +/p
         2 P -/p
         (3 PO retract +/p)

New CF stage 1 P +/r
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Let me explain how using this pattern in combination with the appropriate presentational means can be a way to realize all sub-aims of a topic-shifting maneuver. By putting forward -/p, the politician realizes the first sub-aim. Expressing the opposite standpoint makes it impossible for the political opponent to attack the politician for avoiding to take a position. However, putting forward a critical reaction is a way to begin a discussion rather than to end one (which is sub-aim 3) – it is not likely that the political opponent will retract his standpoint after the politician has made clear that he holds the opposite standpoint. Hence, what is opportune with respect to the first sub-aim (putting forward -/p) is less advantageous with respect to the third sub-aim (a retraction of +/p by the opponent).

Yet, the choice to immediately put forward the new standpoint +/r (that is: without waiting for the opponent’s response) can be explained as a way to realize this third sub-aim. Immediately putting forward +/r is a way to suggest that the political opponent has retracted +/p: it implies that the political opponent silently agrees not to start a discussion about proposition p. The choice to suggest that +/p has been retracted is also opportune with respect to the fourth sub-aim, which is the introduction of the new standpoint +/r. By not waiting for his opponent to respond, the politician makes sure that he himself is the one to propose the new issue for discussion.
The remaining aims of the topic-shifting maneuver can be realized by choosing specific words to formulate \(-p\) and \(+r\). The formulation of \(-p\) is effective if it is of help to make the audience believe that the political opponent is obliged to retract his standpoint \(+p\) (sub-aim 3). This means that the politician should formulate his standpoint \(-p\) in such a way that it provides a reason for retracting \(+p\). A possible way of providing such a reason is to present \(-p\) as something the political opponent should immediately agree with, or even as something he in fact already agrees with. The former could, for example, be established by using an adjunct such as *of course* (\(p\) is, *of course*, not the case), and the latter by using a figure of speech such as a rhetorical question (do you really think that \(p\) is the case?).

Another way of providing a reason for retracting \(+p\) is to present the opponent’s standpoint or the opponent himself as stupid. In case the political opponent said, for instance, that “We should keep giving foreign aid to Africa”, the politician could respond by saying something like: “Why should we keep giving foreign aid to a continent of which we all know that it is backward and corrupt?” In this case, the reformulation of “Africa” into “a continent of which…” helps, together with “we all know”, to give the impression that it was stupid of the political opponent to put forward the standpoint. However, such a way of formulating might be perceived as unreasonable by the electorate if it is considered rude, not to the point or not in line with the institutional convention that parliamentarians should not use offensive language. A politician can, therefore, be expected to avoid remarks that are obviously offending, or to mitigate the insult by choosing specific formulations (sub-aim 2).

The formulation of the new standpoint \(+r\) in this topic-shifting tactic is effective if the audience believes that \(+r\) is institutionally acceptable (sub-aim 5). This means that the formulation of the move should provide an institutionally acceptable reason why \(r\) should be the new topic of discussion. A first way to give a justification for the introduction of the new issue is to relate \(r\) to \(p\) in an acceptable way to \(p\).

88 Section 4.3 will give a more detailed account of the role of rhetorical questions in topic shifting maneuvers and of why a rhetorical question can be used to present the acceptance of an assertive as unproblematic for the opponent.

89 Possible options to mitigate an insult are explained below in a section about polarizing (3.4.1). The reason to discuss them not here but in that particular section is that offending remarks appear more often in polarizing than in topic shifting maneuvers (probably because offending remarks lead almost by definition to disagreement).

90 Relating \(r\) to \(p\) could be achieved by presenting \(r\) as *propositionally relevant* to \(p\). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain that in this case the question of relevance pertains to a specific component (the propositional content) of verbal acting (2004: 82). Another option for relating \(r\) to \(p\) is to do
presentational choice that can be made to establish such a relation consists of the repetition of parts of p in the formulation of r (*immediate other-repetition*). For example, if in a discussion about the budget deficit the opponent said “The budget deficit should not be reduced by cutting back on foreign aid” and the politician responded by saying “I have always been in favor of cutting back on foreign aid so that we can spend that money on fighting poverty in our own country”. The standpoints of the two parties pertain to different issues (the budget deficit and the fight against poverty in the own country), but due to the repetition of “cutting back on foreign aid” the impression is given that they address the same issue and that the initial discussion is continued.

The context of parliamentary debate provides another possibility for giving a justification for the introduction of +/r. As it is the politician’s task to represent the people, the fact that the people perceive a specific issue as important could be an institutionally acceptable reason to shift the topic. In the formulation this justification can, for instance, be realized by including the electorate in the group of people who are putting forward the standpoint. In case a politician wants to put forward a standpoint on the issue of unemployment in a discussion about the budget deficit, he could formulate his standpoint +/r by saying: “My party, which represents the man in the street, is of the opinion that we should be talking about what bothers this man most and that is how to get him back to work.” The fact that the man in the street considers unemployment important can be considered a legitimate reason to introduce the issue.

3.3.2 Tactic 2: Implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint

The main advantage of using the tactic of *implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint* to a politician is that the central aim – introducing a standpoint concerning r – is immediately realized. The pattern of moves underlying this tactic consists of an immediate introduction of the new standpoint +/r after the

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91 The effect of *immediate other-repetition* in a topic-shifting maneuver is explained in more detail in chapter 4.
opponent’s introduction of +/p. If Thieme would have used this tactic to introduce the issue of environmental welfare in the discussion with van Geel on the national debt (see 1.1. and 2.3.1 [2.1] for this example), she would have responded to van Geel by advancing her standpoint on the issue of environmental welfare without explicitly trying to end the discussion on the national debt. She could then have responded by saying something like: “Can you tell us what the Netherlands mean in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the rest of the world.” By advancing this standpoint, she would imply that she considers environmental welfare a more important issue than the national debt. Figure 3.4 represents the pattern of moves constituting this tactic: the moves without parentheses are made by the political opponent (PO) or the politician (P), the moves in parentheses are implied by the politician when putting forward +/r.

**FIGURE 3.4  Topic shift pattern for tactic 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CF stage</th>
<th>1 PO</th>
<th>+/p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2 P</td>
<td>-/p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 PO</td>
<td>retract +/p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New CF stage 1 P +/r

Let me explain how using this pattern in combination with the appropriate presentational means can be a way to realize all sub-aims of a topic-shifting maneuver. Opting for this particular pattern is a way to start the discussion immediately on the preferred issue r (which is sub-aim 4). This choice diminishes the chance of having a discussion about +/p, because the politician is not explicitly taking a position towards p. However, not expressing -/p is also a disadvantage: not taking a stance in matters does not correspond with what a politician is institutionally expected to do (in this case: putting forward -/p). This choice, thus, gives the opponent the opportunity to attack the politician for evading the issue. Hence, what is opportune with respect to the fourth sub-aim (introducing +/r) is less advantageous with respect to the first sub-aim (providing a critical response by putting forward -/p).
In order to give the impression that the other four sub-aims (1, 2, 3 and 5) are also realized, the politician should formulate +/r in such a way that it implies that he holds a negative position towards p (sub-aim 1), that holding this negative position is an institutionally justified reason for the opponent to retract his standpoint (sub-aim 2 and 3), and that +/r is justified as a topic of discussion in this debate at this particular moment (sub-aim 5). A presentational choice that could imply the first three sub-aims is, for instance, antithesis. This figure of speech, which presents two phenomena as each other’s opposites, provides the opportunity to present a standpoint +/r as something important opposed to a standpoint +/p that is not so important. If the political opponent puts forward the standpoint +/p “We should take better care of the environment”, the politician could respond by saying: “If we were as considerate towards our people as we are towards our environment, the elderly would have a much better life than they have now”. The antithesis introduces a standpoint on the well-being of the elderly (+/r) by characterizing the object of +/p as something not human (the environment) and the object of +/r as something human (the elderly). The use of antithesis suggests that the politician holds a negative standpoint towards p (“taking care of the environment is not that important”), because the expression implies that something human is considered more important than something which is not human (sub-aim 1). The audience should then believe that the fact that something is considered of greater importance than the issue at stake in the opponent’s standpoint is an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint +/p (sub-aim 2 and 3).

The new standpoint +/r should also be formulated in such a way that the audience considers it institutionally acceptable (sub-aim 5). As explained with respect to tactic 1, this effect could be achieved by relating r in an acceptable way to p or by presenting +/r on behalf of the people. The following rather straightforward example illustrates the latter option. If a debate is about the standpoint “We should take better care of our environment”, the politician could introduce a new standpoint +/r by saying: “A large part of the electorate is of the opinion that we should tackle the problems of the multicultural society”. By presenting the standpoint on behalf of a large part of the electorate, the politician tries to make the audience believe that there is no reason for the Chair to break off the topic-shifting attempt – an issue the people consider more important is to be discussed with priority. It should be noted that in fact such a way of presenting is also a way to realize the first three sub-aims: the politician is not only saying that the multicultural society is a problem that is important to the people, he also implies that it is more important than environmental problems. The suggestion
that the multicultural society is more an important problem than the environment can be reconstructed as a reaction of non-acceptance with respect to +/p (sub-aim 1) and the fact that the people find it more important might be reason for the opponent to retract +/p (sub-aim 2 and 3)).

3.4 Presentational tactics to polarize the parties’ standpoints

In this section, two tactics will be discussed which can be used in a parliamentary debate by politicians who attempt to initiate a discussion on a specific issue by means of polarization. In section 2.4.2, I have characterized polarization as a maneuver aimed at changing a situation of agreement between the politician and his political opponent about a proposition r into a situation of disagreement (a mixed difference of opinion). An example mentioned in chapter 2 that illustrates this kind of polarization is (the second half of) Thieme’s reaction to a contribution of van Geel on the national debt in the General Debate (see section 2.4.1). In this half of her response she said: “Mr. Van Geel only thinks of his own hardworking Dutchmen, while Holland is responsible for poverty and the loss of a pleasant environment in the rest of the world.” Before discussing the issue of the national debt, van Geel emphasized the measures taken by the Christian Democrats to protect the environment. In the excerpt, Thieme uses van Geel’s contribution on the national debt as an indication that, despite the announced measures, the Christian Democrats are not really concerned with environmental welfare (“he only thinks of his own hardworking Dutchmen”). In doing so she tries to change a situation of presumed agreement between the two parties on the issue of environmental welfare into a situation of disagreement. The preferred route towards such a mixed difference starting from a situation of agreement between the parties is represented in figure 3.5. The first two moves represent the situation of agreement between the politician (P) and his political opponent (PO). This agreement may have been created jointly by the parties either in the debate at hand or on previous occasions, or only presumed by the politician owing to what the opponent has stated or proposed in the debate at hand or on previous occasions. The confrontation stage represents the politician’s attempt to change this situation of agreement into the preferred result of a mixed difference of opinion.
FIGURE 3.5  Preferred route of P aiming for a mixed difference of opinion about a proposition r

1 P  

2 PO  

CF stage  1 P  

2 PO  

3 P  

4 PO  

CF stage = confrontation stage  
P = the politician who tries to polarize the parties’ standpoints  
PO = the political opponent  
+/r = advancing a positive standpoint concerning a proposition r  
? (+/r) = casting doubt on +/r  
maintain +/r = expressing the will to defend +/r  
-/r = advancing a negative standpoint concerning a proposition r

If the politician manages to give the impression that the final aim of establishing a mixed difference of opinion about a standpoint concerning r is realized by following this allowed sequence of moves, the audience might consider this polarizing maneuver involving r as reasonable. Taking into account the institutional constraints of a parliamentary debate, the instantiations of the moves constituting this allowed sequence can be described as sub-aims the achievement of which is necessary for conducting a polarizing maneuver. This means that in case of a polarizing attempt conducted in Parliament, the politician should formulate his contribution in such a way that there is reason to believe that the following three sub-aims are established:
1) PO agrees with P on a standpoint \(+/r\) (turn 2);
2) P puts forward a standpoint \(+/r\) that is institutionally acceptable (turn 1 in CF);
3) PO puts forward the opposite standpoint \(-/r\) (turn 4 in CF).\(^{92}\)

In case of a polarizing maneuver, the institutional constraints of a parliamentary debate as formulated in section 2.5 only affect the second sub-aim. This sub-aim, which indicates that the politician puts forward a standpoint \(+/r\) that is institutionally acceptable, is enforced by the parliamentary conventions that parliamentarians may not be offensive and are not allowed to address the public.\(^{93}\)

In case of polarization too, the political opponent or the Chair could frustrate the attempt to realize one of the sub-aims by putting forward specific moves. These non-preferred moves of the political opponent or the Chair are the following:

1) PO does not explicitly say that he agrees with P on the standpoint \(+/r\);
2) PO or Chair breaks off the maneuver because \(+/r\) is considered institutionally unacceptable;
3a) PO again agrees with the standpoint (which leads to no discussion);
3b) PO maintains his doubt (which leads to a non-mixed difference of opinion) or retracts his doubt (which leads to no discussion).\(^{94}\)

\(^{92}\) Two remarks can be made with respect to these sub-aims:
1. Sub-aim 3 can, again, be identified as the preferred interactional (perlocutionary) effect of the speech act put forward by the speaker (in this case P): the speaker wants the listener (in this case PO) to accept the speech act and to respond in a certain way (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 27).
2. Putting forward \(-/r\) in response to \(+/r\) means by definition that the arguer has doubts about the acceptability of \(+/r\). Therefore, the slot in which the political opponent puts forward critical doubt with regard to \(+/r\) (turn 2 in CF) does not need to be mentioned as a separate sub-aim. The slot in which the politician maintains his standpoint \(+/r\) (turn 3 in CF) does not need to be mentioned as a specific sub-aim because it corresponds with sub-aim 2.

\(^{93}\) The convention that politicians have to stick to the issue set by the Chair applies to every argumentative move in a parliamentary debate and, therefore, also to a polarizing maneuver. However, this constraint is not especially relevant here because evading the parliamentary agenda is not instrumental in conducting a polarizing maneuver.

\(^{94}\) 3b (maintaining or retracting doubt) is a possible non-preferred move in cases where the political opponent has expressed doubt with respect to \(+/r\). However, due to the convention that politicians are expected to take a stance on matters, in a parliamentary debate it is rather uncommon for a politician to respond to his opponent’s standpoint by putting forward only critical doubt (see example [2.12]). Therefore, it is unlikely that the political opponent (PO) will put forward this non-preferred move.
The politician can be expected to try to prevent such non-preferred moves from occurring, or to make at least the audience believe that making such a non-preferred move is unreasonable. Starting from the three sub-aims and the non-preferred moves of the political opponent and the Chair, it is possible to distinguish two presentational tactics that could be opportune when polarizing the parties’ standpoints in a parliamentary context. The first tactic is ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent, and the second is making it difficult for the political opponent to agree. Both tactics consist of a combination of presentational choices for conducting the maneuver of polarization that might be of help to conduct a polarizing maneuver in such a way that the primary audience is given the impression (rightly or wrongly) that the politician has made a reasonable attempt to initiate a discussion on his party’s priority issue. First, I will describe the pattern of expressed and suggested moves that characterizes each of these tactics. Next, I will indicate what effect the presentation of the expressed moves needs to achieve to be considered a presentational tactic that realizes the aims of a polarizing maneuver.

3.4.1 Tactic 1: Ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent

The main advantage of using the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent for a politician is that by putting forward only one move, the impression is given that the preferred outcome of a mixed difference of opinion is realized. In this tactic, the only move that is expressed is the move +/r. The example of Thieme mentioned in the previous section, uses this specific tactic: Thieme puts forward a standpoint on the issue of environmental welfare (her party takes responsibility for “a pleasant environment in the rest of the world”), while at the same time ascribing the opposite standpoint to her opponent van Geel (“he only thinks of his own hardworking Dutchmen). Figure 3.6 represents the pattern of expressed and suggested moves constituting this tactic: the move without parentheses is made by the politician (P), the moves in parentheses are implied by the politician by means of putting forward +/r. The first two moves represent the initial situation of (presumed)

95 From an analytic point of view more than two tactics can be distinguished. However, when starting from the three sub-aims of a polarizing maneuver the other tactics seem to be less opportune than the two tactics described in this section. This theoretically based presumption is empirically confirmed by the fact that all polarizing moves found in the debates that are analyzed (see chapter 5) can be identified as making use of one of the two tactics described in this section.
agreement, the latter four moves which constitute the confrontation stage, represent the politician’s attempt to change this agreement into disagreement.

FIGURE 3.6 Polarization pattern for tactic 1

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CF stage} & \hspace{1cm} 1 \text{ P} & +/r \\
& & \\
& (2 \text{ PO}) & +/r \\
\end{align*}
\]

Let me explain how using this pattern in combination with the appropriate presentational means can be a way to realize all sub-aims of a polarizing strategic maneuver. The mere act of expressing +/r is not enough to realize the three sub-aims of the polarizing maneuver: it does not give the impression (1) that the political opponent initially agreed on this issue, (2) that +/r is institutionally acceptable or (3) that the political opponent (actually) holds the opposite standpoint -/r. Nevertheless, by using an appropriate formulation, just putting forward +/r can suffice to make the electorate believe that all these sub-aims have been realized.

In case the opponent has not explicitly said that he agrees with the politician about +/r, the politician has to formulate +/r in such a way that it is clear for the audience that there is reason to assume that the parties in fact agree on +/r. If the politician would not do this the act of showing that the parties disagree would be superfluous – the audience then already knows from previous occasions on which the parties discussed +/r, that the politician and his opponent have different opinions. The formulation of +/r (especially the part of it that indicates the communicative function) provides several opportunities to give the audience the impression that there is reason to believe that the parties do agree on the issue. It is, for example, possible to introduce one’s own standpoint with “We seem to agree that…” or by means of a question as “Do you now agree with me that ….?” Since the final aim is to create
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disagreement, the agreement is often immediately presented as something which is at least questionable. In the two introductory phrases I just mentioned, this is indicated by the use of the word “seem” or by formulating the standpoint as a question.

To make the audience believe that the second sub-aim of a polarizing maneuver is also realized, the politician should formulate +/r in such a way that it cannot be labeled as institutionally unacceptable. This means that the move should be formulated in such a way that it is not offensive and not addressing the public. These conditions are relevant here because a politician aiming for a polarized discussion might be inclined to use offensive language with regard to the political opponent (or the people this opponent represents) and to give the insult a legitimate character by addressing the public. An example in which both conditions are violated is the following way of formulating a standpoint: “The gallery will agree with me that the Minister is stupid for saying this”. Using offensive language is attractive because it leads almost automatically to disagreement: the political opponent will never agree with a standpoint that insults him or his electorate. To make it seem as if the political opponent or the Chair has no reason to break off the polarizing attempt, the politician should thus simply avoid this kind of language, or he should in some way mitigate the insult so that he can get away with it.

Mitigating an insult can be accomplished by formulating the insult in such a way that there is no reason to qualify the standpoint as unacceptable. This can, for instance, be done by formulating the insult by means of a metaphor, which creates the possibility of claiming that the insult should be interpreted differently. When Wilders described Muslim immigration as “a tsunami”, the effect was that all parliamentarians disagreed because they took it to be a highly offensive remark.96 Accusations of offensive language and even discrimination were brushed aside by Wilders and his party members by saying that the term was not used in the interpretation that immigration is as fatal for our Western society as the tsunami was for a great many Asian people, but in its neutral dictionary meaning of “a big wave”.97

96 The word “tsunami” was used by Wilders in a newspaper interview (de Volkskrant, 6 October 2006). The remark caused so much commotion that it became the topic of a parliamentary debate.

97 One of Wilders’s party members referred to the neutral interpretation when he defended the tsunami metaphor. He said: “Wilders did not literally mean to compare Islamisation with the big wave that caused such a chaos in Southeast Asia” (De Roon in De Gelderlander, 31 October 2006). In the same vein, Wilders said that he only meant that Muslims are “overrunning” Dutch society (NRC Next, 9 October 2006).
A second way to avoid an insult being considered as unacceptable is making use of the possibility to present a standpoint on behalf of the people. Using this option, Wilders could have said: “My electorate considers Muslim immigration a tsunami”. Wilders seems to have a legitimate reason to put forward the offensive standpoint, because it is a point of view held by a large part of the voters. At the same time, referring to his electorate is for Wilders a way to distance himself from the offensive standpoint since it is not so much his own personal point of view, but that of the electorate.

The third sub-aim is to give the electorate the impression that the political opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint. This can be accomplished by formulating the standpoint +/-r as opposed to a position -/+r held by the opponent. A first way of creating this effect is to formulate -/+r as a position the politician himself could never agree with because it is not in line with his political color or earlier expressed opinions. The opponent’s standpoint -/+r is then, for instance, downplayed by presenting it as typically leftist or rightist, as ridiculous, or as too soft.98 An illustration is the following way of presenting a standpoint +/-r in relation to the opposite standpoint -/+r: “Child molesters should be punished hard (+/r); putting them in a hotel-like prison for just a few short years (-/r) is not what I would call a real punishment.” Here, the opponent’s solution is downplayed as too soft by using phrases such as “a hotel-like prison” and “just a few short years”. Another way of formulating the standpoint +/-r as opposed to a position held by the political opponent is to present +/-r as a choice of one out of just two options, thereby implying that the political opponent must be committed to the opposite position. Formulations which can be used in this way include, for example, “you are either with or against us”, “it is the one or the other” and “we stand at a crossroads”.

3.4.2 Tactic 2: Making it difficult for the political opponent to agree

The main advantage a politician can gain by making use of the tactic of making it difficult for the political opponent to agree is that with minimal effort and without the risk of wrongly ascribing a position to the opponent the political opponent is forced into opposition. The pattern of moves underlying this tactic consists of the

98 Figures that can be used for such reformulations are, for example, forms of overstatement (such as a hyperbole) or understatement (such as litotes), metaphors and generalizations. How they work in creating the effect of establishing a mixed difference of opinion will be explained in chapter 5.
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introduction of +/-r by the politician, followed by a reaction of disagreement (-/r) by the political opponent. Had Thieme used this tactic in the discussion with van Geel (see 1.1 and 2.4.1 [2.7] for this example), she would have put forward her standpoint on the new issue of environmental welfare in such a way that it would have been unacceptable for the Christian Democrats. In that case she could have said something like: “We take responsibility for poverty – for which the Christian church is often to blame – and the loss of a pleasant environment in the rest of the world.” When formulated in such a way, the Christian Democrats seem to have no other option than to explicitly disagree with the standpoint. Figure 3.7 represents the pattern of moves constituting this tactic. The first two moves represent the initial situation of (presumed) agreement and the latter four moves, constituting the confrontation stage, represent the politician’s attempt to change this agreement into a mixed difference of opinion. The moves without parentheses are made by the politician (P) or the political opponent (PO), the moves in parentheses are implied by the politician by putting forward +/-r or by the political opponent by putting forward -/r.

**FIGURE 3.7 Polarization pattern for tactic 2**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CF stage</th>
<th>1 P</th>
<th>+/-r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 PO</td>
<td>+/-r</td>
<td>?(+/r)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 P</td>
<td>maintain +/-r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 PO</td>
<td>-/r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

I will explain how using this pattern in combination with the appropriate presentational means can be a way to realize all sub-aims of a polarizing strategic maneuver. The combination of expressed moves (+/-r and -/r) realizes the last sub-aim of a polarizing maneuver, which is that the opponent holds the opposite standpoint -/r. However, the mere fact of putting forward +/-r is not a way to make sure that the opponent will indeed say that he holds the opposite standpoint. In order for the
Getting an issue on the table

A politician to establish this pattern, he has to formulate +/-r in such a way that the opponent has no other option than to express his disagreement.

Hence, just like tactic 1, this tactic depends fully on the formulation of +/-r to make the electorate believe that all sub-aims have been realized. This second tactic differs from the first, though, with respect to the third sub-aim: in case of tactic 1, the aim of showing that the opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint is realized by ascribing this position to the opponent; in case of tactic 2, the opponent is more or less forced to indicate himself that he disagrees. The first two sub-aims (giving the impression that the opponent initially agreed with the opponent about +/-r and that +/-r is institutionally acceptable) can be realized in exactly the same way as described in the previous section. Therefore, I will only explain how the politician can formulate +/-r in such a way that the audience believes that the opponent actually disagrees with the politician (sub-aim 3).

A way in which the opponent can be challenged to disagree is by exploiting the parliamentary practice of ‘question and answer’. The politician then asks the political opponent whether he really believes that +/-r is the case while presenting +/-r as a position that the political opponent is not likely to hold. For example, when the politician is a right wing politician himself he can use rightist (or, as the case may be, anti-leftist) terminology to emphasize the difference between their opinions. An example would be to ask a left wing politician in a discussion on lowering the costs of development aid whether he “indeed agrees that we should stop throwing money away in that bottomless well called Africa”. The disparaging way in which Africa is described might initiate a discussion between the politicians on lowering the costs of development aid. It should be noted that such a provocative way of formulating a standpoint is often ‘helped’ by the parliamentary opportunity to put forward a negative standpoint without being obliged to defend it. As explained in section 2.5, the context of Parliamentary debate determines that MPs hold the neutral position of casting doubt with respect to the main standpoint that performance of the Government is up to standard. Since casting doubt is not a standpoint, an MP cannot be required to substantiate his point of view. In particular circumstances, this institutional division of roles makes it easier to put forward a challenging point of view.99

99 As van Eemeren indicates, “In principle, [institutional] constraints are a limitation of the parties’ possibilities for strategic maneuvering, but they can also create special opportunities for the strategic maneuvering of one or both parties” (2010: 152).
4. PRESENTING TOPIC SHIFTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 introduced various presentational tactics that a politician can use to initiate a discussion about his party’s priority issue in a parliamentary debate. In this chapter, I will show how the two tactics instrumental in a topic-shifting strategic maneuver are used in actual practice. I have characterized these two tactics as *critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint* and *implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint*, and will illustrate them by analyzing some contributions of Wilders’s Party for Freedom to five different parliamentary debates. I will look at specific attempts made by Wilders in these debates to change the topic of discussion to the dangers of Islamisation. This is not to say, however, that Wilders and his party are the only ones who use these tactics. As explained in chapter 2, every politician may try to shift the topic, since all of them attempt to promote their party among potential voters by focusing on one or more specific issues. Although there are specific particularities in Wilders’s manner of employing these tactics, in a parliamentary debate they are in principle used by all politicians who try to shift the topic.

