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

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
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).\footnote{On the importance of issue owning for political parties, see also, for example, Holian (2004) and the Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor (2010).} 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 contradiction 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
Getting an issue on the table

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.

2 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.

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

4 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

magic flute that “gives the feeling that all problems can be solved in one go” (NRC Handelsblad, 29 March 2008).

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.partijvoordeieren.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)

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 Nieuwsonmonitor 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.¹¹ 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.

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).
13 See, for example, HP de Tijd (4 April 2008) and de Volkskrant (18 December 2007).
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.
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.
of opinions). 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

16 In describing the (un)parliamentary practice of insulting, Ilie (2004) mentions a similar distinction between the Swedish and the British political tradition.
17 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 For a more detailed description of the function of parliamentary debate, see section 2.2.1.
19 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).
Getting an issue on the table

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

\[\text{Four stages are distinguished: the } \textit{confrontation stage} \text{ where the difference of opinion is defined; the } \textit{opening stage} \text{ where the starting points of the discussion are established; the } \textit{argumentation stage} \text{ where arguments and critical reactions are exchanged; and the } \textit{concluding stage}, \text{ where