In my analyses the following questions will be answered: (1) why can the argumentative piece of discourse concerned be seen as an example of a topic shift, and (2) how do the presentational choices that are made contribute to realizing the aims of a topic shift as described in section 3.3? In addition to these two key questions I will provide considerations for the evaluation of the argumentative discourse concerned. These considerations help to answer the question of whether the various
pieces of discourse can be evaluated as reasonable ways of shifting the topic. In the next two sections of this chapter (4.2 and 4.3) excerpts are presented that illustrate the first tactic, in which a standpoint concerning a different topic is introduced after a critical response has been given to the political opponent’s standpoint. For each of these excerpts, I will analyze how Wilders’s choice of specific presentational devices is instrumental in realizing a topic shift by means of this tactic. The second tactic – an immediate introduction of the new topic – is illustrated in sections 4.4 and 4.5. In these sections, excerpts are analyzed in which Wilders uses various kinds of presentational devices that are instrumental in realizing a topic shift by introducing the new topic as a direct response to the opponent’s standpoint. In section 4.6, I will present some observations with respect to Wilders’s selection of presentational devices and explain to what extent such a selection is typical for topic shifts of politicians in general.

Before carrying out the analyses, I will introduce the debates from which the excerpts concerned are taken. These debates address rather general topics, such as the budget or policy plans for the coming governmental year(s), or a more specific Islam-related topic such as integration. In chronological order, the debates from which the excerpts are taken are the 100-days debate (19 June, 2007), in which the new Dutch Cabinet presented its plans for the coming governmental term; the Islamic activism debate (6 September, 2007) on a report of the scientific board for government policy; the Fitna debate (1 April, 2008) about Wilders’s anti-Islam movie; and the General Debates of 2008 and 2009 on the budgets for the coming governmental year (17 and 18 September 2008 and 16 and 17 September 2009 respectively). Due to his anti-Islam remarks, Wilders managed to be the centre of attention in all these debates. This was obviously the case in the Fitna debate about his anti-Islam movie, but in the press coverage of the other debates, too, Wilders’s words were often considered the most remarkable of the debate.

4.2 Critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint: the assimilation case

The first case in which Wilders critically responds to his opponent before putting forward a new standpoint stems from the debate on Wilders’s anti-Islam movie Fitna. Shortly after its release, a parliamentary debate was scheduled to discuss the movie. Since Wilders is not a member of the Government he cannot be called on
to account for his actions. Therefore, the debate was officially about whether or not the Prime Minister had acted wisely in warning the whole world that the movie was about to appear without his knowing anything about its contents. As could be expected, the Members of Parliament used this opportunity to attack Wilders about the movie. One of the critical remarks that were made came from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Pechtold. He interpreted Wilders’s fight against Islam as a quest for assimilation – a term associated by many with intolerance, extreme rightist views and even fascism. According to Pechtold, holding such a standpoint is not beneficial to a society in which Muslims and non-Muslims have to live together. In his question, he asks Wilders to explain his views.

[4.1] Pechtold: “You can evoke this fearful image of ‘that which wants to come in from outside’, but I think that, according to your calculation, there are a million Muslims in the Netherlands. How do we manage if they are not allowed to have schools, if they are not allowed to have a house of faith, in short, if they have to assimilate? How do you picture this?”

Wilders: “There is nothing wrong with assimilation. French policy has been aimed at assimilation for decades. So, there is nothing bad about that. It might have a bit of a negative connotation from the past, but assimilation is absolutely no problem. Again, I explained to our colleague Marijnissen why I think that Holland should no longer have Islamic schools. This is the beginning of falling into backwardness. Indeed, I think that when the Netherlands abolish immigration – which is also a proposal of mine – we no longer need, for instance, mosques. That is very normal and very logical. I think the immigration in the Netherlands is enough at this moment: again, a great many people in the Netherlands, including [liberal] democrats, agree on that.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2007/2008, 70, 4880-4937)

Why is the excerpt an example of a topic shift?
Before discussing how Wilders maneuvers strategically with the choice of presentational devices, I will first explain why the excerpt is an example of a topic shift in accordance with the pattern of critically responding and then introducing the new issue. Pechtold’s imputative question on assimilation can be analyzed as a standpoint (+/p) because it expresses the opinion that assimilation is not a way of living
Getting an issue on the table together. In the example, Wilders provides a critical response to this standpoint by claiming that there is nothing wrong with assimilation (-/p). However, in the remainder of his response he shifts away from the original topic of how assimilation can be compatible with living together and focuses again on his own spearhead of stopping Muslim immigration. He first says: “I think that when the Netherlands abolish immigration – which is also a proposal of mine – we no longer need, for instance, mosques”, which is then followed by “I think the immigration in the Netherlands is enough at this moment” (my italics, YT). By introducing a standpoint on this issue (+/r), Wilders evades a further discussion of how Muslims already living in the Netherlands and non-Muslims have to live together and attempts to get back to his priority topic.

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to shift the topic? The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate -/p and +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a topic shift described in section 3.3 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means (1) that the formulation of standpoint -/p can be analyzed as an attempt to provide an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint (which would mean that the discussion on the opponent’s standpoint +/p would end) and (2) the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt to provide an institutionally justified reason for the introduction of +/r (which would mean that the debate can continue because +/r seems to fit the parliamentary agenda). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by the formulation of the standpoints -/p and +/r.

(1) Wilders provides an explicit response to Pechtold’s standpoint by saying that he does not agree with him that assimilation is bad (-/p). He says: “There is nothing wrong with assimilation. The French policy has been aimed at assimilation for decades. So, there is nothing bad about that. It might have a bit of a negative connotation from the past, but assimilation is absolutely no problem.”

100 In the overall debate, Pechtold’s standpoint on assimilation should be viewed as a reason that supports his standpoint that Wilders’s views with regard to Islam (and thus the release of Fitna) are bad for our society. The reason can be analyzed as a (sub-)standpoint, though, because Pechtold explicitly asks for Wilders’s point of view, and Wilders explicitly states that he disagrees.
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Several choices made here are of help to make it seem as if this response is conclusive in the discussion on assimilation (which means that Pechtold should retract his standpoint +/p). A choice that concerns the content of the move is to evade part of Pechtold’s question. Wilders responds explicitly only to the standpoint that assimilation is bad and not to the reason for this judgment. Pechtold claims that assimilation is bad because in our society people with different beliefs have to live together. Wilders’s response does not provide but only suggests a full answer: by stripping the word “assimilation” of its negative connotation, he seems to claim that “if assimilation is not bad, it will cause no problems for Muslims and non-Muslims who have to live together”. Wilders then presents the argumentation that supports his standpoint that assimilation is not bad as conclusive. His arguments are that the French’ policy has also been aimed at assimilation and that they have employed this policy for years. Wilders presents these arguments as a sufficient defense by repeating the standpoint twice, right after the arguments. He first says “So, there is nothing bad about that [assimilation]” and then “Assimilation is absolutely no problem”. The use of the argumentative indicator “so” and the intensifier “absolutely” emphasize that nothing more needs to be said about assimilation. The advantage to Wilders of this way of formulating his response is that it gives him an opportunity to end the discussion on an awkward issue. Furthermore, it helps him to clear the way for the introduction of a different issue while showing the audience that he is not evading difficult questions.

101 According to Polcar’s typology of evasive answers, Wilders’s answer could be characterized as (partly) an indirect answer because it “avoids a direct, open or otherwise straightforward manner of expression”. As she explains, such utterances “do implicate information that answers the question despite their apparent violation of maxims of relevance, informativeness, truthfulness, and/or perspicuity” (2002: 219).

102 This excerpt can be seen as containing a variant of tactic 1 described in section 3.3.1. Here, it is not so much the standpoint itself that is presented as something the opponent is obliged to accept, but the argumentation given in support of that standpoint.

103 Van Eemeren et al. describe so as an expression that can be used to introduce a conclusion (2007: 226). In a reasonable discussion the expression indicates that the protagonist is regarded to be allowed to maintain his standpoint and, hence, that the antagonist should no longer maintain his expressions of doubt concerning this standpoint. Tseronis describes the effect of intensifiers such as absolutely in argumentative discourse as “emphasizing the quality of the evidence”. Absolutely is a modal adverb that indicates a strong degree of commitment to the truth of the proposition that is asserted (2009: 54).

104 Apart from the conclusive presentation of the arguments, it can be said that Wilders’s choice of the propositional content of the standpoint “Assimilation is not bad” is already a way of giving the impression that Pechtold is wrong and should thus retract his standpoint. By putting forward
Wilders introduces the issue of stopping Muslim immigration (+/t) in the following phrases: “Again, I explained to our colleague Marijnissen why I think that Holland should no longer have Islamic schools. Indeed, I think that when the Netherlands abolish immigration – which is also a proposal of mine – we no longer need, for instance, mosques. That is very normal and very logical. [...] I think the immigration in the Netherlands is enough at this moment: again, many people in the Netherlands, including [liberal] democrats, agree on that” (my italics, YT).

The opponent or the Chair could consider the standpoint to stop Muslim immigration ‘not at issue’ at this point because it has already been addressed in (at least) the discussion with Marijnissen. In order to prevent such criticism, Wilders has to provide a reason for introducing the standpoint again. Several presentational choices are instrumental in making it seem as if such a reason exists. These choices suggest that the whole utterance is an answer to Pechtold’s question, while in fact only the first part (“There … no problem”) can be reconstructed as such. Only this first part can be seen as an indirect answer that if assimilation is not bad, it will cause no problems for Muslims and non-Muslims who have to live together. The issue of Muslim immigration is introduced in the second part of Wilders’s response. He starts this part by saying: “Again, I explained to our colleague Marijnissen why I think that Holland should no longer have Islamic schools.” The use of “schools”, a word used earlier by Pechtold in the meaning of ‘Islamic schools’, also helps to present this part of Wilders’s contribution as an answer to Pechtold’s question. Using a word or phrase of the preceding speaker is referred to as immediate other-repetition (Shimojima et al. 2002, 117). The advantage of using this form of repetition is that this standpoint, Wilders agrees with Pechtold on something you might not expect him to agree on, namely, Pechtold’s presupposition that Wilders wants Muslims to assimilate. Instead of denying this presupposition, he implicitly confirms that Pechtold is right. Giving such a (partial) consent is a way to strengthen one’s ethos as a genuine debater because admitting something that is not opportune, even when done implicitly, gives the impression of being honest. In this case, Wilders’s consent makes it seem as if he would be willing to agree with Pechtold if Pechtold were right. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca give a comparable explanation of the effect of concession. They mention that this device can be used to “exhibit a sense of fair play and objectivity” (1969: 488).

105 In fact, Shimojima et al. refer to immediate other-repetitions in two different ways: as opposed to self-repetition and as similar to echoic responses. By echoic responses they mean “everything ranging from an exact repetition to a paraphrase” (2002: 117). Echoic responses, however, never involve a partly repetition (of just a word, for example). When I use the term other-repetition, I am referring only to the first meaning: a way of repetition opposed to self-repetition.
it (rightly or wrongly) creates the impression that Wilders continues the discussion introduced by Pechtold because he seems to refer to the same propositional content.

The part of Wilders's response that concerns the need for mosques is formulated in a similar vein and has, therefore, the same effect as the part about the Islamic schools. Wilders says: “Indeed, I think that when the Netherlands abolish immigration – which is also a proposal of mine – we no longer need, for instance, mosques.” Here, it is the use of the intensifier “indeed” and the repetition of mosques referred to earlier by Pechtold that relate Wilders's response to Pechtold's question:106 the use of “mosques” suggests that the propositional content of the standpoint relates to the question, the use of the modal adverb “indeed” creates the impression that reintroducing the standpoint on Muslim immigration is needed because listeners might think that Wilders no longer wants all mosques to disappear now that Pechtold has attacked him on account of being in favor of assimilation. The advantage of this way of formulating107 is that Wilders can emphasize his intention to stop Islamisation without giving the impression that what he says is redundant. The repetition of his standpoint is necessary because, according to Wilders, Pechtold has raised doubt about his viewpoints concerning Islam – even about the point of view that Muslim immigration should be stopped.

In the last sentence of his contribution Wilders employs yet another device to give the impression that the newly expressed standpoint is part of the current discussion with Pechtold. He repeats his standpoint that immigration should be stopped and adds a clause that says “a great many people in the Netherlands, including [liberal] democrats, agree”. The fact that a standpoint is also the people's point of view (the standpoint is presented as if it is put forward on behalf of the people) gives a justification to present the standpoint again.108 If so many people, including those that might vote for Pechtold's party (the “democrats”), consider the issue of stopping immigration important, it would be strange for Pechtold or the Chair to consider

106 “Mosques” is not a literal repetition of Pechtold’s words: Pechtold speaks of “house of faith”.
107 Just like absolutely, the word indeed (meaning: it is true) can be identified as a modal adverb that indicates a strong degree of commitment to the truth of the proposition that is asserted (Tseronis 2009: 54). The Cambridge Dictionary indicates that indeed can be used to express that something is correct and to emphasize something. In this case Wilders uses the adverb to confirm and emphasize that he is strongly committed to the truth of the proposition that all mosques should disappear.
108 The addition that “a great many people agree, including Democrats” could also serve other argumentative purposes. It could be an argument to convince Pechtold or (more probably) the people that might vote for the Liberal Democrats to agree with Wilders.
it not at issue. Furthermore, such an addition is advantageous to Wilders because it emphasizes that he listens to the people he wants to represent.

**Does the strategic maneuvering derail?**

In this section I will examine whether Wilders’s maneuvering to shift the topic from the desirability of assimilation to stopping Muslim immigration violates any of the pragma-dialectical discussion rules. Some of these rules pertain to the confrontation stage (the freedom rule, the standpoint rule, and the language use rule\(^ {109} \)), but, since a topic shift can also involve argumentation, rules pertaining to other stages could be at stake as well. In this particular excerpt, the rules that are violated are the standpoint rule, the argument scheme rule and the concluding rule.

Wilders attempts to end the discussion initiated by Pechtold by responding only explicitly to how Pechtold qualifies assimilation.\(^ {110} \) Pechtold considers assimilation problematic in a society in which Muslims and non-Muslims have to live together, while Wilders claims that assimilation is not a bad thing. Although Wilders’s response can be called evasive because it is not an explicit response to the actual question, his response does not violate a discussion rule of the confrontation stage. Wilders’s answer relates to the question raised by Pechtold, because it is possible for the listener to construct an implication that provides the information necessary to answer the question (If assimilation is not bad, it will cause no problems for Muslims and non-Muslims who have to live together). This implication suggests that the problem raised by Pechtold (how should Muslims and non-Muslims live together if Muslims have to assimilate) can be made irrelevant by simply refuting the presupposition underlying the problem: if assimilation is not a bad thing, there is no longer reason to think that Muslims and non-Muslims cannot live together.

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109 Violations of the freedom rule (discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question) lead to differences of opinion not being fully externalized; violations of the standpoint rule (attacks on standpoints may not bear on a standpoint that has not actually been put forward by the other party) exclude the possibility of a genuine resolution of the difference of opinion; violations of the language use rule (discussants may not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they may not deliberately misinterpret the other party’s formulations) may lead to misunderstandings or to a pseudo-resolution of the difference of opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004).

110 In this evaluation, Pechtold’s question is omitted from consideration. His question could be fallacious because insinuating that a politician is in favor of assimilation is an ideology-related personal attack (which, according to Ilie, is a kind of insult that is typical for parliamentary debates with a technocratic political tradition (2004: 74)) that could be a violation of the freedom rule.
Although this indirect refutation may not be an argumentatively strong move,\textsuperscript{111} it is a cooperative reaction. Therefore, it does not have much of an effect on the continuation of the discourse (Polcar 2002: 225).

Nevertheless, Wilders’s contribution does not seem completely reasonable. The unreasonableness has to do with the arguments put forward in support of the standpoint that “there is nothing wrong with assimilation”. These arguments are presented as conclusive in the discussion on assimilation in order to make room for a new discussion topic. Wilders claims that he is right because the French Government employs a policy of assimilation. This line of argument could be viewed as an \textit{argumentum ad verecundiam} (the populistic fallacy variant), which violates the argument scheme rule (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 161). The proposition is then regarded as acceptable because an authoritative source (France) says it is. In order to be able to use this argument, Pechtold should recognize it as sound, and it is questionable whether he would be prepared to do so. In addition to this, Wilders’s use of “so” (in “So, there is nothing bad about that [assimilation]”) is a way to present the argument based on French policy as a conclusive defense for his standpoint on assimilation. Since it is at least questionable whether the argument based on French policy is reasonable, presenting it as conclusive defense is a violation of the concluding rule (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 186-187): Wilders has no reason to assume that Pechtold will consider the claim that French policy is based on assimilation sufficient evidence that assimilation is not bad. Wilders’s strategic maneuvering aimed at ending the discussion on assimilation therefore seems to derail.

Wilders attempts to reintroduce the issue of Muslim immigration in the current stage of the debate by making the issue part of an answer to Pechtold’s question. As we shall see presently, this way of presenting could be viewed as a violation of the standpoint rule, although I do not consider it a clear case of fallacious strategic maneuvering.\textsuperscript{112} I will explain why that is the case. The part of the contribution I am referring to consists of the following two sentences: “Again, I explained to our colleague Marijnissen why I think that Holland should no longer have Islamic

\textsuperscript{111} Refuting Pechtold’s presupposition that assimilation is bad does not remove the problem of “how Muslims and non-Muslims should live together if they are not allowed to have schools or a house of faith”: even if assimilating is good, it will make the living together of Muslims and non-Muslims problematic.

\textsuperscript{112} As indicated by van Eemeren, modes of strategic maneuvering can be imagined as representing a continuum running from evidently sound to evidently fallacious strategic maneuvering, with a whole area of less clear cases in between (2010: 211).
schools. Indeed, I think that when the Netherlands abolish immigration – which is also a proposal of mine – we no longer need, for instance, mosques.” By using this utterance Wilders makes it seem as if Pechtold raised the question of why the Party for Freedom opposes Islamic schools and mosques. This is, however, not what Pechtold’s question is about. Pechtold indicates that he knows that Wilders’s party wants to close Islamic schools and mosques in order to stop Islamisation and his question on assimilation cannot be understood as a request for confirmation on this matter. This part of Wilders’s contribution could, therefore, be viewed as misleading: Wilders wrongly suggests that the aim of Pechtold’s question is to call into question why Wilders wants to close Islamic schools and mosques.

However, Wilders’s potential electorate might have gotten the idea that, after Pechtold’s accusation, Wilders is no longer strongly committed to his anti-Islam standpoints. To eliminate this possible thought, the second part of his contribution (about the Islamic schools and mosques) is therefore addressing the electorate. It is meant as a confirmation towards his primary audience that he sticks to his initial standpoint despite Pechtold’s claim that closing Islamic schools and mosques is bad for the unity of our society. The electorate should believe that since Wilders is of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with assimilation, he is not going to change his mind about the closing of Islamic schools and mosques, or – his most important issue – the immigration of Muslims. Hence, Wilders’s contribution about Islamic schools and mosques is relevant to the discussion with the electorate. However, in the discussion with Pechtold the contribution could be considered a straw man: Wilders responds to a standpoint (something like ‘Islamic schools and mosques are here to stay’) that Pechtold cannot be held committed to, at least not in this particular part of the exchange.  

\[113\] In the last part of his contribution Wilders repeats that he wants Muslim immigration to be stopped. This is, as he emphasizes, something that “a great many people in the Netherlands, including democrats, agree on”. In case this addition is reconstructed as an argument, the question is whether this appeal to authority (in this case to the mass of the people) is reasonable or not in Parliament.
4.3 Critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint: the Mohammed B case

The second case that illustrates the tactic of critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint is taken from the 100 days debate. On June 19, 2007 the fourth Cabinet of Prime Minister Balkenende defended its policy program for 2007-2011 in Parliament. For the first time in Dutch parliamentary history the governmental program was established according to the so-called “100 days approach”, which meant that all members of Government travelled through the country during the first 100 days of their governmental term to find out what worried people most. In the first round of turns to speak, Wilders commented on three topics that were part of the governmental program: taxes, crime and public housing. The excerpt I will discuss is about the topic of public housing. In the excerpt, Wilders responds to the plan of the Minister of Housing and Integration, Mrs. Vogelaar, to improve some problematic city districts by restoring run-down houses.114 He comments on her plan by saying the following:

[4.2] Wilders: “Does our Minister of Housing and Integration really believe that she can transform so-called problematic neighborhoods, prize neighborhoods, powerful neighborhoods with some extra paint and youth centers? As if Mohammed B would not have murdered Theo van Gogh if his window frames had been painted once more!”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2006/2007, 82, 4376-4462)

Why is the excerpt an example of a topic shift?
The excerpt is an example of a topic shift in accordance with the pattern of critically responding and then introducing the new issue. The standpoint introduced by Vogelaar concerned the issue of whether or not providing good housing is the right means to accomplish the goal of improving disadvantaged neighborhoods (+/p). The first part of Wilders’s response (“Does our Minister of Housing and Integration really believe…”) clearly shows that Wilders disagrees with the Minister (-/p). The

114 At the time, the Government consisted of a coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Labor Party (PvdA). Mrs. Vogelaar was one of the Labor Party Ministers. In Dutch, the forty city districts chosen to be restored by the Minister are known as ‘Vogelaarwijken’, or as “prachtwijken” (prize neighborhoods) or “krachtwijken” (powerful neighborhoods).
Getting an issue on the table

introduction of the new standpoint (+/r) is accomplished by changing the initial issue into the issue of whether or not providing some paint and extra youth centers is the right policy to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh. Although Wilders seems to talk about the same means to the same end, both the means and the end are different from what is proposed by Vogelaar. By reading the end mentioned by Vogelaar as if it was to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh, Wilders introduces the danger of Islam as a topic of discussion into a debate that was originally not about Islam but about improving disadvantaged neighborhoods.

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to shift the topic? The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate -/p and +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a topic shift described in section 3.3 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that (1) the formulation of standpoint -/p can be analyzed as an attempt to provide an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint (which would mean that the discussion on the opponent’s standpoint +/p would end) and (2) the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt to provide an institutionally justified reason for the introduction of +/r (which would mean that the debate can continue because +/r seems to fit the parliamentary agenda). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by the formulation of the standpoints -/p and +/r.

(1) Wilders makes clear that he does not agree with Minister Vogelaar by saying “Does our minister of Housing and Integration really believe that she can transform problematic neighborhoods […] with some extra paint and youth centers?” The first part of Wilders’s response is formulated as a question that does not literally express that Wilders disagrees with the Minister. It is not an assertion that says “I believe that good housing cannot improve problematic neighborhoods”. However, it can be deduced from the fact that the question cannot be intended literally that the question actually functions as an assertion of this import: Wilders already knows the answer, because the Minister expressed (in the Governmental program) that she believes good housing to be effective for improving problematic neighborhoods.

115 On 2 November 2004, Mohammed Bouyeri killed film director, writer and television interviewer, Theo van Gogh, because of his criticism on Islam.
The question is thus meant as a rhetorical question. The direct meaning, which is conveyed by a directive speech act, is irrelevant and the intended meaning is therefore a different speech act (in this case, an assertive by means of which non-acceptance is put forward).\textsuperscript{116}

The advantage of formulating a reaction of non-acceptance by means of a rhetorical question is that it provides a reason for the opponent to retract his standpoint: it is a way to imply that the opponent actually knows that his standpoint is not true. As has been indicated, among others by Snoeck Henkemans (2007: 1311), the general effect of a rhetorical question is that the proposition in question is presupposed to be already acceptable to the other party.\textsuperscript{117} Snoeck Henkemans explains that by means of a rhetorical question the arguer is making an assertion in which he presents the acceptance of the assertive as unproblematic: because there is no other possible answer to the question, the speaker simply expects to induce the same commitment in the addressee (2007: 1311). Hence, Wilders’s use of “Do you really believe that […]?” (which seems an idiomatic expression for rhetorical questions) presupposes that the unacceptability of the Minister’s standpoint is something agreed upon, not only by Wilders but by everybody else including the Minister. It implies that even the Minister herself knows better. In the second part of the example Wilders proceeds along the same lines by adding a claim that starts with “as if”. The expression “as if” is an indicator of a figurative comparison relationship (van Eemeren et al. 2007: 144). Hence, in line with the first part, the second part can be read as: “As if it were true that Mohammed B would not have murdered Theo van Gogh when his window frames had been painted once more!” (my italics, YT). “As if” implies that we all, including the Minister, know that what is claimed cannot be true. Van Eemeren et al. show that “as if” can be used in a negative analogy to criticize someone’s argumentation. In that case, it introduces “a comparison between the opponent’s argumentation and another argument that is untenable or absurd” (2007: 144). By formulating the second part of his contribution in the same vein as the first part, Wilders is making the Minister responsible for the content of this claim, as well as for the linked implicit claim that problematic

\textsuperscript{116} The reconstruction of the indirect speech act can be justified as follows. Questions like the one uttered by Wilders violate Grice’s co-operative principle because they are redundant and insincere (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992). When the question is taken as a different speech act, the utterance regains its relevance and the principle of co-operation is no longer violated.

\textsuperscript{117} See also Slot (1993: 131).
Getting an Issue on the Table

neighborhoods can only be improved if Muslims are prevented from murdering people like Theo van Gogh.

The implication that everybody, including the Minister, knows that the Minister’s standpoint cannot be true, sounds quite plausible due to the *ridiculous and simplified reformulation* chosen in referring to the Minister’s standpoint. In the first part of Wilders contribution he reformulates “good housing” as “some extra paint and youth centers” and in the second part as “window frames that are painted once more”. In the second part of his contribution, he reformulates problematic neighborhoods as “Mohammed B killing Theo van Gogh”. In both reformulations the figure of *pars pro toto* (or *synecdoche*) is used. Painting window frames could be one of the measures to improve bad housing, and Muslims killing people like Theo van Gogh could be viewed as one of the results of living in a disadvantaged neighborhood. Yet, Wilders did not pick just any part to describe the whole. Painting window frames is just a very minor measure to improve a disadvantaged neighborhood. Choosing this particular measure to describe the Minister’s plan portrays this plan as ineffective. Mohammed B’s killing of Theo van Gogh is a well known but extreme example of what a Muslim who grew up in one of the so-called bad neighborhoods could end up doing. Choosing this particular example portrays the problem of disadvantaged neighborhoods as something huge caused by Muslims – as if the presence of Muslims were the (only) real problem of these neighborhoods. These phrases reformulate the problem and the Minister’s solution in a simplified and exaggerated manner, which makes the Minister’s argumentation look ridiculous. By taking the effect of the rhetorical question and the simplified and exaggerated reformulation together, Wilders makes it seem as if the Minister was stupid in putting put forward the standpoint as she did: how can she make anyone believe that she can prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh by providing some extra paint and youth centers?

118 It should be emphasized that it is Wilders who considers these parts (painting window frames/ Muslims killing people like Theo van Gogh) as representative for the whole (good housing/ disadvantaged neighborhoods). Minister Vogelaar would probably not agree.

119 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe the argumentative function of “inclusion of the part in the whole” in terms of a specific association scheme: “the whole is treated as similar to each one of its parts” (1969: 231). In this case the scheme works as follows: if a measure does not work to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh, then the measure does not work to improve disadvantaged neighborhoods.
The problem though with this line of reasoning (claiming to be right by portraying the opponent as stupid) is that it could be taken as an insult to the Minister and, therefore, unreasonable. The ridiculing reformulation of the Minister’s standpoint might be of help to mitigate the offense in such a way that he is able to keep up the appearance that he is a reasonable discussant. As indicated by van Laar, such a choice of words might be taken as acceptable because “there is a fiction that humor does not count” (2008: 310). When the insult makes an appeal to the sense of humour of the listener, he is more likely to not take it seriously and let it pass.

(2) In the second sentence of the excerpt, Wilders introduces the topic of the dangers of Islam by naming Mohammed B (a Muslim who murdered someone for criticizing Islam). Wilders makes it seem as if the issue of the dangers of Islam is relevant to the current discussion on bad housing by presenting it as part of his response to the Minister’s proposal. By referring to “good housing” as “some extra paint and youth centers”, and making “problematic neighborhoods” synonymous with “Mohammed B murdering Theo van Gogh”, Wilders presents his contribution as a claim supported by an argument in which he mentions the same solution to the same problem as Minister Vogelaar. This effect is especially strengthened by the use of as if (which is, as I explained earlier, an indicator of a figurative comparison relationship). Here, the comparison relationship makes it seem as if the Minister’s intention to improve disadvantaged neighborhoods is actually the same as Wilders’s intention to stop the dangers of Islam: the impression is given that Vogelaar wants to deal with the problem of problematic neighborhoods because she wants to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh. That they are both indeed discussing the problem of improving disadvantaged neighborhoods is plausible because of the pars pro toto: as explained, the case of Mohammed B could be interpreted as an example of a problem (the increasing Muslim population) that leads to socially and economically less developed neighborhoods. The advantage of this comparison by means of a pars pro toto is that it helps Wilders to keep the introduction of a new topic hidden when emphasizing the danger of Islam. Now that problematic neighborhoods are synonymous with the presence of Muslims it seems that the growth of Islam touches

120 Lockyer and Pickering explain that humor often legitimizes and exonerates an insult (2005: 12).
upon almost every aspect of society, and thus causes many more problems than people might at first think.¹²¹

*Does the strategic maneuvering derail?*

Wilders’s strategic maneuvering to shift the topic from bad housing as the cause of disadvantaged neighborhoods to Muslims can be viewed as fallacious because at least two of the pragma-dialectical discussion rules are violated: the freedom rule and the standpoint rule.

Wilders attempts to end the discussion on improving bad housing by making it seem as if it was stupid of the Minister to put forward her standpoint. In pragma-dialectics, personal attacks are viewed as a violation of the freedom rule when the attack is aimed at the opponent’s person instead of the intrinsic merits of the standpoint or doubt. Such attacks frustrate the externalization of the difference of opinion because they aim to eliminate the opponent as a serious discussion partner (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 110-113). In the excerpt, the personal attack is made indirectly. Wilders implies that the Minister is stupid by formulating her standpoint as something ridiculous. Although it might seem that Wilders attacks the standpoint and not the person, I think this is not the case. The insult is meant to make the Minister lose her credibility in the discussion on housing and integration (her portfolio) because her measures are made to seem completely ineffective to handle the only real cause of the problem of disadvantaged neighborhoods: the increasing amount of Muslims living in these neighborhoods. The fact that the insult is wrapped up in a humorous formulation mitigates the insult because it is unclear how seriously the insult is meant. However, the formulation does not take away Wilders’s intention of making Vogelaar look like an incapable Minister who cannot be considered a serious discussion partner.¹²²

The reformulation of the Minister’s standpoint can be identified as a straw man fallacy (a violation of the standpoint rule). Wilders obviously represents the Minister’s standpoint by means of a formulation that is very different from her own.

¹²¹ Since the General Debate addresses many different issues, the easiest way for Wilders to introduce his Islam standpoint would be to mention it in the part that is about integration. The advantage of linking the Islam issue to the issue of public housing is that in this way Wilders can emphasize how far-reaching the danger of Islam actually is. The fact that Minister Vogelaar rules a department that combines housing and integration makes this link not too far-fetched.

¹²² Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe ridicule as “the penalty for blindness” (1969: 206). In this case, the Minister has been blind to the real cause of bad neighborhoods.
The Minister did not say that her measures consist of providing some paint and youth centers, and she did not describe the problem to be solved by these measures as Muslims murdering people like Theo van Gogh. However, these reformulations are in themselves not fallacious. As explained, the reformulations can be interpreted as possible examples of what should be solved by taking a particular measure (see the explanation of the pars pro toto earlier in this section). If it were clear that only Wilders is committed to this choice of examples, the reformulations would have been just a proposal of how to interpret the Minister’s plans. However, in the excerpt, Wilders presents his choice of examples as something generally agreed upon by means of a specific kind of rhetorical question (“Does our Minister of Housing and Integration really believe…”) and an ‘as if’ comparison (“As if Mohammed B…”). Hence, what creates the straw man is that Wilders presents his own interpretation as the only possible one and thereby attributes his choice of examples to the Minister.123

4.4 Implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint: the majority-minority case

Just like the assimilation case, the majority-minority case stems from the debate on Wilders’s anti-Islam movie Fitna (1 April, 2008). Yet, this particular case illustrates a different tactic, namely that of implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint. The excerpt comes from a part of the debate in which the feasibility of Wilders’s solutions is discussed. The leader of the Liberal Democrats, Pechtold, was one of the parliamentarians questioning Wilders on this topic. He posed a question to attack Wilders on one of his proposals to deal with crime caused by immigrants. On previous occasions, Wilders had repeatedly said that he was in favor of deporting Antilleans that committed a crime in the Netherlands. Pechtold wonders whether this also means that a criminal who has a grandfather in Morocco will be sent

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123 A related problem is caused by the fact that Wilders uses the examples as a comparison argument to prove that the Minister’s measures will be ineffective. He can only make the comparison between the Minister’s plan and his own examples if both parties agree on the implicit claim that Muslims are the real problem of bad neighborhoods. Since there is no reason to assume that a Labor Minister will agree with him on this, it can be said that Wilders also violates one of the opening stage rules, the starting point rule: he falsely attributes an unexpressed premise to the other party (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 192).
to Morocco if Wilders’s party were in charge. To underline the intention of his question Pechtold says the following:

[4.3] Pechtold: “I am trying to figure out how you, once you have the majority, will deal with Muslims here.”
Wilders: “Take it from me that if my party, the Party for Freedom, will ever get its share of power, we will deal with minorities much more nicely than when the Islam is in control in the Netherlands.”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2007/2008, 70, 4880-4937)

Why is the excerpt an example of a topic shift?
The excerpt is in accordance with the pattern of implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint. In the first part, Pechtold voices his concern about the way in which Wilders would treat Muslims if he were leading the Government. Although Pechtold’s contribution is formulated as a request for information, it has to be understood as a standpoint (+/p): he is of the opinion that Muslims will not be treated well by Wilders. Wilders’s response is a shift of topic because he changes the issue into how Muslims would deal with minorities. This response is not a direct answer to Pechtold’s question (Wilders does not say that he agrees or disagrees with Pechtold) but the introduction of a standpoint on his priority issue (+/r): by saying that Muslims will treat non-Muslims worse, he introduces the danger of Islam as a topic of discussion.

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to shift the topic?
The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate the move +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a topic shift described in section 3.3 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to imply a standpoint -/p that, at the same time, gives an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint +/p (which would mean that there is no need to discuss the opponent’s standpoint +/p), (2) to provide an institutionally justified reason for the introduction of +/r (which would mean that the debate can continue because +/r seems to fit the parliamentary agenda). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by means of his formulation of the standpoint +/r.
4. PRESENTING TOPIC SHIFTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

(1) The question by means of which Pechtold indirectly conveys his standpoint is based on two key concepts, “majority” and “Muslims”. Pechtold questions whether Muslims will be treated well if Wilders seizes the majority in Parliament. In his response, Wilders gives the impression of using the same two concepts as his opponent, Pechtold. He says: “Take it from me that if my party, the Party for Freedom, will ever get its share of power, we will deal with minorities much more nicely than when the Islam is in control” (my italics, YT). Wilders uses the concepts differently than Pechtold though. He opposes majority to minority and Muslims to non-Muslims and uses them the other way around: in his answer it is not his party that has the majority, but Islam, and, as a consequence, it is not the Muslims that constitute a minority, but the people who are not Muslims. In rhetoric there are figures of speech with similar characteristics. The crossing of words is typical for figures such as antitmetabole and chiasmus; contrasting concepts can be found in the figure of antithesis. Chiasmus is a variant of the antitmetabole, which, as Fahnestock explains “abandons the constraint of repeating the same words in the second colon, yet retains a pattern of reversion”. Instead of repetition, chiasmus uses words related in some recognizable way that change positions. The ways in which words are related could be of various kinds. Fahnestock points at synonyms, opposites, or members of the same category (1999: 123). In the excerpt, the crossing of words can be identified as a figure of chiasmus (there is a reversal of related words) that uses the figure of antithesis (the related words are opposites: Muslims versus non-Muslims and majority versus minorities).

The advantage of using chiasmus based on antithesis is that this enables Wilders to avoid a tricky question while still giving a relevant answer. By means of these figures of speech he can formulate his standpoint as being more important than Pechtold’s...

124 The crossing of words can be represented as follows (what is in parenthesis is not made explicit):

Pechtold: you (PVV) = majority Muslims (= minority)
Wilders: Islam = in control (non-Muslims =) minorities

125 Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca mention only the figure of antitmetabole: they show that a reversal in the position of words without changing any term (antitmetabole) can assume the figure of antithesis (also known as commutation or reversion). They give the example of “One should eat to live, not live to eat” (1969: 428).

126 The reversal of words can be explained as follows: [non-Muslims (PVV) = majority] is reversed into [non-Muslims = minorities] and [Muslims = minorities] into [Muslims = majority].

127 In their classical descriptions, the figures of chiasmus and antithesis are always established within one utterance, and not, as is the case here, in utterances of two speakers. So, in a strict sense, Wilders’s formulation cannot be labeled as one of these figures.
because the figures of speech create the possibility to describe a future scenario that is more frightening than the one of his opponent, Pechtold. This frightening future scenario is in fact an implicit way of responding to Pechtold. Wilders puts Pechtold’s standpoint aside as unimportant because it is less frightening for non-Muslims: why should anyone worry about how Wilders will treat Muslims, if the real danger is that we, non-Muslims, might be treated badly by them? Fahnestock (1999: 54) as well as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 344) refer to the Rhetorica ad Herennium to explain this argumentative use of the antithesis. One of the appearances of antithesis (in the Rhetorica ad Herennium called “contrarium”) is that of two opposite statements, one of which is used to prove the other.\textsuperscript{128} Although in the excerpt the figure is not used in its classical form (in an utterance of one and the same speaker), it can be said that Wilders uses Pechtold’s statement to come up with an argument for why what Pechtold says is not of any importance. Wilders tries to refute Pechtold’s statement by making use of the frightening future scenario sketched by Pechtold.

\textit{(2)} The choice of using the same two key concepts as his opponent uses (Muslims and majority) can be interpreted as an attempt to stick, at least to some extent, to the topic introduced by Pechtold. As explained with respect to the case study discussed in section 4.2 (the \textit{assimilation} case), using a word or phrase of the preceding speaker is also referred to as \textit{immediate other-repetition}. There are clear advantages of using this form of repetition (in this case in the form of chiasmus and antithesis). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain one of these advantages as an opportunity for the speaker of “giving the impression that the second part is deduced from the first” (1969: 428). This is precisely what Wilders’s contribution aims to do: in the excerpt, Wilders creates an impression of cohesion by “deducing” his disapproving answer from Pechtold’s question. Pechtold described a frightening future scenario and Wilders responds by sketching a more frightening future scenario than Pechtold.

\textit{Does the strategic maneuvering derail?}

Wilders’s strategic maneuvering in shifting the topic from how he will treat Muslims to how Muslims will deal with minorities is to be evaluated as a reasonable way of

\textsuperscript{128} Both Fahnestock and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca refer to the following example from the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium}: “Now why should you think that one who is, as you have learned, a faithless friend, can be an honorable enemy?” Here, the statement that someone is a faithless friend is used to prove the opposite statement that he can be an honorable enemy.
arguing. This is the case because Wilders’s move can be recognized by the listener as an attempt to introduce the issue of the dangers of Islamisation as a new discussion topic.

Wilders expresses in an implicit but clear way that he considers a different matter more important: his response can be understood as the introduction of a new topic that is related to Pechtold’s standpoint, but entails, he thinks, a greater danger. Wilders acts as if he presupposes that this greater danger is sufficient reason for Pechtold to abandon the matter of how Wilders will deal with minorities without, however, forcing Pechtold to retract his standpoint. Galansinski (1996) describes this kind of answer as evasive because it actually changes the focus of the question (in the case of the excerpt from Wilders to Muslims). From the choices made possible by the question, the respondent chooses a possibility that deviates from the pragmatic goal of the question. In Wilders’s case he chooses the possibility of saying that the opponent’s standpoint is not important.129 Although it can be said that the answer does not match the speaker’s intention of the question, it cannot be called fallacious. The answer (saying that the opponent’s standpoint is unimportant) is relevant to the question and it is not misleading because it is formulated in such a way that the listener is able to deduce all information necessary to reconstruct this relevant answer.

Although such a clear way of shifting the topic can be both effective and reasonable, the evasiveness entails a disadvantage. Since Wilders did not express how he would deal with Muslims if he were ever part of the Government, Pechtold can claim that Wilders did not answer his question. In this case Pechtold expressed indeed dissatisfaction with the response by saying “You are running away!” In return, Wilders said: “I am not running away. I am giving an important answer” (followed by a repetition of the same answer as he gave in the previous exchange, but in different terms). This second part of the discussion is in fact another attempt to make the same topic shift. However, this time Wilders is using the tactic of critically responding before shifting the topic: he explicitly disagrees with Pechtold on the standpoint that he is running away (“I am not running away”) before introducing (again) the standpoint that Muslims will treat non-Muslims worse than the other way around.

129 Making use of the concept of strategic maneuvering, this choice can be explained as an opportune choice from the topical potential.
4.5 Implying a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint: 
the twenty years case

The fourth and last case study of this chapter illustrates, again, the tactic of implying 
a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint. The twenty years case, 
which was already introduced in chapter 2, stems from the General Debate of 2008. 
In this debate, the starting point of Wilders’s speech is that in Holland there is a 
dichotomy between the elite with its multicultural ideals and the people paying 
the price for these ideals. It is again the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Pechtold, 
who interrupts Wilders to ask him what he has done in the last two years to fight 
this dichotomy.130 Before giving Wilders the opportunity to answer, Pechtold adds 
that Wilders’s solutions are just illusions brought forward for electoral reasons. As 
Pechtold states “You give the people, who sometimes indeed see globalization and 
speed as a problem, the feeling that these illusions are solutions”. In addition to this 
claim, Pechtold accuses Wilders of knowing better. Since Wilders has been part of 
the elite for quite some time, he knows from experience that his solutions are not 
feasible.131 Pechtold then ends his line of reasoning by confronting Wilders with this 
specific accusation.

[4.4] Pechtold: “You want to shout [that the political establishment is no good] 
after having contributed to it yourself for twenty years.”
Wilders: “Mr. Pechtold will have to listen to very concrete proposals of the PVV 
for twenty years or longer. Again, it is not D66, but the PVV which is standing 
up for the average man who is bothered by the multicultural society.”
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Why is the excerpt an example of a topic shift?
The excerpt is an example of a topic shift displaying the pattern of implying a 
critical response by putting forward a new standpoint. Pechtold accuses Wilders of

130 I selected 13 discussion fragments in which Wilders shifts the topic to Islamisation. In four of 
these fragments, Pechtold is Wilders’s opponent (other opponents are Halsema (3), van Geel (3), 
de Wit (1), Vogelaar (1) and Dijsselbloem (1)).
131 Wilders joined the Liberal Party (VVD) in 1989 and was a policy advisor of this party from 
1990 till 1998. In 1998 he became a Member of Parliament for the VVD. He left the party in 
September 2004, due to a disagreement with his colleagues on whether Turkey could join the 
European Union or not.

100
inconsistent behavior because he now “shouts” and “kicks” at the establishment of which he has been a member for such a very long time (+/p). The accusation implies that Wilders is insincere: because he has been part of the establishment – and thus knows how politics works – his proposals cannot be meant to solve the problems of the electorate, but solely to win their support. In his response, Wilders avoids having a discussion about Pechtold’s accusation by not saying anything about it. Instead, he puts forward a standpoint (+/r) by which he promotes himself as the politician who is fighting the problems of Islam (and simultaneously attacks the Liberal Democrats for failing to do so). By advancing this standpoint he actually attempts to get back to the original issue advanced in his speech, which is that the political establishment is no good. By sticking to this issue, Wilders is able to enter a discussion that shows that, in contrast to the political elite, he fights against one of his electorate’s biggest enemies, the multicultural society.

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to shift the topic? The presentational devices used by Wilders in the formulation of +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a topic shift described in section 3.3 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to imply a standpoint -/p that, at the same time, gives an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint +/p (which would mean that there is no need to discuss the opponent’s standpoint +/p), (2) to provide an institutionally justified reason for the introduction of +/r (which would mean that the debate can continue because +/r seems to fit the parliamentary agenda). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by means of his formulation of the standpoint +/r.

(1+2) Wilders’s response can be analyzed as an attempt to make the shift of topic go by unnoticed: he actually presents the new standpoint as if it were just a critical response to Pechtold’s contribution. Making such a move is in fact a way to accomplish all topic-shifting aims in one go: if r seems to resemble p, then the discussion about +/p simply seems to continue. But how does Wilders make it seem that his response is nothing but a critical response towards the standpoint put forward by Pechtold? The fact that Wilders does not say anything about the accusation (neither implicitly nor explicitly) means that the only relevant meaning that can be deduced from his response is that he does not want to discuss his supposedly inconsistent
behavior. However, this is probably not what Wilders wants to communicate: such a response would make it appear as if he were not prepared to take a position on this particular issue. A way of rendering this interpretation less likely is to make it appear as if the response is not meant to break off the inconsistency issue. Wilders attempts to establish this effect by referring to very specific parts of Pechtold’s contribution.

What is most striking in this response is the use of “twenty years”. Pechtold used these words to emphasize Wilders’s inconsistent behavior, Wilders repeats them to emphasize his determination to fight the multicultural society. As explained in previous analyses (section 4.2 and 4.4), immediate other-repetition (using a specific phrase of the previous speaker) is a way of making it seem as if the discussion continues because the repetition appears to make the answer topically relevant.

A second presentational choice that is of help in establishing the effect that the response is relevant is the use of the expression “very concrete” to describe the PVV’s proposals. This intensified adjective creates a sort of antithesis with the way in which Pechtold describes the PVV’s proposals: first Pechtold calls them “illusions”, then Wilders claims that they are “very concrete”. In doing so, Wilders seems to imply that the one description excludes the other – concrete proposals cannot be illusions. This argumentation appears plausible because something which is an illusion (in the meaning of a dream) is indeed the opposite of something concrete (in the meaning of ‘real and existing’). Furthermore, it is generally known that the PVV’s proposals are indeed very concrete (van Leeuwen 2009: 9). To name just a few examples from their electoral platform: “Turkey in the EU means that The Netherlands are out”, “At most 1000 asylum seekers a year” and “Social security only for those who speak Dutch”. The choice to describe his proposals as “very concrete” might thus give the potential electorate the impression that Wilders’s response denies and even refutes Pechtold’s claim. An additional advantage of Wilders’s response is that it may repair the damage Pechtold’s accusation may have caused. Pechtold’s accusation is a way to portray Wilders as insincere. In his response, Wilders emphasizes that he is in fact more sincere than Pechtold, because, in contrast to D66, he at least stands up for the real victims of the multicultural society.

132 These are three of the many concrete proposals to be found in the PVV’s electoral platform for 2010-2015 (www.pvv.nl).
4. PRESENTING TOPIC SHIFTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

*Does the strategic maneuvering derail?*

Wilders’s strategic maneuvering to shift the topic from an accusation of inconsistent behavior to a statement about the dichotomy between the political elite and the people should be viewed as fallacious. His response violates the language use rule because he uses unclearness to mask the actual meaning of his response.

Pechtold claims that Wilders cannot condemn the political establishment after having been a part of it for such a long time. Although it is questionable whether Pechtold’s accusation is reasonable, I limit myself here to discussing Wilders’s response to this accusation. Wilders reacts by introducing a different issue, which is that his Party for Freedom stands up for the man in the street, unlike the Liberal Democrats (D66). Wilders makes it seem as if this contribution is a full answer that complies with the pragmatic goal of Pechtold’s question, while in fact it does not. As explained in the analysis, the only relevant meaning that can be deduced from his response is that he does not want to discuss his supposedly inconsistent behavior. The vagueness he creates about this specific meaning of his words is what turns his reaction into a fallacious move: his utterance can be judged as being deliberately insufficiently clear and, therefore, involving a violation of the language use rule.

The use of the figure of antithesis and the immediate other-repetition both add to the vagueness. The antithesis (illusion versus concrete proposal) is misleading because it is in fact a fake antithesis. Pechtold claims that Wilders’s proposals are illusions because carrying them out is not feasible in political reality. The fact that these proposals are concrete does not tell us anything about their feasibility: something that is a clear, real and existing way to act can still be impracticable in the context at hand. The fake antithesis thus suggests that Wilders’s answer is much firmer than it actually is: he seems to say that his solutions are not illusions, while in fact his answer can only be understood as an attempt to avoid a discussion about the accusation. The repetition of “twenty years” adds to the vagueness of the answer, because it hinders the listener in understanding the real relationship between the standpoint and the response that is given.
4.6 Observations concerning the use of presentational devices in topic shifts

The tactics illustrated and discussed in this chapter can be used by every politician who tries to shift the topic in a parliamentary debate. However, the particularities of a politician’s language use influence in practice the way in which a specific tactic is employed and may make a tactic more suitable for use by a specific type of politician than for use by others. In this section, I will present, by comparing my analyses with the observations made by other analysts about Wilders’s language use, some observations with respect to Wilders’s choice of presentational devices and explain to what extent these choices can be considered typical for topic shifts by politicians in general.

The first topic-shifting tactic, illustrated in sections 4.2 and 4.3, was to respond critically before introducing the new issue for discussion. As explained in the analyses, when using this tactic the challenge is to formulate the critical response in such a way that the discussion on the initial issue comes to an end, and to formulate the new standpoint in such a way that it fits the current stage of the parliamentary debate. I do not claim that this tactic is prototypical for Wilders’s way of shifting the topic, but some typical particularities of his language use are particularly helpful for applying this tactic. I will first mention two features of his language use that help him to present a critical response as conclusive (aim (1) of the tactic). Then I will point at some features of his language use that are of help to present the new issue as relevant to the current stage of the debate (aim (2) of the tactic).

Almost all of the many analysts of Wilders’s language use point at the use of presentational choices that increase the certainty of his standpoints. As Janssen and Mulder say: “He presents himself as someone who has no doubts, who knows how things work” (2009: 346). Wilders makes use of various presentational devices to accomplish this effect: Janssen and Mulder point, for example, to the use of enumerations that end with “etc. etc.” (2009: 346)133; van Leeuwen mentions Wilders’s use of main clauses to present standpoints as facts134 and parallel constructed phrases

133 Janssen and Mulder (2009) compared Wilders’s language use with that of Pechtold (leader of the Liberal Democrats) and Halsema (leader of the Green Party).
134 Van Leeuwen refers to Verhagen (2005) to explain that a standpoint starting with a subordinate clause, such as “I think that”, makes room for discussion: if a standpoint is someone’s personal point of view, other views are also possible (2009: 12).
and repetitions to drill a message into people’s heads (2009: 10). Case study 4.2 (the assimilation case) illustrates how the devices mentioned by van Leeuwen might appear in a topic shift. In the excerpt, Wilders repeats his standpoint by means of slightly different main clauses (“there is nothing wrong with assimilation”, “there is nothing bad about that”, “assimilation is absolutely no problem”). A feature of Wilders’s debating style that is related to the factual way of presenting his viewpoints is his use of authority argumentation. It is often said that Wilders does not argue, but only advances standpoints that appeal to the people’s negative feelings. The choice to present a standpoint as if it needs no further argumentation can be viewed as an argument by authority, because the politician expects the listener to believe that he is right simply because he says that something is the case (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 135-137).

A second feature of Wilders’s language use that can be of help in presenting a critical response as conclusive is his habitually describing the opponent’s standpoint as ridiculous. As explained in case study 4.3 (the Mohammed B case), ridiculing the opponent’s standpoint is a way to exclude his standpoint from discussion because it eliminates the opponent as a serious discussion partner. Janssen and Mulder mention personal attacks as a feature of Wilders way of arguing (albeit without referring to the ridiculing aspect). Case study 4.3 shows that a ridiculing reformulation of the opponent’s standpoint can be realized by translating the standpoint into concrete examples that are formulated by means of hyperbolic expressions. In the excerpt, Wilders uses the figure of pars pro toto to describe the Minister’s solution as completely unrealistic (the ‘huge’ problem of Muslims like Mohammed B murdering people like Theo van Gogh should be prevented by the ‘minor’ solution of providing some extra paint for the window frames of these Muslims). Van Leeuwen considers the use of concrete examples and exaggerations as characteristic of Wilders’s language use (2009: 7).

The second aim of the tactic of critically responding before shifting the topic is to present the new standpoint in such a way that it seems to fit the current stage of the parliamentary debate. A feature of Wilders’s language use that is of help in realizing this aim is, again, the use of concrete examples. As explained in case study 4.3, the

135 Van Leeuwen (2009) compared Wilders’s language use with that of Minister Vogelaar in her political speeches about integration. Wilders used substantially more repetitions, parallel phrases and main clauses than Vogelaar.
use of examples as pars pro toto can be employed to relate, by way of comparison, the new issue to the initial issue. Other devices that help to fit the issue in the current stage of the debate are immediate other-repetition and introducing the electorate as co-protagonist of the standpoint. Repetition is a presentational device often used by politicians. Several analysts mention repetition of words, repetition of word groups in the beginning of consecutive phrases (the figure of anaphor) and repetition of grammatical constructions in consecutive phrases (the figure of parallelism) (Janssen and Mulder 2009; van Leeuwen 2009). Immediate other-repetition is not mentioned by any of the authors as a feature of political language in general, or of Wilders’s language use in particular. However, when looking at the General Debate of 2008 a great many examples can be found in which different politicians use the words of the preceding speaker to relate a new issue to the issue earlier introduced by their opponent (see the next paragraphs for some examples). The (populist) choice to present a standpoint on behalf of the people, though, appears to be rather typical for Wilders (an example can be found in case study 4.2, the assimilation case). Mulder and Janssen point out that Wilders, more than Pechtold and Halsema, underlines his loyalty to the people (2009: 345). Presenting a standpoint on behalf of the people can be characterized as one of the possible ways to express this loyalty.

The second topic-shifting tactic, illustrated in sections 4.4 and 4.5, is to imply a critical response by introducing a standpoint about a different issue. As explained in the analyses, when using this tactic the challenge is to formulate the new standpoint in such a way that the discussion on the initial issue ends and the new issue somehow fits the current stage of the parliamentary debate. In contrast to the previous tactic, Wilders’s language use does not seem to be any more suitable for applying this tactic than the language use of other politicians. I will first mention a feature of language use that is of help to end the discussion on the issue introduced by the opponent (aim (1) of the tactic). Then I will point at a specific feature of language use that is of help to present the new standpoint as relevant to the current discussion (aim (2) of the tactic).

What is characteristic of this tactic is that the new standpoint is brought forward as a reason to end the discussion on the issue introduced by the opponent. A specific presentational device that is of help in providing this reason is the figure of antithesis. As explained in case study 4.4 (the majority-minority case), this figure can be used to present the new standpoint as an issue that is of greater importance than the initial issue. Using the figure of antithesis is, however, not a specific feature of Wilders’s way of arguing: Janssen and Mulder argue that other politicians use
this figure as well (2009: 345). However, a typical feature of Wilders’s language use is the frame in which the antithesis is used. Case study 4.4 shows that Wilders uses the antithesis to describe a future scenario that is more frightening than Pechtold’s scenario. This frame of disaster is often used by Wilders, especially in relation to the growing number of Muslims in the Netherlands (Janssen and Mulder 2009; Kuitenbrouwer 2010; de Bruijn 2010).

Both case study 4.4 and case study 4.5 show how immediate other-repetition can be used to present the new standpoint as relevant to the current discussion. As explained in relation to the previous tactic, using specific words of the preceding speaker is a way of arguing employed by a great many politicians. I will mention two examples from the General Debate of 2008 that are characteristic for how this device is often used. In the first example the repetition creates a change of focus (or perspective) within the same context, in the second example it creates a kind of topical relevance. The reason to mention the examples here, and not in relation to the previous tactic, is that in both cases discussed here the repetition is used to realize the tactic of implying a response by putting forward a new standpoint. The first excerpt stems from a discussion between the leader of the Labor Party in the Second Chamber, Hamer, and the leader of the Liberal Party, Rutte. By means of a critical question, Hamer implies that Rutte finds acquiring the Olympic Games for the Netherlands in 2028 a more important task for the Government than, for example, improving healthcare. Rutte then tries to avoid answering this question by mentioning something the Labor Party wanted to be done which he considered not to be a task for the Government at all. By repeating part of Hamer’s contribution he relates this task to her question.

Hamer: “Do I understand you correctly that you are of the opinion that the State should no longer be occupied with social security, education and health care, but should organize the Olympic Games?”

Rutte: “I will tell you what the State should not be occupied with. Your party has contributed to the coalition negotiations that welfare mothers no longer have to apply for jobs. […] You think that you promote the people’s happiness, while in fact you are in the way of their happiness.” (my italics, YT)

_Proceedings Second Chamber 2008-2009, 2, 2-79_

137 Galansinski (1996) mentions these functions of repetition in relation to different types of covert evasion (ways in which a speaker tries to covertly evade a question).
The second excerpt illustrates a form of immediate other-repetition in which just one phrase of the preceding speaker is used to make it seem as if the topic of discussion has not changed. The excerpt is part of what was discussed during the second round of turns to speak of the debate in which Prime Minister Balkenende defends the government’s policy and budget. The line of approach chosen by the Prime Minister for his defense was based on “trust”. In his speech, he emphasizes time and again that the people have to maintain trust in the Netherlands and in Balkenende’s steady political line, “especially now in turbulent times”. Verdonk (of the one-woman faction Verdonk) interrupts his speech to ask the following question:

Verdonk: “Chairwoman. Trust, trust, trust. We have heard this word many times. […] You know, trust should be earned by honesty and openness. Yesterday, on public television, I was accused of having agreed in 2005 on a proposal for a general pardon of 10,000 people. This was the initiative of Mr. Verhagen, Mr. Zalm and Mr. Dittrich and it was meant to save the cabinet. […] Did you know about this case of backroom politics?” (my italics, YT)

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Here, Verdonk attempts to introduce a matter relating only to her (an accusation addressed to her on public television) as a topic of discussion in a debate that is actually about the budget and policy plans for the coming governmental year. She tries to relate this topic to the current discussion with Balkenende by presenting it as an example of why the Government is not to be trusted. Other politicians used the word “trust” too in their response to Balkenende. The leader of the Liberal Party, Rutte, said:

……………………………

138 In this case, Chairwoman Verbeet intervened by asking Verdonk to talk about the subject on the agenda. A bit later, Verbeet even ended the discussion between Verdonk and Balkenende because she considered the accusation not at issue (Verbeet’s reaction is quoted in section 2.2.2).

139 A similar example is the excerpt of Thieme mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 (sections 1.1 and 2.3.1 [2.1]) that starts with “It is all about money, money, money”. What is different, though, is that Thieme relates the issue of environment to that of the preceding speaker not by using the same words, but by making a kind of recapitulation of the previous contribution in one term (in this case “money”), which she then repeats three times. Thieme appears to use this way of presenting quite often. Another example figuring Thieme (from the General Debate of 2009) is the following reaction to a contribution of the Labor Party: “I actually hear only one mantra from the Labor Party and that is work, work, work. What I miss is an appeal to the Government to work, work, work on animal welfare, environment and climate” (Proceedings Second Chamber 2009/2010, 2, 2-100).
Rutte (Liberal Party): “What gives confidence, is a Government that leaves room in its policy to deal with future setbacks”.
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

Thieme reacted in the following way:

Thieme (Party for the Animals): “Why is there so little trust in the Government? Is it not because the Government has too little ambition and is backing out when dealing with issues worthy to protect, such as health care, education, agriculture and food supply?” (my italics, YT).
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)

In all these phrases, the politicians repeat the Prime Minister’s words to introduce their own priority topic as a response to the Prime Minister’s defense.
5. PRESENTING POLARIZED STANDPOINTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, two presentational tactics were introduced that a politician can use to polarize the debate in order to initiate a discussion about a specific issue. In this chapter, I will show how these two tactics are used in actual parliamentary practice. The first tactic I have characterized as *ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent*, and the second tactic as *making it difficult for the political opponent to agree*. The cases to be analyzed are, again, contributions of Wilders to various parliamentary debates.\(^{140}\) I will look at specific attempts made by Wilders in these debates to polarize standpoints in order to initiate a discussion between his party and the political opponent on the issue of the dangers of Islamisation. Although there are specific particularities in Wilders’s way of employing these tactics, these tactics are in principle used by all politicians in a parliamentary debate, since all politicians attempt to promote their party by claiming that its policies and actions concerning a specific issue are more effective than those of their political opponents.

In my analyses the following questions will be answered: (1) why can the argumentative piece of discourse concerned be seen as an example of polarizing and (2) how do the presentational choices that are made contribute to realizing the

\(^{140}\) The cases stem from the debates introduced in section 4.1.
aims of a polarizing maneuver as described in section 3.4? In addition to these two key questions I will provide considerations for the evaluation of the argumentative discourse concerned. These considerations help to answer the question whether the various pieces of discourse can be evaluated as reasonable ways of polarizing. In the first two sections (5.2 and 5.3), excerpts are presented that illustrate the first tactic in which the politician introduces a standpoint while ascribing in the same move the opposite standpoint to the political opponent. For each of the excerpts, I will analyze how Wilders’s choice of specific presentational devices is instrumental in realizing a polarizing maneuver by means of this tactic. In sections 5.4 and 5.5, excerpts are presented that illustrate the second polarizing tactic. In each of these sections, an excerpt is analyzed in which Wilders uses various presentational devices to present his standpoint in such a way that it is difficult for the opponent to agree with him. In section 5.6, I will present some observations with respect to Wilders’s choice of presentational devices and explain to what extent such a choice is typical for polarizing maneuvers of politicians in general.

5.2 Ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent: the crumbs of my bread case

The first case in which Wilders polarizes the debate by ascribing the opposite standpoint to his opponent concerns a remark he made in the General Debate of 2009. He then interrupted the leader of the Christian Democrats in the Second Chamber, van Geel, who just had addressed in his speech the issue of limiting the number of foreign brides. Earlier that day, the research institute of the Christian Democrats had published a report in which a proposal was made on how to limit the number of foreign brides. This proposal was immediately picked up by the media, including Teletext, because nobody had expected the Christian Democrats to put forward measures that help to control Muslim immigration (the issue of Muslim immigration had more or less been appropriated by Wilders’s Party for Freedom in its fight against Islamisation). By publishing the report, the Christian Democrats gave the impression that they, to some extent, agreed with Wilders’s Party for Freedom on the subject of immigration control and that the difference of opinion between them on whether or not the Islamisation of the Netherlands should be stopped was no longer that sharp. Wilders attempts to show that the two parties still disagree on the matter by responding as follows:
5. PRESENTING POLARIZED STANDPOINTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

[5.1] Wilders: “When I was having breakfast this morning and I saw on Teletext that ‘Christian Democrats want to limit marriage immigration’ I thought: today, is going to be a beautiful day. Now that I hear the proposal of Chairman van Geel, I just see a few crumbs of my bread lying on the floor, but that is about it.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2009/2010, 2, 2-100)

Why is the excerpt an example of polarization?

Before discussing how Wilders maneuvers strategically with the choice of presentational devices, I will first explain why the excerpt is an example of polarization in accordance with the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to the opponent. In the excerpt, Wilders formulates his standpoint with regard to Muslim immigration in relation to the standpoint on foreign brides expressed earlier by the Christian Democrats. He claims that their proposal is disappointing because it contains only a few of the things he had wished for: he sees just a few crumbs of his bread lying on the floor (+/r). The interpretation that “my bread” refers to the standpoint that Muslim immigration should be stopped can be derived from the generally known fact that stopping Islamisation is Wilders’s priority issue.

In the remainder of his response to van Geel, Wilders criticizes the proposal of the Christian Democrats because it will stop only a few immigrants from coming to the Netherlands. According to Wilders, the proposal is therefore not a way “to make up for the general pardon of 25,000 illegal asylum seekers”. The excerpt is an attempt to show that the Christian Democrats’ standpoint should not be understood as being in agreement with Wilders’s standpoint on stopping Islamisation: in fact the parties disagree. Wilders says that limiting the number of foreign brides may appear to be in line with his party’s view that the Islamisation of the Netherlands should be stopped (agreement), but unfortunately the standpoint of the Christian Democrats cannot be understood in this way (which means that Wilders, rightly or wrongly, ascribes the opposite standpoint to his opponent).

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to polarize the standpoints?

The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a polarizing maneuver described in section 3.4 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (I) to show that there is prima facie reason to believe that the parties agree
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on +/r (which would mean that there seems to be a situation of agreement), and (2) to show, in an institutionally justified manner, that the opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint -/r (which would mean that the difference of opinion between the politician and the political opponent is actually a mixed difference of opinion). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by the formulation of his standpoint +/r.

(1) Wilders’s polarizing interruption of van Geel’s speech is intended to make clear that the parties still disagree on the issue of stopping Islamisation. However, suggesting that the parties still disagree is informative (and thus relevant) only if there is reason to think that the difference of opinion between the parties no longer exists. Such a reason could be that the political opponent has explicitly said that there is no difference of opinion between the two parties on the issue concerned. However, in this fragment this is not the case. The Christian Democrats have never explicitly said that their proposal should be understood as a way to stop Islamisation; hence, it is only Wilders who is concluding that the Christian Democrats’ proposal to limit marriage immigration is a reaction of agreement with his party’s standpoint on stopping Islamisation. Wilders raises this suggestion of agreement by formulating his response in a specific way.

Wilders chooses to introduce his standpoint on Muslim immigration (represented by “my bread”) by saying that when he read the Christian Democrats’ proposal “he thought that today was going to be a beautiful day”. This introduction can be rephrased as “When I read your proposal, I thought we agreed that Muslim immigration should be stopped”. “A beautiful day” can here be read as a day of agreement, because a politician’s day is generally made by gaining more support for his party’s standpoint. The phrase is thus metaphorically used to underscore how happy he would have been if the parties had agreed. When it is a politician’s aim to polarize the discussion, the advantage of introducing a standpoint with a phrase that can be understood as “I thought we agreed” is twofold. First, the phrase indicates that the Christian Democrats made their proposal as a reaction of (partial) consent to Wilders’s standpoint on Muslim immigration. If the electorate indeed understands the proposal as a reaction to Wilders’s standpoint, they have reason to believe that the parties no longer disagree on the issue. Second, the phrase immediately indicates that the Christian Democrats are wrong in thinking that the parties agree: because it is formulated in the past tense, it actually says “I thought we agreed, but now I see that this is not the case”. Hence, with the introduction of a beautiful day Wilders
makes immediately clear that although there is prima facie reason to believe that the parties now agree on the issue of Muslim immigration, this is in fact not the case.

(2) In the excerpt, there are actually two propositions at stake: the Christian Democrats are in favor of limiting the number of foreign brides and the Party for Freedom is in favor of stopping Islamisation. The difference of opinion is, therefore, multiple. In the analysis, I will explain that Wilders is trying to give the impression that the discussion is in fact mixed by reformulating the standpoint of the Christian Democrats as “some crumbs of my bread”. I shall explain more precisely how the choice of words is of help in this endeavor.

In terms of presentational devices, Wilders’s reformulation of van Geel’s standpoint can be identified as involving an antithesis and a metaphor. The reformulation is metaphorical because Wilders suggests an analogy between a standpoint and bread, more specifically between van Geel’s standpoint and a few breadcrumbs lying on the floor. To introduce the metaphor, and to attract the listener’s attention to it, Wilders first creates a suitable everyday setting, a breakfast situation (“When I was having breakfast this morning …”). The analogy he then creates is that the measures proposed by the Christian Democrats to limit the number of foreign brides relate to the measures to stop Islamisation as a few crumbs of bread relate to a loaf of bread. Since Wilders is not talking about just any bread, but about “my bread”, the metaphor creates an antithesis between Wilders’s standpoint and van Geel’s standpoint: the metaphor contrasts the two standpoints as a whole that is complete (a loaf of bread) compared to something that is far from whole and, hence, actually nothing (a few breadcrumbs). Especially the fact that the crumbs are

141 I take Wilders’s utterance to be metaphorical because it complies with the following basic characteristics of a metaphor as a “condensed analogy”: “an element from one particular sphere [bread] is brought together with an element of another sphere [the proposal of van Geel to limit marriage immigration] in order to elicit, or generate, some understanding of the second element” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 399-405, see also Wilson 1990: 108).
142 As indicated by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, a bold metaphor needs suitable precautions to be accepted (1969: 401). The breakfast introduction can be viewed as such a precaution for introducing the bread metaphor. The utterance as a whole can be labelled as a form of enargia, which is a generic name for a group of figures aiming at vivid, lively description (Den Boon 2001).
143 The utterance of Wilders is not an antithesis in a strict sense. As Fahnestock explains, the original figure requires at least parallel phrasing, which brings the opposed terms in similar positions (as in “You have everything to win, nothing to lose”) (1999: 49). Some rhetoricians (as, for example, the author of the Rhetorica ad Alexandrum), dissociate antithetical thought...
lying on the floor (and not, for example, on the table) depicts van Geel’s standpoint as ‘nothing’: it makes it seem as if there is nothing left anymore of Wilders’s proposal that is of any use to stop Muslim immigration. The antithesis thus consists in a combination of the opposing concepts all and nothing and whole and parts of the whole. Especially the contrast between all and nothing portrays the two standpoints (stopping Muslim immigration and limiting the amount of Muslim brides) as mutually exclusive (and the difference of opinion as mixed). If the measures to limit marriage immigration will have no effect at all on stopping Islamisation, the Christian Democrats’ proposal cannot be seen as compatible with Wilders’s drastic point of view on Muslim immigration. Wilders thus ascribes a negative position to the Christian Democrats concerning the issue of stopping Muslim immigration.

Wilders presents his interpretation that the exchange with van Geel has to be understood as a mixed difference of opinion as plausible by presenting it as the only possible interpretation. He is doing this, firstly, by creating the impression that he is a sincere politician telling the truth. Before giving his interpretation of the relationship between his position and that of van Geel, Wilders claims that he wished it were true that his party and the Christian Democrats agreed on the issue of Islamisation by saying that it would have made his day “a beautiful day”. This way of formulating implies that the disagreement with the Christian Democrats is not something Wilders has made up, but the actual state of affairs: if solving the disagreement is what would make Wilders’s day beautiful, there seems to be no reason for him to conclude falsely that the parties still disagree. Wilders strengthens the impression that he is right in drawing this conclusion by avoiding formulations that might emphasize that he is just giving his opinion. He could, for example, also have said: “I get the impression that there are just a few crumbs of my bread lying on the floor”. By avoiding to formulate explicitly to what extent he is committed to the assertion that there are only a few crumbs of his bread lying on the floor, Wilders implies that he knows that he is right.144

from antithetical phrasing, the former being an antithesis that occurs without parallel phrasing (Fahnestock 1999: 53, 55). Following this distinction, Wilders’s utterance (which opposes bread and crumbs in a contrast without parallel phrasing) can be identified as an antithesis of thought. 144 For a more detailed explanation of this way of presenting an assertion, see section 3.2.2 (my reference to Hooper 1975) and section 4.6 (my reference to van Leeuwen 2009 and Verhagen 2005).
Does the strategic maneuvering derail?
In this section, I examine whether, using the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to a political opponent in this particular case violates any of the pragma-dialectical rules. As I will explain, both the standpoint rule and the freedom rule seem to be at stake.

The standpoint rule stipulates that a party’s attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has been advanced by the other party. The rule thus determines that the standpoint ascribed to the opponent can only be the starting point of a further discussion if it is a standpoint that it is genuinely held by the other party. At first sight, the crumbs-of-my-bread metaphor does not really seem to change the content of van Geel’s proposal. Because the metaphor refers to Wilders’s bigger plan to stop Islamisation, Wilders seems right in his observation that he and van Geel hold different opinions. Wilders sees limiting marriage immigration as a way to stop Islamisation of the Netherlands, while the Christian Democrats only want to put a hold on the arrival of prospectless marriage immigrants – or, as one of the CDA-ministers once said, on marriage immigration that “is not based on love”.145

The antithesis between the whole and parts of the whole thus seems to be in accordance with the actual situation. The antithesis between all and nothing, however, does not seem to agree with the standpoints genuinely held by both parties. The proposal to limit marriage immigration and Wilders’s idea of stopping Islamisation are not contradictory, because the proposal will have a certain amount of effect on the number of Muslims coming to the Netherlands. Hence, based on their proposal, Wilders cannot claim that the Christian Democrats do nothing about the problem of Muslim immigration. To describe the standpoints nevertheless as all and nothing creates a false antithesis and Wilders’s reformulation of van Geel’s standpoint could, therefore, be judged as violating the standpoint rule. The advantage of using the metaphor is that it implies (instead of asserts) that the Christian Democrats and the Party for Freedom hold opposite opinions on the issue of stopping Muslim immigration. In the debate van Geel responded by saying that the proposal cannot be understood as doing nothing. Wilders then used the opportunity to explain the metaphor in its meaning of the whole versus parts of the whole. He said: “It [the proposal to limit marriage immigration] is a small step forward [...], but actually it is nothing”. With this

phrase he argues that the use of the bread metaphor was meant to say that the proposal is *not enough* to stop Muslim immigration.

In order to make it plausible that the political opponent holds the ascribed opposite standpoint, a politician might be inclined to use offensive language. The opponent will most probably not agree with a standpoint that insults him or his electorate. When the offense is addressed to the political opponent, it could be a personal attack that violates the freedom rule. In that case the insult is not aimed at testing the acceptability of the standpoint on the merits but at eliminating the political opponent as a serious discussion party. In the excerpt, Wilders attempts to create the impression of disagreement by describing the Christian Democrats’ proposal as not a solution at all (just a few crumbs of his bread). This description draws the listener’s attention to the weakness and ineffectiveness of the proposal and, hence, to the inability of the Christian Democrats to solve the immigration problems the country is faced with.\(^{146}\) Rephrasing the political opponent’s standpoint in this way is not very respectful, but cannot be said to be a personal attack that eliminates the opponent as a serious discussion partner. Wilders here attacks the proposal and not the person and the impression of incompetence is ‘just’ a side-effect of this attack.\(^{147}\) Hence, the metaphor gives Wilders an opportunity to portray the Christian Democrats as less competent representatives of the people than Wilders’s Party for Freedom, without explicitly saying so.

\(^{146}\) A bit further on in the speech, Wilders continues his attack on the Christian Democrats by *downplaying* their standpoint on limiting the number of foreign brides even further. He then reformulates their proposal by means of the figure of *meiosis* (a figure of speech that involves intentionally understating the case). He says: “the [naturalization] test should become a little stricter and a kind of diploma should be introduced” (my italics, YT).

\(^{147}\) As indicated by Ilie, parliamentarians often mitigate their offensive language use by qualifying the opponents’ acts or statements as completely inadequate instead of calling the opponent an incompetent politician (Ilie calls this the “attribution transfer strategy”) (2004: 59). The advantage of such strategies of indirect insult is that they contribute to polarizing the debate (“fuelling inter-group conflict”) while being relevant to the subject discussed in a parliamentary debate (“they bear a relation to the politician’s policies and actions”) (Ilie 2004: 61).
5. PRESENTING POLARIZED STANDPOINTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

5.3 Ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent: the *Henk and Ingrid* case

The second case study (which I introduced in chapter 2) stems from the General Debate of 2008. The excerpt is part of Wilders’s speech in the first round of turns to speak in which he explains that Holland now consists of two Hollands, ‘a Holland’ of Prime Minister Balkenende with his multicultural ideals, and ‘a Holland’ of Wilders’s Party for Freedom, consisting of the people who pay the price for these ideals. This approach – dividing Holland into two – shows that the whole speech is actually polarizing: Wilders attempts to distance himself as much as possible from the political establishment in order to create an outsider position for his party. The excerpt that I will analyze comes from a part of the speech in which Wilders attempts to show that the leftist part of the political establishment, in particular the Labor Party (PvdA), disregards a particular aspect of the danger of Islamisation, namely the influence it has on the wealth of the common people.148

[5.2] Wilders: “Chairwoman. We could have been swimming in money and instead of doing so we follow the leftist’s dream to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands. The more voting cattle for the leftist church, the better. […] But Chairwoman, who is paying the bill, who is paying that 100 billion? Those are the people who built up Holland, those are the people who work hard, the people who save up properly, who pay their taxes as they should, the common Dutchman who is not getting things for free: Henk and Ingrid are paying for Mohammed and Fatima.”

(*Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79*)

*Why is the excerpt an example of polarization?*

The excerpt is an example of polarization in accordance with the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent. Wilders makes it seem as if the parties still strongly disagree on the issue of Muslim immigration. He does so by explicitly putting forward his standpoint in opposition to the standpoint he ascribes to his

148 With “leftist church” Wilders refers to the Labor Party (PvdA) because this was at the time the only leftist party that was part of the Government (the other two parties were the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Union of Christian parties (ChristenUnie). In this Government, the members concerned with immigration (the Minister of Housing and Integration, Mrs. Vogelaar and the State Secretary of Justice, Mrs. Albayrak,) were both members of the Labor Party.
opponent. In the excerpt, Wilders implicit claim is that the Muslim immigration should be stopped. The argument to support this claim is that Muslim immigration is a leftist ideal that costs “us” too much money (+/r). The leftist ideal he ascribes to his opponent is “the dream to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands”. Even though the Labor Party had not (yet) addressed the issue in this debate, Wilders claims in effect that it should be clear that this party is not doing anything about the problems of Muslim immigration. The three arguments put forward to support his claim that Muslim immigration should be stopped sharpen this disagreement. These arguments are: Muslim immigration costs “us” too much money (argument 1); The Labor Party needs Muslim immigrants as voters (argument 2); Muslim immigration takes money away from hardworking non-Islamic Dutchmen (argument 3). Since it is obvious that these arguments are themselves potential points of disagreement, they can be considered sub-standpoints which, just as the main standpoint, serve to polarize the discussion on Muslim immigration.149

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to polarize the standpoints?

The presentational devices used by Wilders to convey a standpoint +/-r (and the supporting arguments) can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a polarizing maneuver described in section 3.4 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the formulation of standpoint +/-r (and the supporting arguments) can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to show that there is prima facie reason to believe that the parties agree on +/-r (which would mean that there seems to be a situation of agreement), and (2) to show, in an institutionally justified manner, that the opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint -/+r (which would mean that the difference of opinion between the politician and the political opponent is actually a mixed difference of opinion). I will now explain how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by the formulation of his standpoint +/-r and the supporting arguments.

149 In my analysis, I consider these arguments as part of the confrontation stage, because they can be reconstructed as (sub-)standpoints in the discussion with the political opponent. Only such an analysis makes it possible to explain how the choice of presentational devices can contribute to steering the discussion towards a mixed difference of opinion. In case the analyst wants to explain how these devices affect the relation between the standpoint and the arguments a different approach is needed. In that case, the arguments should be analyzed as part of the argumentation stage.
(1) Just as in the previous case study, Wilders’s polarizing utterance seems to be motivated by the fear that the electorate might have gotten the impression that there is not that much difference anymore between the Party for Freedom and the Labor Party concerning their standpoints on problems related to Muslim immigration. In this case, however, there is no direct reason for this fear other than the fact that the Government is executing an integration policy.150 This policy is not explicitly mentioned though: Wilders does not refer to any specific measure that might have led the electorate to think that the Labor Party approaches the Party for Freedom on this issue. But if he does not mention such a reason, how does he then manage to give the impression that the parties do not just disagree, but that they still disagree (that is: despite the measures taken by the Government that might suggest otherwise)?

That there is reason to believe that the parties agree can be derived from the content of the arguments (or sub-standpoints) put forward in support of the claim that Muslim immigration should be stopped (and not so much from the choice of presentational means).151 These arguments seem intended to refute the possible idea that measures proposed by the Labor Party to deal with Muslim related problems are a real solution to the Islamisation of the Netherlands. The sub-standpoint that Muslim immigration costs too much money implies that the Governments’ integration policy – consisting of, for instance, Dutch language lessons and assimilation courses – offers in fact not a solution. People might consider this policy a solution because it deals with some of the trouble caused by Muslims. However, as Wilders claims, in the end Muslim immigration simply costs money that could be spent differently if the immigration is stopped. The sub-standpoint that the Labor Party needs the immigrants as voting cattle then suggests that whatever the Labor Party proposes with respect to Muslim related problems the party is not going to solve the Islamisation issue. Wilders implies that even when the Labor Party proposes measures that deal with the problems caused by Muslim immigration, in the end the party will never stop Islamisation because the party needs the Muslims for party members to be elected in Parliament.

150 One of the Governments’ measures that could be viewed by the electorate as a solution to Muslim-related problems is the improvement of forty problematic neighborhoods. These neighborhoods (or: “vogelaarwijken”) were also the subject of discussion in the case study discussed in section 4.3 (the Mohammed B case).

151 The presentation of the sub-standpoints is mainly effective in realizing the second polarizing aim, which is to show that the parties actually have opposite opinions (explained under (2) in this section).
Wilders formulates his standpoint to stop Muslim immigration (+r) (and the supporting arguments) in relation to a standpoint he ascribes to the Labor Party. By formulating his opponent’s main standpoint as “the leftist’s dream to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands” he claims that the opponent holds a standpoint -/r. This means that the parties have a mixed difference of opinion on the issue of Muslim immigration. I shall explain more precisely how Wilders’s choice of words is of help to present the difference of opinion as mixed.

The sub-standpoint that Muslim immigration is a leftist ideal that is costing “us” too much money is formulated by using several presentational devices that emphasize that the difference of opinion is in fact huge. By means of two *hyperbolic expressions* Wilders creates a comparison between something desirable, namely being very rich, and something undesirable, which is living together with half a billion Muslims in a small country such as Holland. “Swimming in money” is a *clichéd metaphor* used to exaggerate the costs of Muslim immigration; “to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands” is an exaggerated way of expressing that the Labor Party is not dealing with Muslim immigration. Especially the choice of the *active verb* used to formulate the proposition of the Labor Party’s alleged standpoint is to be viewed as an effect-seeking exaggeration. Wilders claims that the Labor Party is intentionally promoting Muslim immigration, since it is *getting* the Islamic people here (as potential voting cattle). The opposition between the standpoints of the two parties becomes more prominent by Wilders’s standpoint to stop Islamisation being contrasted with an active Islamisation-policy: Wilders tries to stop what the Labor Party actively attempts to realize.

What is striking about the exaggerations is that they are so obviously untrue: it would never be possible to get more than half a billion Muslims to the Netherlands and stopping the immigrants from coming to the Netherlands does not yield enough money to make everybody extremely rich. Since these formulations are in fact *ridiculous exaggerations*, they merely *suggest* that the Labor Party’s point of view on stopping Islamisation is very different from Wilders’s point of view. They are used to draw attention to the propositional distance between the parties’ standpoints rather than to their actual standpoints and to convince the electorate that the Labor Party’s standpoint is indefensible because it is not to the electorate’s benefit.

The intended effect of the formulation of the second sub-standpoint (“The more voting cattle for the Leftist church, the better”) can be explained in a similar way. The use of “Leftist church” for the Labor Party and “voting cattle” for part of their electorate are exaggerated phrases that suggest that the Labor Party’s standpoint on
Muslim immigration is indefensible because it is both irresponsible and insincere. I will explain why that is the case. Wilders obviously exaggerates when he claims that self-interest would be the only reason for a party to support immigration – as if humanitarian reasons would play no role at all. Nevertheless, the word “voting cattle” creates the impression that humanitarian reasons are not the only reason (or the main reason) why the party supports Muslim immigration, which makes the Labor Party insincere. Describing the party as part of the Leftist church suggests that it is also irresponsible: this phrase creates the impression that the party’s views are based on ideology instead of reality. The advantage of using all these suggestive phrases for Wilders is that it becomes difficult to hold him accountable for what he has claimed and to accuse him of insulting language because literally his claims are obviously not true, which makes it hard to justify the claim that Wilders is wrongly portraying his opponent as a non-serious discussion party.152

The sub-standpoint that it is the common Dutchman who is paying for the Muslim immigration is also formulated in a way that makes clear that the parties actually disagree. In the first part of the sub-standpoint the formulation amplifies the common Dutchman’s decency when it comes to money. By means of a five-fold repetition Wilders attracts the listener’s attention to this decency: he says that these people have built up Holland, work hard, save up properly, pay their taxes as they should, and do not get things for free. The argumentative function of this repetition can best be explained by taking the repetition together with the concluding sentence that “Henk and Ingrid are paying for Mohammed and Fatima”. The way in which this last sentence is formulated can be identified as the figure of metonymy because the names, which are prototypical for the group (Henk and Ingrid for the non-Muslims and Mohammed and Fatima for the Muslims), are used to refer to the group as a whole. The effect of this way of phrasing is that a particular aspect of the group is emphasized: the rather ordinary names emphasize in case of the non-Muslims that they are truly Dutch people, in case of the Muslims that they are truly not Dutch.153 Together with the five-fold repetition, the double metonymy thus creates

152 Plug explains (by referring to Fraser, 1980) the advantage of these mitigating strategies as “self-serving”: the speaker mitigates the offense to prevent undesirable consequences for himself (such as accusations from the Chair or other politicians), without preventing any undesirable effect the insult might have on the opponent (2007: 271).

153 In this case, the metonymic relation is of a symbolic nature. Henk and Ingrid symbolize the hard working non-Islamic Dutch people and Mohammed and Fatima symbolize the Muslims who profit from these people. By referring to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Snoeck Henkemans
an *antithesis*: it generalizes the non-Muslims (Henk and Ingrid) as a group of decent hard working Dutch people and the Muslims (Mohammed and Fatima) as people who profit from these hard working Dutch people. Dividing the electorate into two separate groups that exclude each other helps Wilders to polarize the debate. It makes it possible to claim that it is the Party for Freedom and not the Labor Party that truly has the interests of the common hard working Dutchman at heart.

It should be noted that together with the figure of metonymy the repetition is of help to mitigate the offensive generalization that all Muslims are just profiteers. By using the figure of metonymy Wilders avoids literally putting forward that the non-Muslims are paying for all Muslim-immigrants, and by emphasizing that the hard working people are such decent people (they “save up properly” and “pay their taxes as they should” (my italics, YT)), he avoids to say literally that the Muslims are not such decent people. Furthermore, contrasting Henk and Ingrid with Mohammed and Fatima is a remarkable and original way of formulating, and such a way of phrasing also mitigates the insult. Whether it concerns the electorate, the political opponent or the Chair, when the listener’s attention is focused mainly on the presentational aspect, he might take the insulting character of the generalization less seriously.

A last observation concerning the presentational choices in the formulation of this sub-standpoint is the choice of the question-answer format. This way of formulating helps Wilders to make it seem that he is right in claiming that the parties are actually having a mixed difference of opinion. He first puts forward an informative question (who is paying the immigration bill?) and then provides the information as if it is the only possible answer to this question (it is Henk and

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exposes that this symbolic relation “is not an objective connection, but, one that is recognized only by the members of a group” (in this case Dutch people) (2005: 435). Next to its function of emphasizing specific aspects, this type of metonymy may, therefore, also function as an adaptation to audience demand because it brings about communion with the audience addressed. The use of “Henk and Ingrid” may strengthen the bond between Wilders and his electorate. In Fahnestock and Tonnard 2011(103-116) we explain that Wilders’s contribution as a whole can be identified as the figure of an *epicheireme* (as it is used in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*).

In this speech, Wilders used for the first time “Henk and Ingrid” to refer to his electorate. During the election campaign of 2010, in which Wilders mentioned Henk and Ingrid time and again, he said in a newspaper interview that the names refer to “the people who do not get things for free” and “who have to pay for a failing Government that ignores them”. As noticed by the interviewer, Wilders no longer claimed that Henk and Ingrid (or: Henk and Anja as the interviewer called them) are the people who have to pay for the immigration costs of Mohammed and Fatima (or: Achmed and Fatima) (*De Telegraaf*, 23 April 2010).
Ingrid). As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca indicate: “A question presupposes an object to which it relates and suggests that there is agreement on the existence of this object. To answer a question is to confirm this implicit agreement” (1969: 159). By answering his question himself, Wilders thus makes it seem as if it is generally agreed upon that the hard working non-Islamic Dutch people are paying the immigration bill. The advantage of presenting the answer (that it is Henk and Ingrid who are paying the immigration bill) as a fact is that it also makes the implicit claims seem true. The answer functions as a premise for the implicit claim that a party cannot at the same time represent both Muslims and non-Muslims: If it is a fact that the non-Muslims pay for the Muslims, it seems also true that the Labor Party – which indeed represents the Muslims – cannot also represent the non-Muslims.

**Does the strategic maneuvering derail?**

The analysis has made clear how Wilders maneuvers strategically to polarize the debate by using the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to the Labor Party. In this section, I will show that, due to Wilders’s maneuvering, the standpoint rule and the freedom rule are at violated.

In the excerpt, Wilders ascribes several positions to the Labor Party: the party wants to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands because it needs the Muslims as voting cattle and considers it not to be a problem that the non-Muslims are paying for the Muslims. To determine whether in any of these cases the standpoint rule is violated, it has to become clear whether the Labor Party genuinely holds these standpoints – otherwise the discussion would continue with ‘the wrong’ definition of the difference of opinion to start with. With regard to the first claim, that the party wants to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands because it needs the Muslims as voting cattle, there are no indications that the Labor Party indeed holds this point of view. Even when taking into account that this is an exaggerated statement that should not be taken too seriously, there is still a claim left that the Labor Party supports Muslim immigration out of self-preservation (it needs the Muslims as their future voters). This claim about voting cattle is followed immediately by the question of who pays the immigration bill, and the answer that it is the common hard-working Dutchman who pays. This line of reasoning implies that this common Dutchman is made to pay lots of money for the Muslim immigration just to keep the Labor Party in Parliament. Since Wilders takes this line of reasoning to which the opponent cannot be held committed as a starting position in the further discussion, it can be said that the utterance is a violation of the standpoint rule.
A standpoint implicitly ascribed to the Labor Party is that they find it no problem that the non-Muslims are paying for the Muslims. This can be deduced from the claims that the Labor Party needs Muslims as their voters (which implies that the party stands up for the Muslims) and that the non-Muslims are paying for the Muslims. It suggests that the party cannot have the interests of both sections of the population at heart. The problem with the implicitly ascribed standpoint is that the antithesis on which it is based (hardworking Dutch people versus Muslims who profit from these people) should be viewed as unwarranted. The antithesis does not represent a fact but just an opinion, which means that there seems to be only very weak (if any) support for the claim that the Labor Party does not represent the non-Muslims (and thus finds it no problem that they pay for the Muslim immigration bill). It is, however, difficult to prove that Wilders really imputes this fictitious standpoint (that the Labor Party finds it no problem that the non-Muslims are paying for the Muslims) to the Labor Party (and thus violates the standpoint rule), since he is not explicitly saying that it is because the common Dutch people have to pay the costs of Muslim immigration that the party does not represent both Muslims and non-Muslims.

In his pursuit of disagreement, Wilders uses several offensive remarks to portray his opponent as an incompetent representative. Although an insult is not necessarily an unreasonable personal attack, in this case at least one of the insults should be viewed as a violation of the freedom rule. The remark that the Labor Party wants to get half the Islamic world to the Netherlands because it needs them as voting cattle is an indirect personal attack (or *circumstantial argumentum ad hominem*) meant to eliminate the party as a serious discussion partner. By questioning the Labor Party’s motives for supporting Muslim immigration (their support is based on self-interest), Wilders claims in effect that the party will never change its mind about this issue regardless of the quality of the arguments that he may put forward.

5.4 Making it difficult for the political opponent to agree: the *Moroccan scum* cases

A second tactic a politician can use to polarize the parties’ standpoints concerning a specific issue is to make it difficult for the political opponent to agree. In this section two cases will be analyzed in which Wilders uses this tactic to initiate a discussion on how to deal with violent young Moroccans. These cases are discussed
together because in both more or less the same presentational choices are used (of which “scum” is the most salient choice). For both cases, I will explain the strategic function that these presentational choices can have in a polarizing maneuver.

**Moroccan scum case I**

In the first case study, which stems from the General Debate of 2008, Wilders interrupts the speech of the leader of the Socialist Party, Kant. In her speech Kant made a proposal for improving the public sector (education, safety and public health) that focused on city districts. She explained that her party is in favor of small-scale schools, local policemen and district health care centers. Wilders interrupts her explanation by saying that the people in these districts are above all bothered by crime caused by young Moroccans. He then asks her whether the present proposal for improving the public sector means that the Party for Freedom and the Socialist Party now agree on how to deal with this crime problem.

> Wilders: “Are you, in contrast to previous years, now in favor of more severe punishments for the scum that makes those neighborhoods unsafe? Is there a new wind blowing or do we continue on the old, wrong track?”

*(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)*

**Why is the excerpt an example of polarizing?**

The excerpt is an example of polarization in accordance with the tactic of making it difficult for the opponent to agree. Wilders presents his standpoint that violent young Moroccans deserve severe punishments (+/r) in such a way that he forces his opponent, Kant, to explicitly say that she disagrees with him on this issue (-/r). The proposal of the Socialist Party to focus on the districts in solving the problems ordinary people are faced with might give the impression that this party is also going to solve the problems these people experience with the increasing amount of Muslim immigrants. At the time of the debate, the problem of Moroccan youngsters causing trouble was a hot issue due to some incidents in Gouda. On the emergency debate addressed to this issue, a newspaper wrote “Parliament in overdrive about Moroccan...”

156 The word “scum” (in Dutch: “tuig”) used by Wilders refers to young Moroccans. A bit earlier in the debate he talked about crime committed by “little Moroccan boys of two crates high”. A day later (in the same General Debate) he said: “Community Centers? Cameras? The whole Government and the Prime Minister evade the cause of this misery. The cause of this misery is that Moroccan scum that has to be put out of the country.”
youngsters”, indicating that the parties rivaled one another in taking drastic action to deal with these youngsters (*NRC Handelsblad*, 26 September 2008).

To find out whether or not the Party for Freedom and the Socialists hold the same standpoint, Wilders asks Kant whether her party now agrees with his party on the issue of violent young Moroccans. This question, however, is formulated in such a way that it is almost impossible for Kant to agree with Wilders. If she agreed, she would, for example, admit that her party has changed its mind, which is in most cases not a good thing for a politician to admit. Kant therefore responds by saying that she disagrees, which makes it appear that Wilders succeeded in polarizing the debate on violent young Moroccans. She says: “I have to disappoint you, but maybe I will reassure a lot of other people: the Socialist Party did not change its course.” She goes on to imply, though, that Wilders’s polarizing attempt was not completely successful by emphasizing that, although the party did not change its course, there is no daylight between what Wilders suggests and what the party believes: “scum that causes trouble has to be picked up”.

*Moroccan scum case II*

The second Moroccan Scum case stems from the debate on Islamic Activism held on 6 September 2007. Although the debate was planned to discuss a report of the Scientific board for Government Policy (WRR), it was also used to make Wilders defend his proposal, made in a newspaper interview a few days before the debate, to ban the Koran. In the excerpt, Wilders responds to a member of the Labor Party, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who attacks Wilders by asking him “what would be the use of such a tough measure”. Wilders answers by saying that “it [banning the Koran] helps a thousand times more than all small subsidy measures of the Labor Party” and then continues by saying:

[5.4] Wilders: “I say to you, Mr. Dijsselbloem, it is not a coincidence that all those Moroccan youngsters, scum – that is just what it is; you agree, don’t you –, who keep ruining the country, beat up homosexuals. Although they are not doing this with a Koran in their hands, they are part of a culture in which it is tolerated and in which it is taught.”

(*Proceedings Second Chamber 2006/2007*, 93, 5260-5319)
5. PRESENTING POLARIZED STANDPOINTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

Why is the excerpt an example of polarizing?
The second Moroccan scum case is, just like the first case, an example of polarizing in accordance with the tactic of making it difficult for the opponent to agree. This time, Wilders puts forward his standpoint on violent young Moroccans in relation to another Islam-related issue on which the parties are likely to disagree (the banning of the Koran). In this way he tries to elicit also a reaction of disagreement on the issue of violent young Moroccans. Wilders does this by suggesting that Dijsselbloem agrees with his standpoint +/- that the young Moroccans are scum and that the Koran is partly to blame for this (since it teaches the young Moroccans to beat up homosexuals). It might seem that with this response Wilders tries to elicit a reaction of agreement (and not disagreement, as I claimed earlier) on the issue of banning the Koran: if Dijsselbloem does what Wilders suggests, i.e. agreeing that the young Moroccans are scum that ruins the country, the Labor Party also has to accept that there is reason to ban the Koran.

However, Wilders has formulated this starting point for accepting the standpoint of banning the Koran in such a way that it cannot be his intention that Dijsselbloem agrees. Being a member of the Labor Party he will not be inclined to agree that young Moroccans are “scum who keep ruining the country”, certainly not if agreeing would create the impression that his party would also be inclined to accept banning the Koran as a possible solution (which is something the Labor Party will strongly object to). In this case, Dijsselbloem responded indeed by saying that he disagreed. He said that banning the Koran is not going to solve the problem of the violent young Moroccans (-/-). Wilders then used this reaction of disagreement to emphasize that his Party for Freedom and the Labor Party also disagree on how to handle violent young Moroccans. He said that the Labor Party “prefers to sit on its chair doing nothing” while his party tries to solve the problem.

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157 Wilders’s claim that the Koran causes Moroccan youngsters to beat up homosexuals is an argument to support the standpoint that the Koran should be banned. In this discussion it can also be analyzed as a sub-standpoint because Dijsselbloem disagrees with Wilders on the justificatory force of the argument. Dijsselbloem is of the opinion that the problem of violent young Moroccans is not going to be solved by banning the Koran.
Getting an issue on the table

Moroccan scum cases I and II: How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to polarize the standpoints?

Both attempts to polarize the parties’ standpoints can be reconstructed as putting forward a positive standpoint (+/r) on the issue of violent young Moroccans. In both excerpts, the presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a polarizing maneuver described in section 3.4 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to show that there is prima facie reason to believe that the parties agree on +/r (which would mean that there seems to be a situation of agreement), and (2) to make, in an institutionally acceptable manner, the opponent take the opposite standpoint -/r (which would mean that the politician and the political opponent have a mixed difference of opinion). I will now explain how Wilders attempts to accomplish these two aims in the formulation of his standpoint +/r for each of the two Moroccan scum cases.

(1) Wilders’s polarizing responses to Kant and Dijsselbloem seem to spring from a fear that the parties may seem to agree on the issue of how to deal with violent young Moroccans. This fear stems from the fact that this issue is often used by other political parties to minimize the differences between their own party and the Party for Freedom. The following contributions (stemming from the same debates as the two Moroccan scum examples) show how other parties use the issue of violent young Moroccans for this purpose. In response to Wilders’s standpoint that violent young Moroccans should be punished hard, Prime Minister Balkenende said “We should condemn what is wrong and reject what is not allowed” and “Moroccan youngsters who behave as scum is something that is being loathed by the whole Parliament”. The Minister of Housing and Integration, Mrs. Vogelaar said: “We should be tough on Antillean and Moroccan loitering teens that exceed the limit”. However, in both Moroccan scum cases Wilders’s opponents did not explicitly say that they agree with him on the issue concerned: the Socialists’ proposals to improve the safety in specific city districts did not include any specific measures concerning crime committed by youngsters; the discussion with Dijsselbloem was about a different Islam-related issue, namely the banning of the Koran. The question is therefore how Wilders managed to show that there is reason to believe that the parties agree on the issue concerned.
In the discussion with Kant, Wilders formulates his standpoint that he is in favor of more severe punishments for “that scum” by means of a question to Kant (“Are you now […] in favor of…”). In the formulation of his question he indicates that he has reason to believe that the Socialist Party indeed agrees. He claims that in “previous years” the party had a different opinion, but that “now” and “in contrast to” these previous years their opinion seems to have changed. The addition of this adverb and this adjunct (or parenthetical) indicates that Wilders’s question can be interpreted as a request to confirm or deny whether his impression that the parties are in agreement is correct.

In the second case – the discussion with Dijselbloem – Wilders uses, again, a parenthetical to indicate that there is reason to believe that the parties agree. The parenthetical is used to bring forward the question of whether the parties agree (“that is just what it is: you agree, don’t you”). However, in this case the question is a statement rather than a request for information. Because the question is preceded by a factual claim (that is just what it is), the question has to be interpreted as a rhetorical question: Wilders presents his question as if the only possible answer is “yes”. In the discussion with Dijselbloem, Wilders thus explicitly claims that the parties agree on the standpoint that violent young Moroccans are “scum who keep ruining the country”. Holding this standpoint presumes that the parties might also agree that firm measures, such as banning the Koran, are appropriate.

Wilders formulates his standpoint that we should be tough on violent young Moroccans (+r) in such a way that the opponent is forced to explicitly say that he does not agree (-/r). In both examples, Wilders exploits the question-answer format of a parliamentary debate. He formulates his question in such a way that the opponent has only two options for responding (agreeing or disagreeing), while agreeing is ‘unacceptable’ because it damages the opponent’s image as a representative of the people. I shall explain more precisely how the formulation of Wilders’s standpoint is instrumental in forcing the opponent to disagree.

In both excerpts, the word “scum” is used to describe a specific part of the Muslim electorate. In the discussion with Kant, Wilders uses just the word “scum”; in the discussion with Dijselbloem he first refers to the subject of his standpoint as “Moroccan youngsters” and then describes them by means of a complement as “scum who keep ruining the country”. Wilders could have used the more neutral description “violent young Moroccans”. However, with the word “scum” he is able to also express his feelings of dislike and disgust for these youngsters, which will
appeal to voters who are troubled by these youngsters. The complement put forward in the discussion with Dijselbloem emphasizes these negative feelings: that these Moroccan boys are “ruining the country” (my italics, YT) is a rather overstated phrase to describe the problems they cause.

In order not to offend their own electorate, both Dijselbloem and Kant will be very reluctant to use the word “scum” in this context. Using this word would mean that they condemned not just the Moroccan boys’ behavior as bad, but also the boys themselves. Probably even more problematic for his opponents is that Wilders uses the word solely to refer to Moroccan youngsters. This makes it seem that other violent youngsters are a different case, which should be dealt with differently. From their responses it appears that the opponents avoid using this word: by using descriptions such as “troublemakers” or “youngsters that beat up homosexuals” they refrain from making a distinction between Moroccan and other violent youngsters.

Since the word scum is a politically loaded and, therefore, unparliamentary word, which could be taken as offensive, there is a possibility that the use of this word might be a reason for the opponent or the Chair to intervene. However, it can still be said that Wilders attempts to present his standpoint as institutionally acceptable. He knows that in Parliament there is little chance of being reprimanded for using the word “scum”. In fact, he generally seems to use a strategy of trial and error to discover what is taken as offensive in Parliament and what is not. If the Chair allows him to use a particular word a first time, he can decide to use that word more often. “Scum” appears to be such a word: in the Islamic Activism Debate held in 2007 (the discussion with Dijselbloem) he used the word only once, while in the General Debate of 2008 (the discussion with Kant) he expressed his dislike of violent young Moroccans by using the word “scum” at least 16 times. When using the word that one time in the Islamic Activism debate, he introduced it rather carefully. The phrase “you agree, don’t you” makes it seem that not only Dijselbloem, but actually all MPs, have to agree with Wilders that those Moroccan youngsters are in fact scum.

158 Ilie (2004) explains the use of this kind of abusive language as an attempt “to undermine the other party’s conceptual categories [in this case, the categories of violent and non-violent youngsters], while strengthening the stability of one’s own party’s conceptual categories [in this case, the categories of Muslims and non-Muslims]” (2004: 50).

159 With “politically loaded” I mean that the word “scum” is charged with a negative meaning because it is not in line with the Dutch Parliamentary tradition of being focussed on verifiable data (see section 1.1).
In the discussion with Kant, there is a second reason why agreement is harmful to the Socialist Party. The option to agree with Wilders is formulated in such a way that it suggests a change of mind of the Socialist Party. Several presentational choices are instrumental in drawing the listener’s attention to this change of mind. In his first question to Kant, Wilders interrupts the running sentence with an adjunct that explicitly states that the party was earlier not in favor of more severe punishments (‘in contrast to previous years’). Since the adjunct is not necessary to ask Kant for her opinion on the issue of violent young Moroccans (‘Are you in favor of more severe punishments’ would have been enough), it seems to have been added just for emphasizing the change of mind. In the second question, Wilders produces the same effect by means of a (double) clichéd metaphor: he refers to the standpoint of being in favor of stronger punishments as “a new wind” and to the Socialist Party’s previous standpoint as “the old (wrong) track”. The metaphor of “a new wind” (my italics, YT) already implies that the Socialist Party has changed its mind. By placing it in contrast to “the old track” (my italics, YT) Wilders creates an antithesis that emphasizes the change even more. Furthermore, the metaphor of “a new wind” (my italics, YT) implies that the Socialist Party might be trimming its sail every time a new wind blows by, and that it is, therefore, not a consistent and trustworthy party.

These negative qualifications, however, do not constitute really serious accusations in a political context, which means that the utterances will most probably be judged as institutionally acceptable. Moreover, the insults are not explicitly expressed but only inferable from the questions as they are formulated. Ilie describes the formulation of insults as questions as a mitigating strategy often used in Parliament (2004: 58): by avoiding to say that the Socialist Party is inconsistent and thus untrustworthy, Wilders indirectly declines responsibility for making an insulting statement. As a consequence, there is no real reason for the opponent or the Chair to explicitly judge Wilders’s contribution as an insulting and therefore institutionally unacceptable contribution. Yet, the formulations help Wilders to damage the image of the Members of the Socialist Party as competent representatives of the people.

In both excerpts, Wilders tries to force his opponent into opposition by formulating his insinuating question in such a way that the option to evade it is made almost impossible. In the discussion with Kant, Wilders explicitly asks her to make a choice. The antithesis makes it seem as if this choice consists of only two options – “the new wind” or “the old wrong track” – and Kant has to make clear which of these two options it is going to be. In the discussion with Dijselbloem, Wilders uses a different presentational device to force Dijselbloem to express his disagreement.
As explained earlier, the parenthetical introduction of the question “that is what it is: you agree, don’t you” has to be interpreted as a rhetorical question because it is presented as if the only possible answer is “yes” (Moroccan youngsters are scum that keeps on ruining the country). Since Wilders simply assumes agreement about this standpoint, the only way to clear up this misunderstanding is to explicitly say that the Labor Party has a different view. The Labor Party will be inclined to do this because, due to Wilders contribution, their electorate could have gotten the impression that the party might also agree with Wilders that the Koran is partly to blame for the violent behavior of young Moroccans. Dijselbloem indeed responded by saying that he disagreed with Wilders. As I mentioned earlier, he said that banning the Koran is not going to solve the problem of violent young Moroccans.

Moroccan scum cases I and II: Does the strategic maneuvering derail?
The analysis has made clear how Wilders maneuvers strategically to polarize the debate in Parliament by making it difficult for the political opponent to agree with him. In this section, I will show that in these cases the strategic maneuvering aimed at damaging the opponent does not involve a fallacious personal attack (a violation of the freedom rule) but a violation of the starting point rule or standpoint rule.

The analysis of both excerpts has shown that Wilders insulting language cannot be considered a way to eliminate the political opponent as a serious discussion partner. It is true that in the discussion with Kant, the Socialist Party is portrayed as inconsistent and untrustworthy, but these accusations are only implied and presented as a possible answer, not as a fact. This does not mean, though, that no discussion rules have been violated. In both excerpts Wilders seems to have committed a violation of the standpoint rule because he imputes a fictitious standpoint to his opponent. In the first case study, he says that in previous years the Socialist Party was not in favor of stronger punishments for violent young Moroccans, a standpoint he later refers to as “the old wrong track”. The question is whether the Socialist Party

160 Ilie (2003), who examined parentheticals as rhetorical strategies in parliamentary debate, makes a distinction between rational, ethical and emotional appeals in parentheticals. According to this classification, Wilders’s use of the parenthetical “that is what it is: you agree, don’t you” is an emotional appeal in the form of an attribution frame. That is the case because the parenthetical is used “to shorten the distance between speaker and MP by foregrounding shared values” (2003: 259). Here, the shared value is that Moroccan youngsters are scum. However, as I explained, Wilders has formulated this value in such a way that the opponent will probably object to the assumption that it is a shared value.
5. PRESENTING POLARIZED STANDPOINTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

genuinely held this standpoint in previous years and whether it can be used as a starting point in the current discussion. According to Kant, it cannot. She says that there is no daylight between what the Socialists think and what Wilders suggests. If she is right, it would mean that Wilders’s question is in fact a loaded question, violating the standpoint rule (or starting point rule), because it wrongly presupposes that there is something like an old wrong track. However, in order to determine whether Wilders’s contribution is really fallacious, more information is needed than can be derived from the debate from which the excerpt is taken. For an accurate evaluation it has to be clear what the Socialist Party has claimed with regard to the issue of violent young Moroccans in other debates and what Wilders precisely means by stronger punishments.

In the second excerpt, Wilders’s use of the rhetorical question (“you agree, don’t you”) suggests that Dijsselbloem agrees with him that the violent young Moroccans are scum that is ruining the country. Dijsselbloem, however, can be expected not to agree with such a loaded and hyperbolic description that might be considered offensive by a large part of his electorate. Therefore, it can be said that Wilders wrongly assumes that the parties agree. This does not mean that Wilders also violates a discussion rule, in this case the starting point or standpoint rule. Wrongly assuming that the parties agree would only be a violation if Wilders used the presumed agreement as a common starting point in the further discussion or as the position on which the opponent can be attacked. However, neither of these two situations is in fact the case. The use of “you agree, don’t you” in combination with “that is what it is” only expresses that, according to Wilders, Dijsselbloem should agree with him. However, it is still a question. This means that the formulation leaves Dijsselbloem the opportunity to say that he has a different opinion.

161 In pragma-dialectics a question entailing a presupposition is considered fallacious if it violates a discussion rule. In case the question imputes a fictitious standpoint to the opponent on which he can be easily attacked it violates the standpoint rule. In case the speaker uses the presupposition as a premise for his argumentation (fallacy of many questions) the starting point rule is violated (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 102-103, 126, 152).

162 A second reason why Wilders’s question seems to be fallacious is that it creates a false dilemma. Wilders presents his question as if “the new wind” and the “old wrong track” are the only standpoints possible in the issue of violent young Moroccans, while it is in fact possible to come up with a whole range of other standpoints concerning possible solutions. However, in itself putting forward a false dilemma is not fallacious. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst indicate that as long as the false dilemma is not forced upon the opponent by using it as a means to put forward an argumentum ad ignorantiam, no rule for critical discussion is violated (1992: 190-191).
5.5 Making it difficult for the political opponent to agree: 
the head rag tax case

The last case study stems from the General Debate of 2009. In this debate Wilders’s speech in the first round of turns to speak, was almost completely devoted to the topic of stopping the Islamisation of the Netherlands. Even in cases where he attacked the Government on another policy than immigration, the criticism was always that the Government rather spends money on immigration than on, for example, safety, education or public health. The excerpt chosen stems from a part of the speech in which Wilders proposes to stop Islamisation by introducing a permit for wearing headscarves (a “head rag tax”, in Dutch: “kopvoddentaks”). Before making the proposal, he provides a reason why it would be necessary to introduce such a tax. This reason is that Islam is ‘polluting’ our streets – or as he started this part of the speech: “A better environment starts with yourself”.

Wilders [5.5]: “A lot of Dutch people are annoyed by the pollution of the public space by the Islam. In other words: our streets start to look in some places more and more like a scene in Mecca and Teheran: headscarves, ‘burr beards’, burkas and men in strange long white dresses.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2009/2010, 2, 2-100)

Why is the excerpt an example of polarizing?
The excerpt is an example of polarization in accordance with the tactic of making it difficult for the opponent to agree. Wilders forces his opponents (in this case almost the entire Parliament) to explicitly say that they disagree as he supports his standpoint about the head rag tax introduced later in the speech with the argument that Islam pollutes our streets. The proposal and the argument are formulated in such a provocative way that even the parties willing to deal with Islamisation seem to have no other option than to disagree with Wilders (which means that the argument can be considered a sub-standpoint since it is obviously a potential point of disagreement).

Apart from the Liberal Party and the Party for the Animals, all parties interrupted Wilders’s speech in order to respond to his proposal of introducing a head rag tax.

163 The phrase is a well-known Dutch campaign slogan, introduced in the early nineties to create support for extensive environment measures.
These responses were all reactions of disagreement (-/r), except for that of the Labor Party which tried to change the subject to the economic crisis. Some politicians reacted by saying that the proposal was unrealistic (“How can you decide whether a headscarf is Islamic?”), some emphasized that it was not effective for stopping Islamisation (“What if they are all going to pay the 1000 Euros?”), and a last group disapproved of the proposal because it was offensive (“Your proposal is a succession of insults towards a specific community”).

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to polarize the parties’ standpoints?

The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate +/r (and the supporting argument) can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a polarizing maneuver described in section 3.4 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to show that there is prima facie reason to believe that the parties agree on +/r (which would mean that there seems to be a situation of agreement), and (2) to make, in an institutionally acceptable manner, the opponent take the opposite standpoint -/r (which would mean that the politician and the political opponent have a mixed difference of opinion). I will now explain how Wilders attempts to accomplish these two aims by the formulation of his standpoint +/r.

(1) Wilders’s contribution to the debate seems to spring from the possibility that his electorate is not certain anymore that only Wilders’s party has a solution of how to deal with Islam-related problems. His contribution seems to be meant to emphasize that indeed it is still only his party that is prepared to take firm measures concerning these problems. However, Wilders’s contribution is not a direct response to an MP who proposed to handle Muslim immigration. His contribution is part of a speech, carefully prepared in the weeks prior to the General Debate, in which no direct reference is made to a specific measure of the Labor Party concerning Muslim immigration. The question, therefore, is how in his speech Wilders creates the impression that there is reason to believe that the Labor Party might agree on how to deal with Muslim immigration.

In the excerpt taken from his speech, there are no explicit indications that the parties might agree on the issue of stopping Islamisation: this time Wilders does not, as he did in previous cases, introduce his standpoint with a formulation such as “I
thought we agreed” or “I wished we agreed”. The only way in which it is indicated that there might be reason to assume that the parties agree (or have come closer to each other) on the issue of Muslim immigration is his obviously abusive standpoint (that people should pay taxes for wearing an Islamic headscarf) formulated by obviously abusive words (“pollution” combined with “head rag tax”). According to Ilie, insults are basically intended to focus attention on (or distract attention from) a particular topic by an extremely powerful verbalization of the standpoint concerning this topic. Such a powerful verbalization could indicate the politician’s aim to “restore the political balance in his own favor” with regard to the issue he wants to focus attention on (2004: 79). The issue Wilders wants to focus attention on is Muslim immigration. By formulating his challenging views regarding this issue by an extremely powerful verbalization he shows that, according to him, the political balance needs to be restored: in this case from a balance in which the parties agree – or almost agree –, to a balance involving opposite standpoints.

Due to the powerful and insulting verbalization of his standpoint, the audience may also recognize Wilders’s proposal as outstripping once more his own previously proposed measures to stop Islamisation. Each time Wilders proposes a new measure this measure seems to be more drastic (and according to his opponents, more far-fetched and unrealistic – or as one of them wrote “right-wing absurdist”).

Making such extreme proposals creates the impression that the attention drawing effect of the previous proposal has worn off. The attention drawing effect may disappear when the public no longer considers the proposal a remarkable point of view, either because the party has mentioned the proposal too often, or because, in the meantime, other parties proposed similar measures. It is for the latter reason that an extreme proposal such as introducing a “head rag tax” gives away that there is reason to assume that the Party for Freedom and the Labor Party have come closer to each other on the issue of Muslim immigration. The new proposal in its extreme formulation of introducing a tax for wearing Islamic headscarves seems necessary

164 The following quotes from different newspapers illustrate that the proposals of the Party for Freedom appear to be firmer or more remarkable every time: “Wilders’s tone is getting more radical each time, he now even argues for a banning of the Koran” (NRC Handelsblad, 9 August 2007); “That Geert Wilders strikes out hard is no news, but that it can always be harder transpired during this General Debate” (Algemeen Dagblad, 19 September 2008); “Wilders shocked Lower House with proposal for head rag tax”, “The tax is a new stone in Wilders’s construction of anti-Islamic rhetoric” (NRC Handelsblad, 17 September 2009).

165 An example of a standpoint of Wilders other parties have more or less adopted is his proposal for dealing with violent young Moroccans (see section 5.4).
to, once more, attract the public’s attention to the Party for Freedom’s distinctive measures for stopping Islamisation.

(2) Wilders formulates his standpoint (and the supporting argument) that we should introduce a tax on Islamic headscarves (+/r) in such an abusive way that the opponent is forced to explicitly say that he does not agree (-/r). I shall explain more precisely how the formulation of Wilders’s standpoint is instrumental in forcing the opponent to disagree.

Most striking in the formulation of the proposal are the words “head rag tax” and “pollution”. Both ways of expressing make the already abusive proposal even more provocative. Wilders could have chosen to describe the proposal in more neutral terms. He could have said something like “because our street views are looking less and less Western, I propose to introduce a tax for Islamic headscarves”. The choice for “head rag tax” over “a tax for Islamic headscarves” can be explained in a similar way as the choice for the word “scum” in the previous case study. “Head rag” is, just like “scum”, a word that expresses feelings of dislike and disgust for Muslims (since a rag is an old cloth, at the most used for cleaning). The choice to describe the Islamisation of the public space as “pollution” is even more remarkable. “Pollution” is not such an obvious term for the Islamisation of the public space as “scum” is for violent young Moroccans. The word expresses not just feelings of dislike towards Muslims, it also implies that their Islamic appearance has to disappear: filth is something that has to be cleaned away.

What his opponents will also consider problematic is that Wilders uses the word “pollution” to refer to the outward appearances of by exclusion the Islam (which makes his proposal also discriminating). Other religions are, as Wilders explains, “a different case” which should be dealt with differently. The reason for introducing the tax (the ‘de-westernizing’ of our street views) is also formulated by means of negative words. The traditional wear of Islamic men is described as feminine (“long white dresses”) and un-Western (“strange”), their hair style by “burr beards”, a made

166 In Dutch it is not just rag (Dutch: vod) that has a negative connotation when used to refer to a headscarf, but also the word used for head, which is kop. In Dutch there are two words for head: kop and hoofd. As the Dutch say, “animals have a kop, humans have a hoofd” (cf. the use of paw and leg in English).

167 This interpretation is even more strongly emphasized when, a bit later in the speech, Wilders relates the head rag tax to a dog owner who needs to pay a dog-licence fee. As he claims “then too the polluter pays”.
up word (also in Dutch: “haardbaarden”) that suggests an uncouth appearance (and in Dutch even hatred: “haatbaarden”). Even if the political opponents were in favor of stopping Islamisation, they would not consider a discriminating tax to be an appropriate measure or ‘pollution’ to be an appropriate reason to propose measures.¹⁶⁸

A last thing to be noted in the formulation of the excerpt is the frightening scenario sketched in its second part (“our streets look in some places more and more like a scene in Mecca and Teheran”). In this part it is emphasized that, although outward appearances of Islam may seem harmless, they are the beginning of a complete loss of our Western identity. The choice to refer to specific places (not by coincidence two of the best known (religious) capitals in fundamentalist Islamic countries) can be explained as providing illustrations of fundamentalist Islamic countries or places in general. In this case the effect of the (twofold) illustration is that the danger of Islam becomes more realistic. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca explain, the use of an illustration wins the listener’s attention because “it strikes the imagination forcibly”; the enumeration of using not one but two illustrations increases presence (1969: 236, 357). The effect of striking the listener’s imagination is especially important in combination with the polarizing aim of the contribution: in case a political opponent disagrees with the proposal of a head rag tax (or the claim that Islamic headscarves pollute our street view), Wilders is able to give the electorate the impression that holding this opinion means that the opponent is not aware of the creeping danger of Islam. The opponent then does not see that taking over our streets is the beginning of a complete loss of our Western identity as we shall become equal to Teheran and Mecca.

Although the utterance is clearly offensive, and even discriminating against Muslims, it can be said that Wilders attempts to present his standpoint as institutionally acceptable. He starts his offensive claim that Islam pollutes the public space by saying that it is the opinion of “a lot of Dutch people”. With this introduction he emphasizes that the standpoint is not just his own opinion but the opinion of his electorate. As explained in section 3.4.1, presenting the offensive opinion as acceptable by putting forward the people as co-protagonist of the standpoint is a

¹⁶⁸ On 9 August 2007, NRC Handelsblad wrote: “With a bit more political willingness to compromise, it would not be unthinkable that Wilders would gain more support in Parliament. Especially the Liberal Party often rejects a proposal of Wilders by adding that he rightly points at the excrescences of immigration and Islam, but that his way of doing politics makes cooperation impossible.”
way to legitimize this opinion: making Wilders take back this opinion could be interpreted as silencing a particular part of the electorate. And if Wilders were to be accused of using offensive language, he would at least have given the impression that he listens to the people and dares to speak out for them.

Other presentational choices can also be explained as attempts to present the insulting standpoint as institutionally acceptable. One choice that is made is the use of the remarkable word “burr beards”. Because of its unknown meaning, choosing this word could be seen as mitigating the insult. In Parliament, the word is to be defined as a neologism that, in combination with the other negatively loaded words (“pollution”, “strange long white dresses”) and the resemblance (in Dutch) of the word with “hate beards”, adds to the negative description of Muslim men. On the internet, the word is described as a euphemism for hate beards (or as someone said: “a domesticated version of hate beards”), a word used by extremists from the right to refer to Muslim fanatics.\(^\text{169}\) Thus “burr beards” refers to Muslim men in a negative way, but it is not as loaded as “hate beards”.

Another choice that could be seen as mitigating the insult is “head rag tax”. Because both the proposal and the way it is described are rather ridiculous, the listener might be inclined to take the proposal not too seriously. He might think it is just an attention drawing proposal to emphasize the difference between the Party for Freedom and the other political parties.\(^\text{170}\) As explained in section 4.3, the advantage of using a witty formulation is that “humor often legitimizes and exonerates an insult” (Lockyer and Pickering 2005: 12).

**Does the strategic maneuvering derail?**

Wilders’s strategic maneuvering to polarize the debate on the issue of stopping Islamisation can be considered both offensive and discriminating, yet it does not violate any of the discussion rules. From all examples discussed in this chapter this  

\(^{169}\) Kuitenbrouwer too explains the use of “burr beards” instead of “hate beards” as a way to present the standpoint as institutionally acceptable. He says that using this particular word can be viewed as an attempt to avoid a possible reprimand by the Chair (2010: 96).

\(^{170}\) Pechtold (Liberal Democrats) accused Wilders of pretending to act in a cabaret festival in which he has to make the people laugh. However, neither Pechtold, nor any other MP, really took the proposal as something laughable. Even some of his voters called it a strategic blunder because it damaged his image as a serious discussion partner. After the General Debate, the election polls even showed a loss of two seats for Wilders’s party. As one of his voters wrote on the internet, the head rag tax was to blame for this: “It is a too far-fetched proposal to be taken seriously, because practical objections, legal problems and social aversion make the proposal unfeasible.”
excerpt is the most provocative because of its insulting language towards Muslims. However, making an insult is in itself not a fallacy. Wilders’s contribution does not offend the opponent, but a specific part of the electorate. The insults are thus not meant to eliminate the political opponent as a serious discussion party and therefore do not violate the freedom rule (it is not an *ad hominem* argument).171 The freedom rule even stipulates that no restrictions apply to the content of the standpoint. This means that, according to this rule, Wilders has the right to put forward the standpoint as it is. The question, however, remains whether Wilders is also allowed to put forward this standpoint in the context of Parliament, where some restrictions apply to the content of the standpoint. The answer to this question depends completely on the Chair’s interpretation of the parliamentary convention that politicians are not allowed to use offending language.172 In this case, Chairwoman Verbeet decided that Wilders could continue the discussion.

### 5.6 Observations concerning the use of presentational devices in polarization

Every politician who tries to polarize the parties’ standpoints in a parliamentary debate can use the tactics discussed and illustrated in this chapter. However, the particularities of a politician’s language use influence in practice the way in which a specific tactic is employed and may make a tactic more suitable for use by a specific type of politician than by others. In this section, I will present, by comparing my analyses with the observations made by other analysts of Wilders’s language use, some observations with respect to Wilders’s choice of presentational devices and explain to what extent these choices can be considered typical for polarizing maneuvers by politicians in general.

The first polarizing tactic, illustrated in sections 5.2 and 5.3, was to ascribe the opposite standpoint to the political opponent. As explained in the analyses,

171 There is one way though in which the contribution could be explained as a personal attack violating the freedom rule. The proposal for a head rag tax could be seen as an insult to the Parliament (or even the Parliamentary system), because by asking Parliament to take into consideration a non-serious proposal, Wilders is not taking his opponents seriously. He claimed, however, that introducing a head rag tax should be taken seriously: “It is a very serious and well thought-out proposal.”

172 See section 2.2 for a detailed description of this parliamentary rule.
when using this tactic the challenge is to make clear, just by formulating one’s own
standpoint, that there is reason to believe that the parties may agree but that the
opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint. Wilders’s language use does not
seem to be more suitable for this tactic than the language use of other politicians.
Characteristic of this tactic is that the politician presents his standpoint in relation
to the opposite standpoint which is then he assumes held by the opponent. A specific
presentational device that is of help in articulating the two opposite standpoints is
the figure of antithesis. As explained in case study 5.2 (the crumbs of my bread case)
and case study 5.3 (the Henk and Ingrid case), this figure can be used to create a
dilemma that makes it appear as if there are only two options to choose from: agree
or disagree. Using the figure of antithesis does not seem to be a feature typical of
Wilders’s way of arguing, though. Janssen and Mulder have shown that there are
other politicians who use this figure just as often as Wilders (2009: 345).

In both cases (5.2 and 5.3), Wilders combines the antithesis with figurative
language (the metaphor of “crumbs of my bread” and the metonymy of “Henk
and Ingrid”). This might give the impression that Wilders frequently uses such
creative constructions. However, there is no decisive evidence for such a claim.
Kuitenbrouwer argues that “Wilders is fond of metaphors and that his texts are
full of it” (2010: 48); Mulder, however, found no indications that Wilders is using
more metaphors than other politicians. She claims that it is the other way around:
in her corpus, both Pechtold (Liberal Democrats) and Halsema (Green Party) used
far more creative metaphors than Wilders (2009: 73). Yet, the creative metaphor
of Henk and Ingrid can be viewed as typically Wilders. The metonymical use
of language is for Wilders a way to translate his message into something concrete (in
this case, the perpetrators and the victims of Islamisation become characters of flesh
and blood). As indicated in section 4.6, van Leeuwen considers the use of concrete
examples, which help to present his message as clearly as possible, characteristic of
Wilders’s language use.

Next to figurative language use and antitheses, I also mentioned the use of
exaggerations (“getting half the Islamic world to the Netherlands”) as a device that
can be used to ascribe the opposite standpoint to the opponent (case study 5.2).
The use of this device seems to be typical for Wilders. According to Kuitenbrouwer

173 Mulder makes a distinction between creative and clichéd metaphors. With regard to clichéd
metaphors, she found no significant differences between the politicians Pechtold, Halsema and
“exaggerating is Wilders’s second nature” – he points at Wilders’s frequent use of adjectives, superlatives and hyperboles (2010: 41-44). Van Leeuwen explains that Wilders’s use of adverbials and adjectives, which “can be found on the extremes of a semantic scale”, is (just like his frequent use of examples) a way to present his message as clearly as possible (2009: 8, 10). A second function of the exaggerations is that they help Wilders portray the opposite opinion as disastrous (see also section 4.6 on the ‘frame of disaster’): In case study 5.3, the exaggerated phrase of “half the Islamic world” makes it seem as if, due to the number that is coming to the Netherlands, the problem of Muslim immigration is rather frightening.

The second polarizing tactic, illustrated in section 5.4 and 5.5, is to make it difficult for the political opponent to agree. As described in the analyses, when using this tactic the challenge is to formulate one’s standpoint in such a way that the opponent has no other option than to explicitly say that he disagrees although there is reason to believe that the parties are in agreement on the standpoint. I do not claim that this polarizing tactic is only used by Wilders, but his tendency to use insulting language is particularly helpful for applying this tactic. In section 4.6, I indicated that Janssen mentions personal attacks as a feature of Wilders’s way of arguing (2009: 57-59; Janssen and Mulder 2009: 345). She makes a distinction between two variants of abusive language: a politician attacking a whole group (for example, the Parliament), or just one person (which could be the direct opponent, but also another parliamentarian). She claims not only that Wilders uses more personal attacks than Pechtold and Halsema, but also that he does not restrict his personal attacks to his opponent (which is what other parliamentarians do when they use insulting language). This observation is supported by the two case studies 5.4 and 5.5, because both excerpts are especially abusive towards Muslims.

The fact that Wilders uses more abusive language than other parliamentarians corresponds with the different debating styles often ascribed to Wilders on the one hand and the rest of Parliament on the other hand. As van den Bos and Duursma write, “The Netherlands lack a real debating culture. It is a taboo to discuss far-reaching or controversial proposals, because seriously discussing them would imply a willingness to make concessions.” Wilders, as they claim, introduces controversial proposals to reinforce his electorate’s opinion and win the support of floating voters (NRC Handelsblad, 29 September 2007). Hilhorst explains Wilders’s abusive language use as a way to address the electorate by taking sides: other politicians use their language to make policy, but Wilders “understands that politics is about
making a distinction between friends and enemies” (de Volkskrant, 2 November 2010). According to Ilie (2004: 82-84), Parliaments with a real debating culture, such as the UK, “exhibit a stronger political polarization, whereby the adversarial relations between opposite political camps are constantly and intensively reinforced”. As a consequence, in these Parliaments politicians do not refrain from personal attacks and it is accepted to adopt a playful tone and outsmart one’s opponents.

The difference in debating style could explain why other politicians than Wilders do not seem to polarize the debate by making it difficult for the opponent to agree. They may polarize the discussion by claiming that there is a difference of opinion where there seems to be none (which is the first polarizing tactic), but they are not inclined to force the opponent to explicitly distance himself from a specific opinion (which is the second polarizing tactic). For example, the leader of the Party for the Animals, Thieme, cannot easily be caught using the second polarizing tactic. A possible example can be found in a debate on ‘the memorandum on animal welfare’ held on 4 February 2008. In this debate, Thieme and her colleague Ouwehand used all their speaking time to propose over 40 motions on animal welfare, including, for example, a ban on selling fish bowls.

Formulating their disapproval of animal suffering in this way was rather provocative at the time. Other political parties, even though they were willing to support motions for amending the memorandum, interrupted the enumeration of motions to make clear that they had doubts about the seriousness of some of the proposals and rejected the party’s working procedure. This example can be compared with case study 5.5 (the head rag tax case), because here the standpoint of the Party for the Animals is also rather ridiculous and can, therefore, be seen as challenging other parties to explicitly say that they disagree. However, most of Thieme’s polarizing attempts can be reconstructed as instances of the first polarizing tactic. The following excerpt, stemming from Thieme’s speech in the General Debate of 2008, illustrates how she uses the tactic of ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent to show that parties still disagree.

Thieme: “It is good that the Government appears to allocate money for the improvement of animal welfare, but it is too soon to start cheering because there is a catch. On closer inspection, the amounts mentioned under the heading of animal welfare seem to be a veiled investment and development subsidy for the bio-industry.”

(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79)
In the first part of her contribution, Thieme indicates that there is reason to believe that her party considers the measures that are taken by the Government to improve animal welfare sufficient to meet their standards. However, there is a catch. By claiming that the money is not going to be spent well, she makes clear that only her party is really keen on animal welfare, while others (in this case the Labor Party and the Christian Democrats) only pretend to take the issue seriously.
6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The main findings

The aim of this study was to provide an account of how presentational choices can help a politician to get the priority issues of his party discussed within a parliamentary debate. Initiating a discussion in Parliament on a priority issue can be considered a party-political argumentative strategy aimed at winning the support of potential voters. The strategy purports to show the electorate that the party is more sincere and committed to doing something about these issues (or problems) than the opponents. The criticism often heard about such strategies is that they solely serve to address the electorate and thus frustrate the problem-solving intentions of parliamentary debate (Duursma & van den Bos, NRC Handelsblad, September 2009; RMO 2009: 43-44). In this study I have shown that the use of the strategy of getting a specific issue on the table deserves a more accurate analysis and judgment.

In this study, the presentational choices in politicians’ attempts to get their priority issue on the table are analyzed by making use of the pragma-dialectical concept of strategic maneuvering. Using this concept has made clear that a politician’s presentational choices in a piece of discourse can be analyzed as a coherent presentational tactic serving a specific argumentative aim. When trying to initiate a discussion on a party’s priority issue in Parliament, this aim is to make the audience (whether it is the electorate, the political opponent or the Chair) accept that this specific issue should be debated at this specific moment in the discussion and to do so in a reasonable way. In some cases, using such a tactic indeed constitutes a reasonable attempt to get the party’s priority issue discussed. In other cases such an
get\thing an issue on the table

attempt has to be considered an unreasonable – that is fallacious – discussion move, because it frustrates the possibility of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits.

The study consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. In the theoretical part, I have answered the research questions of how attempts to get a specific issue discussed in parliamentary debate can be characterized as specific strategic maneuvers within the institutionalized context of Dutch Parliament (chapter 2), and how in such strategic maneuvers the function of presentational choices can be determined (chapter 3). In the empirical part of the study, consisting of chapters 4 and 5, I have answered the question of how in parliamentary practice a politician can maneuver strategically with the choice of presentational means to get a specific issue on the table. The answer is provided by analyzing pieces of parliamentary discourse of the leader of the Party for the Animals, Marianne Thieme, and the leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders. In the excerpts pertaining to Thieme she tries to initiate a discussion on her party’s priority issue of environmental and animal welfare; the excerpts pertaining to Wilders illustrate how he tries to get his party’s priority issue of the danger of Islamisation on the table.

In this study, I have claimed that attempts to get a specific issue on the table can be characterized as a strategic maneuver of topic shifting or as a strategic maneuver of polarizing (or as a strategic maneuver involving a combination of both). In cases of a strategic maneuver of topic shifting, the politician tries to introduce a proposition that is different from the one put forward by his political opponent. In case of a strategic maneuver of polarizing, he tries to show that the political opponent holds a position towards the proposition that is opposite to his own position. A politician may use a topic-shifting strategic maneuver if the discussion is about a different issue than his party’s priority issue. A polarizing strategic maneuver might be useful if the parties agree or seem to agree on the party’s priority issue. Both topic shifts and polarization can be characterized as confrontational strategic maneuvers because they aim to steer the discussion towards a specific type of difference of opinion. In cases of a topic shifting or a polarizing strategic maneuver the type of difference that is aimed for is a mixed difference of opinion about a proposition that concerns the party’s priority issue: the politician tries to initiate a discussion on the preferred issue with his political opponent in which they hold opposite opinions.

To analyze the function of presentational devices in topic shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers I make use of the distinction between an explicit and an implicit presentation of the speech acts constituting the argumentative moves. This
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distinction points to choices the arguer is faced with when presenting his moves. I have shown that the explicit-implicit distinction pertains both to ‘the argumentative move as a whole’ and ‘the elements the move consists of’. Concerning the argumentative move as a whole, the choice is to express the content of that move or to suggest its entire meaning by other moves and/or the general context. An arguer can, for example, start a discussion about whether the windows should be closed by putting forward his standpoint in the following way: “I am of the opinion that we should close the windows”. An alternative way to start this discussion would be to say “I am of the opinion that we should close the windows, otherwise we might all get sick”. In the latter example the standpoint is immediately followed by argumentation. By using this way of presenting a standpoint, two other argumentative moves are in fact implied. These moves are that the opponent possible has some doubt (Is it really necessary to close the windows?) and that, despite this doubt, the speaker maintains his standpoint (Yes, I really think we should close the windows). With regard to the elements a move consists of (the communicative function and the propositional content) the choice is in all cases to convey the meaning of these elements explicitly or to suggest their presence by means of the context or in some other indirect way. Compare, for example, the standpoints: “We should close the windows” and “I think you should close the windows”. In the former example the communicative function of making the addressee close the windows is left implicit, whereas in the latter example it is explicitly conveyed. In attempts to get a party’s priority issue discussed, all of these choices between explicit and implicit presentations of a move, whether it concerns the entire move or an element of a move, can have their own specific strategic effect.

I have argued that the possibilities of choosing with respect to the moves as a whole (either to express the content of the move explicitly or to suggest its meaning entirely by other moves or the general context) are a suitable basis for distinguishing between different presentational tactics. These choices constitute certain patterns of expressed and suggested moves designed to lead to the argumentative result preferred by the politician – which is in case with topic shifts and polarization creating a mixed difference of opinion about the party’s priority issue. A presentational tactic consists of the choice of such a pattern of expressed and suggested moves substantiated by a particular choice of devices for the presentation of the moves that are expressed. Together these choices of moves and devices constitute the presentational aspect of a specific confrontational strategic maneuver. For both topic-shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers I have claimed that there are two
presentational tactics that can be effective in the context of parliamentary debate. These tactics are opportune because they enable the politician to shift the topic or to polarize the parties’ standpoints with a minimal amount of effort while still giving the impression that he complies with the general standards of reasonableness and the conventions of parliamentary debate.

If the politician’s aim is to shift the topic, a first opportune tactic is to *give a critical response before putting forward a new standpoint*. This tactic is a way to introduce the new issue while at the same time taking a clear stance on the issue proposed by the opponent. Taking a stance is important because avoiding to do so is not in line with the convention that MPs provide answers to questions asked. This convention is akin to the rule that members of the Government should provide an MP with the information he needs to judge the Government’s performance. This rule stipulates that members of the Government are obliged to give answers to questions, which de facto means that they have to defend their policies or actions. Although MPs are not officially obliged to answer a question, they hardly ever use this as a reason to refuse giving an answer when invited to take a stance. It can be considered parliamentary practice that MPs, too, provide answers to questions. When trying to shift the topic, this parliamentary practice eliminates the option of simply introducing a new discussion issue without responding in any way to the issue introduced earlier by the political opponent.

The second opportune topic-shifting tactic is to *imply a critical response by putting forward a new standpoint*. The main advantage of this tactic is that it is a way to realize a topic shift by advancing only one move: the introduction of the new standpoint. However, when using this tactic the politician runs the risk of being accused of evading important issues, since he implies a critical response but does not explicitly take a stance. As just explained, evading taking a stance is not in line with the convention that MPs provide answers to questions asked. It should be noted that the two topic-shifting tactics are interchangeable with regard to the problem that the new issue should not deviate too much from the agenda. In both tactics the politician has to present his standpoint in such a way that the new issue will be accepted as the issue to be discussed at this given moment in the debate. This restriction regarding the propositional content of a new standpoint follows from the parliamentary convention which stipulates that a politician’s contribution has to relate to the topic set by the Chair. If the Chair considers the newly brought in proposition irrelevant to the current stage of the discussion, he can break off the politician’s contribution.
If it is the politician’s aim to polarize the parties’ standpoints, a first opportune tactic is to *ascribe the opposite standpoint to the political opponent*. This tactic is advantageous for the politician because it creates a polarized discussion by putting forward only one move. By means of this move the politician expresses his point of view in a specific matter while at the same time saying that the opponent holds the opposite point of view. Such a move could be established in many ways, but an attractive one is to use insulting language. The politician then presents his standpoint in such a way that it insults the political opponent or his electorate. Since the political opponent will never agree with such a standpoint, it almost inevitably leads to disagreement. In parliamentary debate, however, insulting standpoints or insulting language use may make the Chair break off the polarizing attempt by ordering the politician to take back his words. Such an intervention is instigated by the parliamentary convention that a standpoint should not be offensive or incite people to act illegally. This convention determines (amongst other things) that a standpoint that promotes discriminating behavior is not allowed. In the case of a polarizing tactic, the rule that MPs cannot use offending language restricts both the possible standpoints the politician can put forward and the way in which these standpoints can be phrased.

The second polarizing tactic which is opportune is to *make it difficult for the political opponent to agree*. This tactic aims at forcing the political opponent into opposition. The main advantage of using this tactic is that it limits the risk of wrongly ascribing a standpoint to the political opponent (a risk inherent to the first polarizing tactic), because the political opponent himself makes clear that he disagrees with the politician. In using this tactic, it is, again, the use of insulting language that makes it risky. A way in which a politician can make the opponent explicitly say that he disagrees with a standpoint is to formulate his own standpoint in such a way that it insults the opponent or his electorate. Especially when the standpoint insults the opponent’s electorate, the opponent will in his capacity of representative of the people be more or less obliged to explicitly distance himself from the insulting point of view.

In the empirical part of the study (chapters 4 and 5) I have shown how the topic shifting and polarizing tactics distinguished in chapter 3 are used in actual parliamentary practice and how they can be evaluated.

The analyses of the cases under investigation have shown that in his parliamentary contributions even a politician with extreme political views such as Wilders
tries to comply with the rules and practices that regulate parliamentary debate and tries to maintain the general standards of reasonableness. The case studies I have carried out make clear how for each specific tactic different combinations of presentational devices are used to help Wilders in creating the impression that shifting the topic or polarizing the debate is a reasonable move. For example, Wilders effectively introduced his new standpoint (a move made in both topic-shifting tactics) by using the device of *immediate other-repetition* (repeating specific words of the previous speaker) or by adding a clause like “many voters think that...”. These presentational choices help him to present his new standpoint as relevant to the debate. By using immediate other-repetition Wilders makes it seem as if the discussion on the initial standpoint continues. By introducing the electorate as a co-protagonist of the standpoint he makes it difficult for his political opponent or the Chair to say that his standpoint should not be discussed: if something is considered important by a large group of people, saying that it is irrelevant could be interpreted as silencing the electorate.

The evaluations of the case studies give reason to assume that each of the tactics used to realize the strategic maneuvers has its own specific ‘catch’ when it comes to committing fallacies. This means that for each tactic there are specific pragmадialectical rules of critical discussion that could be more easily violated than others. In case of a topic shift a fallacy that is likely to occur is the straw man (violation of the standpoint rule): in order to make it seem as if still the same issue is being discussed, the politician might reformulate the opponent’s standpoint in such a way that the opponent cannot be held committed to this reformulated standpoint. Yet, topic shifts can also lead to less obvious fallacies. When using the tactic of critically responding before introducing the new standpoint, the politician’s critical response should end the discussion on the topic introduced by his political opponent. He might be inclined to try to achieve this result by using the wrong means to force his opponent to retract his standpoint, for example by uttering a threat or making a personal attack (violation of the freedom rule). In case of polarization a fallacy that is likely to occur is an argumentum ad hominem (violation of the freedom rule). Politicians trying to polarize are inclined to use insulting language in order to make their opponents disagree with them, which can easily lead to unreasonable personal attacks. Polarizing maneuvers could also lead to less obvious fallacies. For example, when using the tactic of ascribing the opposite standpoint to the opponent politicians are easily inclined to impute a fictitious standpoint to the opponent (violation of the standpoint rule).
By themselves, the presentational devices used to exploit a specific tactic do not sufficiently indicate how a topic-shifting or polarizing maneuver should be evaluated. For example, in three of the four case studies of a topic shift the device of immediate other-repetition is used to make the new issue seem relevant to the current stage of the debate making it seem that the same issue is still being discussed by repeating specific words of the previous speaker. I have shown that each of the moves in which the device is used needs to be evaluated differently: either the fallacies committed in these moves were different, or the move was not fallacious at all. The analyses of polarizing strategic maneuvers have made clear that in the case of this strategic maneuver too the choice for a specific presentational device does not determine whether a specific move is fallacious. When a polarizing maneuver is conducted by means of insults addressed at the electorate – for example, by putting forward the standpoint that “violent young Moroccans are scum that keeps ruining the country” – the move cannot be viewed automatically as fallacious. Insulting language has to be evaluated as a fallacious personal attack only when it eliminates the opponent as a serious discussion partner. The fact that the content of a standpoint is insulting (as in the example that describes violent young Moroccans as scum) does not necessarily disqualify the opponent. Hence, in principle putting forward an insulting standpoint does not have any effect on whether the difference of opinion at issue can be resolved in a reasonable way. Whether such insulting and sometimes even discriminating language should be allowed in Parliament is thus not a matter of what is reasonable from a problem-solving perspective, but of what should be allowed from the perspective of determining the boundaries of freedom of speech in Parliament, of the accurateness of the parliamentary code of conduct, and of the strictness with which this code should be applied by the Chair.

The empirical part of the study has also made clear that, depending on the politician’s personal debating style, one tactic may be more suitable for use by a specific politician than another. The two tactics – shifting the topic by critically responding before putting forward a new standpoint, and polarizing by ascribing the opposite standpoint to the opponent – seem useful to every politician who aims to get his party’s priority issues discussed in Parliament. However, when trying to shift the topic, the tactic of critically responding before actually shifting the topic particularly suits a politician such as Wilders, who uses parliamentary debate to emphasize the differences between political parties rather than to achieve balanced decision making (Hilhorst, de Volkskrant 2 November 2010; Fennema 2010). The tactic entails an immediate exclusion of the opponent’s standpoint by putting forward a
critical response. Such an exclusion of the opponent’s standpoint is easier to realize when the politician does not care whether every claim he makes is well-founded (which is necessary for balanced decision making). Wilders, for example, often presents his contrary answer as indisputable by refraining from giving any support for his standpoint – he then, for example, confines his reaction to a simple “No!” or “Nonsense!” The polarizing tactic of making it difficult for the opponent to agree is especially useful to populist politicians. The tactic, which tries to force the opponent into opposition, is especially likely to succeed when the electorate is called in as a co-protagonist of the politician’s controversial standpoint. Presenting a standpoint on behalf of the electorate is a way to alienate one’s political opponents in a manner that might be considered reasonable by the electorate. The political opponent is then portrayed as being ignorant with regard to matters the electorate considers important, which might be regarded reasonable by the electorate because it sees itself represented Parliament.

The strategic use of presentational devices as employed by Wilders are described in the debate literature as “tricks” that can be used by politicians to win the support of potential voters. The case studies have made clear how these debate tricks are used in actual practice. In fact, Wilders seems inclined to use every trick in the book. As the analyses have shown, he “uses personal attacks, deviously changes the subject of discussion, raises false dilemma’s, simplifies and distorts the opponent’s standpoint, uses supporters [the electorate] to justify his position, and makes sure that every refutation is followed by his own story [standpoint]”. However, this study has made clear that just applying these tricks is not what makes parliamentary contributions effective. Simply making a personal attack or raising a false dilemma is not an effective way to argue because the audience (whether it is the opponent, the Chair or the electorate) might judge such tricks as unreasonable. The politician has to adapt his tricks to the argumentative goal they are to serve and the specific circumstances in which they are applied. The analyses of Wilders’s parliamentary contributions

174 According to Abts (2004), overcoming the electorate’s political dissatisfaction by appealing to the people’s opinion is a way of conducting politics that characterizes what he calls “respectable populism” or “popular politics” as well as “radical populism”. In case of the latter the appeal to the people’s opinion “is connected to a simple analysis in which truth results directly from the (common) people, it is hostile against political opponents and it rejects the representative democracy and its constitutional structure” (2004: 470-471).
175 These specific debating tricks were listed by van der Geer in NRC Handelsblad (30 September, 2006).
have shown what specific function such debating tricks have in realizing the party-political argumentative strategies of topic shifts and polarization, and how the choice of presentational devices can be of help in making these debating tricks effective.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

In this study, I have analyzed the function of presentational choices by considering these choices to be part of a presentational tactic that can be used to influence the outcome of the confrontation stage. A first topic for further research is to further develop the concept of presentational tactics by analyzing presentational choices in other discussion stages of political discourse. In contrast to, for example, the argumentation stage, in the confrontation stage the number of possible moves is limited. This makes it relatively easy to distinguish the possible patterns of expressed and suggested moves underlying a specific tactic. Applying the concept of presentational tactics to other stages could make clear whether the concept is also useful to analyze the presentational aspect of strategic maneuvers that aim for results other than the confrontational aim of getting a specific issue on the table. These could be strategic maneuvers by which arguers, for example, attempt to exclude starting points, promote a certain division of the burden of proof, apply particular argument schemes or structures, or end the discussion in a specific way. Incidentally, it would also be interesting to explore whether the way in which I examined the aspect of an effective presentation provides an adequate point of departure when the focus of analysis is the selection from the topical potential or adaptation to audience demand.

A second topic for further research concerns the kinds of topic shifts and polarizing moves that were not examined in this study. To provide a full picture of how politicians shift the topic or polarize the debate in Parliament, these other strategic maneuvers should be examined as well. For both topic shifts and polarization, only one specific kind of maneuvering distinguished in chapter 2 was analyzed in chapter 4 and chapter 5. Both kinds of maneuvering are characterized by the specific result of getting a particular issue on the table and taking a specific route to achieve this result. The kinds of topics shifts and polarization that were not examined either aim to realize the result of getting a specific issue on the table by other sequences of argumentative moves, or are aimed at achieving a result other than getting a specific issue on the table. As far as topic shifts are concerned, two interesting kinds of strategic maneuvering have been left unscrutinized which also
aim at getting the party’s priority issue on the table but do so by a sequence of argumentative moves that is different from the topic shift discussed in chapter 4 (topic shifts realized by means of a critical response).

The first kind of topic shift that deserves closer examination is the one in which the original topic is reformulated. The example given in chapter 2 was the introductory phrase of Wilders’s speech in the General Debate of September 2008, in which he created an opportunity to introduce the topic of Islamisation by reformulating the aim of the debate. He said: “Today we are not only talking about the budget, we also talk about the state of the country”. In pragma-dialectical terms such a topic shift can be characterized as a precization or elucidation of the standpoint that was initially introduced – in this example the broader description of the debate is a precization of the purpose of the debate because it is a more accurate description of what the General Debate is about. This kind of topic shift is interesting because, as van Schagen points out, it is frequently used in Dutch Parliament to immediately incorporate the party’s priority issue(s) in the debate (1994: 26).

A second kind of topic shift that should be analyzed in closer detail is the one in which the shift is made after putting a forward a reaction of (partial) agreement with the opponent’s standpoint (a concession). The topic shift using a concession may not only help a politician to get his party’s priority issue on the table, but can, in certain circumstances, also be a way to improve or strengthen the politician’s image. A politician who admits that his opponent is right, portrays himself as an honest debater who is able to put his personal interests aside. Some debate trainers mention making a concession followed by an expression of the arguer’s own standpoint also as an effective countermove in fighting populist politicians in a political discussion (NRC Handelsblad, 30 September 2007). They describe this countermove as a way to frustrate these politicians in their endeavor to portray themselves as outsiders of the political establishment – which is in fact a way of polarizing. This kind of topic shift thus also seems to be a useful tool to frustrate an opponent’s attempt to polarize the parties’ standpoints. Research into this specific kind of topic shift should make clear whether it could indeed serve to frustrate a polarizing attempt and what function presentational devices can have in such a strategic move.

A third and final topic for further research is the use of presentational tactics in other political contexts than (Dutch) parliamentary debate. The current study focused on topic-shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers in the specific case that an MP wants to get his party’s priority issue discussed in a parliamentary debate that attracts a lot of media attention, such as the General Debate on the budget. To make
more general claims about how topic shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers are conducted in a political context it is necessary to analyze these strategic maneuvers in other political contexts as well. Since politicians can be expected to bring their priority issues into the limelight whenever they can, they probably use the same topic shifting and polarizing maneuvers in other political contexts such as political interviews and election debates. Research into these specific political contexts should make clear whether in such political contexts politicians employ indeed the same presentational tactics, or need to employ different tactics when trying to shift the topic or polarize the parties’ standpoints.

Further research in the area of topic-shifting and polarizing maneuvers in the political context should also include the ways in which arguers other than MPs try to initiate a discussion on a specific issue. Such research would benefit from the work done by other pragma-dialecticians in the field of political discourse. It could, for example, include the ways in which the Prime Minister is engaged in party-politics during question time or – to mention a completely different political context that has been studied from a pragma-dialectical perspective – the ways in which online discussants emphasize the gap between the political establishment and the common people on a certain issue.176 Another interesting political context is that of broadcasted political interviews. In this specific context both the interviewer and the politician being interviewed can be expected to attract the listener’s attention by initiating a discussion on a specific issue. The politician will try to get his party’s priority issues discussed while the interviewer will try to discuss, as Andone points out, “debatable matters of political controversy” (2010: 37-38). In order to accommodate the listening, reading or television-watching audience, the interviewer can be expected to stick to such matters of political controversy when the politician tries to evade them. Or, when the politician claims that the difference has been resolved, the interviewer may regenerate the difference of opinion on these matters. In doing so, a political interviewer may use presentational devices that are different from those a politician engaged in party-politics uses to lure his interlocutor into the discussion he favors most. Since, due to the formal requirement of neutrality an interviewer should refrain from asserting opinions on his own behalf (Andone 2010: 40), other presentational devices might be necessary to realize a shift of topic or to polarize the discussion. A politician should preferably present his standpoints

176 See for studies of confrontational strategic maneuvering in these specific contexts Mohammed 2009 (British Question Time) and Lewinski 2010 (internet political discussion forums).
in such a way that it is clear to the electorate which side he takes (for or against, right-wing or left-wing), while a political interviewer is not expected to take any side at all.
APPENDIX: EXAMPLES

1.1 Initiating a discussion on a priority issue in parliamentary debate

Verkiezingsprogramma PVV 2010-2015: “De massa-immigratie heeft enorme gevolgen voor alle facetten van onze samenleving. Het is economisch gezien een ramp, het tast de kwaliteit van ons onderwijs aan, vergroot de onveiligheid op straat, leidt tot een uittocht uit onze steden, verdrijft Joden en homo’s en spoelt decennia vrouwenemancipatie door de wc.”

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “Het gaat alleen maar weer over geld, geld en nog eens geld. […] Ik zou het graag willen omdraaien: wat betekent Nederland in termen van duurzaamheid, biodiversiteit, voedselverdeling en verdeling van welvaart voor de rest van de wereld? De heer Van Geel denkt alleen maar aan zijn eigen hardwerkende Nederlanders, terwijl wij als Nederland juist een enorme verantwoordelijkheid hebben voor de armoede en het verdwijnen van een aangename leefomgeving in de rest van de wereld.”

2.2.1 The aims of a parliamentary debate

Halsema (GroenLinks): “De reden dat u hier bent, is helemaal niet omdat u bent geïnteresseerd in het lot van mensen in de wijken. Het is omdat u hoopt dat u vrijdag in de peilingen van tien naar elf gaat.”

Wilders (PVV): “Wij doen het vooral en alleen voor de Nederlanders die in de wijken wonen, […] om hen een stem te geven en om voor hen op te komen. Ook al
gaat u duizend keer met ik weet niet hoeveel woorden aan de interruptiemicrofoon staan, ik blijf het doen tot het laatste woord dat ik hier ooit zal uitspreken.”

2.2.2 The conventions of parliamentary debate

Verdonk (Fractie Verdonk): “Gisterenavond was er bij RTL een uitzending waarin ik beschuldigd werd van het feit dat ik in 2005 akkoord zou zijn gegaan met het voorstel voor een generaal pardon […] bedoeld om het kabinet te redden.” […] Voorzitter Verbeet: “Beperkt u zich alstublieft tot wat vandaag op de agenda staat. Wij hebben al genoeg op ons bord liggen.”

Wilders (PVV): “Ik heb geen domme gans gezegd; hooguit gedacht.”
Hamer (PvdA): “Dat beschouw ik als een compliment.”
Voorzitter Verbeet: “Maar ik niet en ik wil echt dat wij proberen het een beetje op niveau te houden.”

Minister president Balkenende: “Ik ben nu toe aan onderdeel 8.”
Rutte (VVD): “Ik dacht dat u nog over asielbeleid zou komen te spreken, want ik heb nog geen antwoord op de vraag die ik heb gesteld.” […] Voorzitter Verbeet: “Een stuk asielbeleid is al in een eerdere fase van het debat aan de orde geweest, maar dit nog niet. […] Dat klopt.”

2.3.1 Topic shifts in parliamentary debate

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “Het gaat alleen maar weer over geld, geld en nog eens geld. […] Ik zou het graag willen omdraaien: wat betekent Nederland in termen van duurzaamheid, biodiversiteit, voedselverdeling en verdeling van welvaart voor de rest van de wereld?”

Pechtold (D66): “[...] u wilt hier schreeuwen [dat het politieke establishment niet deugt] nadat u er twintig jaar aan hebt bijgedragen.”

Wilders: “De heer Pechtold zal nog twintig jaar of langer heel concrete voorstellen hierover van de PVV moeten aanhoren. Nogmaals, niet D66 maar de PVV komt op voor de gewone man die last heeft van de multiculturele samenleving.”

Wilders (PVV): “Wij praten vandaag niet alleen over de begroting, wij praten ook over de staat van ons land. Hoe ziet Nederland eruit? [...] Er is ook niet langer meer één Nederland, er zijn twee Nederlanden.”

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “In het belang van de dieren zal er spoedig een einde moeten komen aan de bio-industrie.”

Van Geel (CDA): “De kernwaarden van de democratische rechtstaat zijn voor het CDA geen onderwerp van onderhandeling.”

Wilders (PVV): “Ik ben het met de heer Van Geel eens dat onze rechtstaat iets heel belangrijks is. [...] Vindt u ook niet dat de PVV gelijk had toen zij in het verleden zei dat niet alleen staatssecretarissen maar ook mensen met een functie als politiagent eigenlijk alleen de Nederlandse nationaliteit zouden mogen hebben?”

2.3.2 A pragma-dialectical characterization of topic shifts

Van Geel (CDA): “Ik constateer dat ik tot drie keer toe vraag wie de rekening betaalt. Ik krijg dan een algemeen verhaal te horen, dat ik nu al drie keer heb gehoord. Ik zal dan maar aangeven waar de rekening door de VVD gelegd wordt.”

2.4.1 Polarization in parliamentary debate

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “De heer Van Geel denkt alleen maar aan zijn eigen hardwerkende Nederlanders, terwijl wij als Nederland juist een enorme verantwoordelijkheid hebben voor de armoede en het verdwijnen van een aangename leefomgeving in de rest van de wereld.”

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “Als ik de heer Rutte hoor spreken over het milieu, denk ik: dit kan hij toch niet menen? Ik ken hem als iemand die graag ‘groen’ wil zijn. Ik heb hem in de wandelgangen ook horen zeggen dat hij wat minder vlees wil
Wilders (PvV): “De mensen in uw wijken hebben last van criminaliteit. Hoe prachtig een wijkagent ook is, een wijkagent en een buurthuis lossen de problemen niet op. Wat gaat u nu echt doen voor de SP-stemmers? Laat u ze net als de afgelopen jaren, in de kou staan?” […] “[of] Bent u, in tegenstelling tot de laatste jaren, nu wel een voorstander van strengere straffen voor het tuig dat die buurten onveilig maakt? Waait er een nieuwe wind of gaan wij door op de oude, verkeerde weg?”

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “De minister president doet net alsof hij met een bootje op een kabbelend beekje aan het varen is. Wij hebben echter te maken met een wereldwijde voedselcrisis. […] Dit is een noodsituatie.”

Wilders (PvV): “Wij hadden kunnen zwemmen in het geld en in plaats van dat te doen volgen wij de linkse droom om de halve islamitische wereld naar Nederland te halen. […] Henk en Ingrid betalen voor Mohammed en Fatima.”

Wilders (PvV): “Toch blijft het een schande dat in dit land gevangenen beter behandeld worden dan onze ouden van dagen.” […] Minister president Balkenende: […] “Ik denk dat wij moeten oppassen om zomaar het een met het ander te vergelijken, want het is niet zomaar een zwart-witverhaal. Natuurlijk is het interessant om te horen wat de heer Wilders zegt over de rechten van gevangenen. Ook zij hebben rechten, maar ik weet niet of je het zomaar direct kunt vergelijken.”

Wilders: “Ik wil dat iedere oudere in Nederland iedere dag gedoucht wordt. Ik wil dat die iedere dag naar buiten kan. Ik wil dat die genoeg verpleegsters en verplegers om zich heen heeft. Ik wil dat die kan roken op zijn eigen kamer. De rechten die nu gelden voor de criminelen, voor de verkrachters, de pedofielen en de moordenaars gelden niet voor de ouderen.”

Balkenende: “Voorzitter. Wij hebben onze gedachtewisseling gehad. Uiteraard zullen wij ons nader laten informeren, maar ik ga niet de vergelijking maken die de heer Wilders maakt en ik ga daar zeker geen conclusies aan verbinden.”

Wilders: “Dan kan de conclusie helaas geen andere zijn dan dat de minister president van Nederland kiest voor de gevangenen en niet voor de ouderen. Dat is een schande.”
2.4.2 A pragma-dialectical characterization of polarization

Kant (SP): “Hier wordt een tegenstelling gecreëerd die er helemaal niet is. Denkt u nu werkelijk dat ik vind dat die raddraaiers niet aangepakt moeten worden?”

4.2 The assimilation case

Pechtold (D66): “U kunt dat angstbeeld oproepen van wat van buiten naar binnen wil, maar volgens mij hebben wij in Nederland volgens uw berekening een miljoen moslims. Hoe gaan wij daar mee om, als zij geen scholen mogen hebben, als ze geen geloofsgebouw mogen hebben, als ze, kortom, moeten opgaan in een vorm van assimilatie? Hoe ziet u dat beeld nu voor u?”

Wilders (PVV): “Er is niks mis met assimilatie. Het Franse beleid is al decennialang gericht op assimilatie. Daar is dus niets verkeerds aan. Het heeft misschien een beetje een negatieve connotatie vanuit het verleden, maar assimilatie is geen enkel probleem. Nogmaals ik heb collega Marijnissen uitgelegd waarom ik vind dat Nederland geen islamitische scholen meer moet hebben. Dat is een begin van achterstand. Ik denk inderdaad ook dat op het moment dat Nederland de immigratie stopt – dat is ook een voorstel van mij – wij niet langer bijvoorbeeld moskeeën hoeven te hebben. Dat is heel normaal en heel logisch. Ik vind dat de immigratie van Nederland op dit moment genoeg is; nogmaals heel veel mensen in Nederland, inclusief democraten, vinden dat.”

4.3 The Mohammed B case

Wilders (PVV): “Denkt de minister voor Wonen, wijken en integratie dat zij zogenaamde aandachtswijken, prachtwijken, krachtwijken kan omtoveren met een likje verf en wat extra jeugdhonken? Alsof Mohammed Bouyeri de moord op Theo van Gogh niet zou hebben gepleegd als zijn kozijnen een keer extra geschilderd waren!”
4.4 The majority-minority case

Pechtold (D66): “Ik probeer na te gaan hoe u, wanneer u de meerderheid heeft, hier met moslims omgaat.”
Wilders (PVV): “Neemt u van mij aan dat op het moment dat mijn partij, de PVV, ooit onderdeel wordt van de macht, wij met de minderheden een stuk netter zullen omgaan dan op het moment dat de islam in Nederland het voor het zeggen heeft.”

4.5 The twenty years case

Pechtold (D66): “[...] u wilt hier schreeuwen [dat het politieke establishment niet deugt] nadat u er twintig jaar aan hebt bijgedragen.”
Wilders: “De heer Pechtold zal nog twintig jaar of langer heel concrete voorstellen hierover van de PVV moeten aanhoren. Nogmaals, niet D66 maar de PVV komt op voor de gewone man die last heeft van de multiculturele samenleving.”

4.6 Observations concerning the use of presentational devices in topic shifts

Hamer (PvdA): “Begrijp ik goed dat u vindt dat de Staat zich niet meer moet bezighouden met de sociale zekerheid, het onderwijs en de zorg, maar wel de olympische spelen moet organiseren?”
Rutte (VVD): “Ik zal u zeggen waar de Staat zich niet mee bezig moet houden. Uw partij heeft in de coalitieonderhandelingen ingebracht dat bijstandsmoeders niet meer hoeven te solliciteren. [...] U denkt het geluk van mensen te bevorderen, terwijl u in feite hun geluk in de weg zit.”

Verdonk (Fractie Verdonk): “Voorzitter. Vertrouwen, vertrouwen, vertrouwen. Wij hebben dit woord al heel vaak gehoord. [...] Weet u vertrouwen moet je verdienen door eerlijkheid en openheid. Gisterenavond was er bij RTL een uitzending waarin ik beschuldigd werd van het feit dat ik in 2005 akkoord zou zijn gegaan met een voorstel voor een generaal pardon van 10.000 mensen. Dat was ingestoken door de heer Verhagen, door de heer Zalm en door de heer Dittrich en was bedoeld om het kabinet te redden. [...] Wist u van die achterkamertjespolitiek?”
Rutte (VVD): “Wat vertrouwen geeft, is een regering die ruimte laat in haar beleid om in de toekomst om te gaan met tegenslagen.”

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “Hoe zou het komen dat er zo weinig vertrouwen is in het kabinet? Komt dat niet doordat het kabinet te weinig ambitie heeft en dat als het gaat om belangrijke beschermwaardige zaken, als zorg, onderwijs, landbouw en voedselvoorziening, de overheid niet thuis geeft?”

5.2 The crumbs of my bread case

Wilders (PVV): “Toen ik vanochtend aan de ontbijttafel zat en ik op NOS Teletext zag: ‘CDA wil huwelijksimmigratie beperken’, dacht ik: het wordt een mooie dag vandaag. Nu hoor ik dat voorstel van collega Van Geel en ik zie nog wat kruimeltjes van mijn brood op de grond liggen, maar dat is het ook wel ongeveer.”

5.3 The Henk and Ingrid case

Wilders (PVV): “Voorzitter. Wij hadden kunnen zwemmen in het geld en in plaats van dat te doen volgen wij de linkse droom om de halve islamitische wereld naar Nederland te halen. Hoe meer stemvee voor de linkse kerk, hoe beter. […] Maar voorzitter, wie betaalt de rekening, wie betaalt die 100 mld.? Dat zijn de mensen die Nederland hebben opgebouwd, dat zijn de mensen die hard werken, de mensen die keurig sparen, die netjes hun belasting betalen, de gewone Nederlander die het niet cadeau krijgt: Henk en Ingrid betalen voor Mohammed en Fatima!”

5.4 The Moroccan scum cases

Wilders (PVV): “Bent u, in tegenstelling tot de laatste jaren, nu wel een voorstander van strengere straffen voor het tuig dat die buurten onveilig maakt? Waait er een nieuwe wind, of gaan wij door op de oude, verkeerde weg.”

Wilders: “Ik zeg u, mijnheer Dijselbloem: het is geen toeval dat al die Marokkaanse jongeren, tuig – dat is het gewoon; dat bent u toch met mij eens – die keer op keer
opnieuw het land verzieken, homo’s in elkaar slaan. Die doen dat weliswaar niet met de Koran in de hand, maar zij komen wel uit een cultuur waarin het wordt gedoogd, waarin het wordt geleerd.”

5.5 The head rag tax case


5.6 Observations concerning the use of presentational devices in polarization

Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren): “Het is goed dat het kabinet extra geld lijkt uit te trekken voor de verbetering van het dierenwelzijn, maar laten wij niet te vroeg juichen, want er zit een adder onder het gras. Bij nadere bestudering lijken de bedragen onder de noemer dierenwelzijn vooral een verkapte ontwikkelings- en investeringssubsidie voor de bio-industrie.”
This study aims to provide a systematic explanation of how presentational choices can help politicians to get a priority issue of their party on the table in a parliamentary debate. To achieve this aim, cases are analyzed in which so-called one-issue politicians try to get the priority issue of their party discussed in Dutch Parliament. These politicians are the leader of the Party for the Animals, Marianne Thieme, and the leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders. In the selected excerpts pertaining to Thieme, the priority issue that she tries to introduce is related to environmental and animal welfare; in the selected excerpts pertaining to Wilders, the priority issue that he attempts to get on the table is the issue of the danger of Islamisation.

Getting a party’s priority issue discussed in Parliament can be considered a party-political strategy aimed at winning the support of potential voters – especially when the maneuvers concerned are used in debates that will attract a lot of media attention, such as the General Debate on the budget. The strategy is a way of showing the electorate that the party is more sincere and more committed to doing something about a specific problem than are the opponents. In this study, the presentational choices politicians make to conduct this strategy were examined by making use of the pragma-dialectical concept of strategic maneuvering. This pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation is useful because it is normative, considers the context in which the discourse takes place and views the aspect of formulation as a means to win the listener’s support.

To determine the function of presentational means in attempts to get the party’s priority issue discussed, it is first explained which particular argumentative moves can be viewed as such attempts (chapter 2). Depending on what exactly the politician tries to accomplish with his argumentative moves, such attempts can be characterized as topic shifts or as polarizing the parties’ standpoints (or as a combination
of both). In the case of a topic shift, the politician tries to introduce a proposition that is different from the one put forward by his political opponent. In the case of polarization, he tries to show that the political opponent holds a position towards the proposition that is opposite to his own position. A polarizing attempt intends to realize a so-called mixed difference of opinion. A politician may try to shift the topic if the discussion is about an issue other than his party’s priority issue. A polarizing maneuver might be useful if the parties agree or seem to agree on the party’s priority issue. This is not to say that every topic-shifting or polarizing attempt is meant to initiate a discussion on a party’s priority issue. Examples from the General Debate of 2008 show that topic shifts can, for example, be used to evade a difficult question or to put the opponent in an awkward position. Polarization can also have the potential to elicit agreement from the political opponent.

The conventions (rules and practices) of parliamentary debate determine how a topic-shifting or polarizing strategic maneuver can be realized in this specific context. In line with the pragma-dialectical approach, in this study parliamentary debate is characterized as a specific communicative activity type in the domain of political communication. By examining the standing orders of the Second Chamber and established parliamentary practice, the rules and other conventions were determined that constrain the ways in which a politician can try to shift the topic or polarize the parties’ standpoints. In the case of a topic shift, for example, the rule that one should stick to the topic as set by the Chair constrains the potential propositions that can be put forward as the ‘new issue’. Only issues that relate to the agenda are allowed, which means that the new issue must not deviate too much from the agenda. In the case of polarizing maneuvers, the politician might be inclined to insult the political opponent or his electorate because that almost inevitably leads to a mixed difference of opinion. In parliamentary debate, however, insulting standpoints or insulting language use may lead the Chair to break off the polarizing attempt by ordering the politician to take back his words. Such a reprimand is based on the rule that MPs cannot use offensive language or urge others to act illegally (which might be the case when an offensive utterance also serves to discriminate).

The method introduced in this study to analyze the strategic function of presentational choices (chapter 3) is based on the pragma-dialectical starting point that every argumentative move can be identified as a specific speech act. The components of a speech act (the communicative function and the propositional content) can be presented in an explicit or implicit manner. The explicit-implicit distinction refers to the possibility of choosing between expressing the content of a move completely
and implying the content of a move by the surrounding discourse or the context in general. A presentational tactic involves creating a specific pattern of expressed and suggested moves and choosing particular devices to formulate the expressed moves. For both topic-shifting and polarizing strategic maneuvers, two presentational tactics are distinguished that can be effective in the context of parliamentary debate. These tactics can be understood as being opportune because they enable the politician to shift the topic or polarize the parties' standpoints in a reasonable way with a minimal amount of effort.

By analyzing excerpts from parliamentary debates, the study highlights the presentational tactics that are helpful in shifting the topic (chapter 4) or polarizing the debate (chapter 5) and demonstrates how they are executed in actual practice. The selected excerpts are all parliamentary contributions in which Wilders tries to initiate a discussion on the dangers related to the Islamisation of the Netherlands. These contributions can be considered to be aimed at winning the support of potential voters since they all stem from a type of debate known to attract a lot of media attention, such as the General Debate and the Fitna-debate on the release of Wilders' anti-Islam movie. The analyses show that for each specific tactic different combinations of presentational devices are used. These combinations help the politician to shift the topic or polarize the debate in a reasonable way – or at least to give the impression that the maneuver is conducted in a reasonable way. The excerpts also show that in making parliamentary contributions even a politician with extreme political views such as Wilders tries to comply with the rules that regulate parliamentary debate and with the standards of reasonableness. The analyses conducted in this study are compared with observations made by other analysts of Wilders' language use. This comparison allows for a determination of the extent to which Wilders’ presentational choices can be considered as 'typical Wilders' or as typical for topic-shifting and polarizing maneuvers by politicians in general.

Based on the analyses, some considerations for the evaluation of the excerpts are provided. The evaluation is aimed at determining whether a politician's effort to win the support of potential voters by addressing a priority issue frustrates a resolution of the difference of opinion with the political opponent. The considerations make clear that an attempt to get the party's priority issue discussed can be either a reasonable discussion move or a fallacious discussion move, and that this evaluation is achieved irrespective of the presentational tactic that is used. However, the evaluation bears out the assumption that there are specific pragma-dialectical rules of critical discussion that could be more easily violated than others for each
tactic. The judgment of some critics that using a party political strategy, such as getting a priority issue on the table, is by definition unreasonable, is not supported by this study. However, in those cases in which getting a priority issue on the table frustrates the resolution of the difference of opinion, such a contribution should indeed be considered unreasonable.
Het doel van deze studie is een systematische uitleg te geven van de wijze waarop presentatiekeuzen politici kunnen helpen een prioriteitsonderwerp van hun partij op tafel te krijgen in een parlementair debat. Om dit doel te bereiken zijn fragmenten geanalyseerd waarin politici van zogenaamde ‘one-issue’ partijen proberen het onderwerp waar hun partij het meeste belang aan hecht ter discussie te stellen in een Nederlands parlementair debat. Deze politici zijn de leider van de Partij voor de Dieren, Marianne Thieme, en de leider van de Partij voor de Vrijheid, Geert Wilders. In de geselecteerde bijdragen van Thieme probeert zij een standpunt te introduceren dat gerelateerd is aan het onderwerp milieu- en dierenwelzijn; de geselecteerde bijdragen van Wilders illustreren hoe hij probeert de gevaren van de islamisering van Nederland op tafel te krijgen.

Het op tafel krijgen van een prioriteitsonderwerp in een parlementair debat kan gezien worden als een partijpolitieke strategie die gericht is op het winnen van de gunst van de kiezer – zeker wanneer de betreffende manoeuvres plaatsvinden in een debat dat veel media-aandacht krijgt, zoals de Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen. De strategie is een manier om de kiezer te laten zien dat de partij serieuzer en vastberadener dan andere partijen probeert om een specifiek probleem op te lossen. In deze studie zijn de presentatiekeuzen waarmee politici deze strategie uitvoeren onderzocht met behulp van het pragma-dialectische concept strategisch manoeuvreren. Deze pragma-dialectische benadering van argumentatie is bruikbaar omdat ze normatief is, rekening houdt met de context waarin de argumentatie plaatsvindt en het aspect van de formulering ziet als een middel om de gunst van de luisteraar te winnen.

Om de functie van presentatiemiddelen te bepalen in pogingen een bepaald onderwerp op tafel te krijgen, wordt eerst uitgelegd welke argumentatieve zetten als zulke pogingen gezien mogen worden (hoofdstuk 2). Afhankelijk van wat de politicus
precies probeert te bereiken met zijn argumentatieve zetten, kunnen zulke pogingen gekarakteriseerd worden als het veranderen van onderwerp of het polariseren van de standpunten van partijen (of als een combinatie van beide). Wanneer een politicus van onderwerp probeert te veranderen, probeert hij een propositie te introduceren die een andere inhoud heeft dan de propositie die door zijn politieke opponent naar voren is gebracht. Wanneer een politicus de standpunten van partijen probeert te polariseren, probeert hij te laten zien dat de politieke opponent een positie inneemt ten opzichte van een propositie die tegengesteld is aan zijn eigen positie. Een poging tot polariseren is gericht op het tot stand brengen van een zogenaamd gemengd verschil van mening. Een politicus die een discussie wil initiëren over een prioriteitsonderwerp zal proberen van onderwerp te veranderen wanneer het debat over een ander onderwerp gaat dan dit prioriteitsonderwerp; een polariserende manoeuvre kan zinvol zijn wanneer de partijen in feite geen verschil van mening hebben of lijken te hebben over het prioriteitsonderwerp. Hiermee is niet gezegd dat elke verandering van onderwerp of elke polariserende zet bedoeld is om een discussie te initiëren over een prioriteitsonderwerp. Voorbeelden uit de Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen van 2008 laten zien dat het veranderen van onderwerp bijvoorbeeld ook gebruikt kan worden om moeilijke vragen uit de weg te gaan of om de politieke opponent in een lastig parket te brengen. Polariserende zetten blijken ook te kunnen worden gebruikt om een reactie van instemming los te krijgen bij de politieke opponent.

De conventies (regels en gewoontes) van een parlementair debat bepalen hoe het op tafel krijgen van een specifiek onderwerp in deze specifieke context gerealiseerd kan worden. In overeenstemming met de pragma-dialectische benadering wordt het parlementaire debat in deze studie gekarakteriseerd als een specifiek communicatief activiteittype in het domein van de politieke communicatie. Door het bestuderen van het Reglement van Orde van de Tweede Kamer en de parlementaire praktijk zijn de regels en gewoontes vastgesteld die bepalend zijn voor de wijze waarop een politicus van onderwerp kan veranderen of de standpunten van partijen kan polariseren. Wanneer een politicus van onderwerp probeert te veranderen beperkt de regel dat parlementariërs zich moeten houden aan het onderwerp zoals dat is vastgesteld door de voorzitter bijvoorbeeld de keuze aan mogelijke proposities die naar voren gebracht kunnen worden als het ‘nieuwe onderwerp’. Alleen onderwerpen die gerelateerd zijn aan de agenda zijn toegestaan, wat betekent dat het nieuwe onderwerp niet te ver van deze agenda mag afwijken. In een poging tot polariseren kan een politicus geneigd zijn de opponent of diens electoraat persoonlijk aan te vallen, omdat een dergelijke aanval bijna automatisch tot een gemengd verschil
van mening leidt. In een parlementair debat kan de voorzitter echter besluiten een beledigende bijdrage af te breken en de parlementariër zijn woorden te laten terugnemen. Een dergelijke reprimande is gebaseerd op de regel dat een parlementariër geen beledigende taal mag gebruiken of anderen mag aansporen tot onwettige handelingen (wat bijvoorbeeld het geval kan zijn wanneer de beledigende uiting discriminerend is).

De methode die in deze studie geïntroduceerd wordt om de strategische functie van presentatiekeuzen te analyseren (hoofdstuk 3) is gebaseerd op het pragma-dialectische uitgangspunt dat elke argumentatieve zet geïdentificeerd kan worden als een specifieke taalhandeling. De componenten van een taalhandeling (communicatieve functie en propositionele inhoud) kunnen op een expliciete of een impliciete wijze worden gepresenteerd. Dit onderscheid verwijst naar de mogelijkheid van een keuze tussen, aan de ene kant, het volledig verwoorden van de inhoud van een zet en, aan de andere kant, het suggereren van de inhoud van deze zet met behulp van de omringende discourse of de algemene context. Een presentatietactiek bestaat uit het creëren van een specifiek patroon van verwoorde en gesuggereerde zetten en de keuze van specifieke presentatiemiddelen. Zowel voor het veranderen van onderwerp als voor polariseren worden in de studie twee tactieken behandeld die effectief kunnen zijn in de context van een parlementair debat. Deze tactieken zijn opportuun omdat ze de politicus in staat stellen om met minimale inspanning op een redelijke wijze van onderwerp te veranderen of de standpunten van de partijen te polariseren.

Met behulp van fragmenten uit parlementaire debatten wordt in de studie aangetoond op welke wijze de verschillende presentatietactieken die gericht zijn op het veranderen van onderwerp (hoofdstuk 4) of polarisatie (hoofdstuk 5) precies worden toegepast in de parlementaire praktijk. De gekozen fragmenten zijn alle discussiebijdragen waarin Wilders een discussie probeert te initiëren over de gevaren die verbonden zijn aan de islamisering van Nederland. Zijn bijdragen kunnen gezien worden als gericht op het winnen van de gunst van de kiezer omdat ze afkomstig zijn uit debatten waarvan op voorhand duidelijk was dat de media er aandacht aan zou besteden, zoals de Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen en het Fitna-debat over het verschijnen van Wilders’ anti-islamfilm. De analyses van de fragmenten laten zien dat voor elke tactiek verschillende combinaties van presentatiemiddelen worden gebruikt. Deze gebruikte combinaties dragen bij aan het op een redelijke wijze veranderen van onderwerp of polariseren van standpunten – of wekken tenminste de indruk dat dit op redelijke wijze gebeurt. De analyses laten zien dat zelfs een politicus met extreme politieke opvattingen zoals Wilders probeert te
handelen in overeenstemming met algemene redelijkheidsnormen en de conventies die het parlementaire debat reguleren. De gemaakte analyses van de fragmenten van Wilders worden in de studie vergeleken met de observaties van anderen die Wilders’ taalgebruik hebben geanalyseerd. Op die manier kan worden aangegeven in hoeverre Wilders’ presentatiekeuzen gezien kunnen worden als ‘typisch Wilders’ of als typerend voor het veranderen van onderwerp of het polariseren van standpunten in een politieke context in het algemeen.

Op basis van de analyses worden overwegingen gegeven voor de evaluatie van de betreffende fragmenten. De evaluatie is bedoeld om aan te geven in hoeverre het doel van een politicus om de gunst van de kiezer te winnen door een discussie te initiëren over een prioriteitsonderwerp een redelijke uitkomst van het verschil van mening met de politieke opponent in de weg staat. De overwegingen maken duidelijk dat een poging een prioriteitsonderwerp op tafel te krijgen zowel een redelijke als onredelijke argumentatieve bijdrage kan zijn en dat het oordeel hierover niet afhankelijk is van de gekozen presentatietactiek. Wel is het zo dat voor elke tactiek bepaalde pragma-dialectische discussieregels zijn aan te wijzen die eerder geschonden worden dan andere. Critici die menen dat een partijpolitieke strategie zoals het op tafel krijgen van een prioriteitsonderwerp per definitie onredelijk is, krijgen op basis van deze studie geen gelijk. In die gevallen echter dat het op tafel krijgen van een prioriteitsonderwerp het oplossen van het verschil van mening frustreert, moet een dergelijke discussiebijdrage inderdaad als onredelijk worden beschouwd.


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The aim of this study is to answer the question of how presentational choices can be helpful to politicians to get their party’s priority issues discussed in parliamentary debate. For this purpose, relevant pieces of Dutch parliamentary discourse are analyzed in which politicians operate who lead a party that is often considered to be a one issue party, such as Geert Wilders (Party for Freedom) and Marianne Thieme (Party for the Animals). Making use of the pragma-dialectical concept of strategic maneuvering, the study shows that attempts to get a party’s priority issue on the table can generally be characterized as either a topic shifting maneuver or a polarizing maneuver. More often than not, the presentational choices these politicians make are to be analyzed as coherent presentational tactics, which serve at the same time the politician’s aims of being effective and remaining within the institutionally determined requirements of reasonableness. The judgment that using party political strategies such as getting a priority issue on the table is by definition unreasonable is not supported by this study. Only when the politician’s efforts frustrate the parliamentary process of resolving the differences of opinion at issue they do not comply with the reasonableness requirements.

Getting an Issue on the Table

a pragma-dialectical study of presentational choices in confrontational strategic maneuvering in Dutch parliamentary debate

Yvon Tonnard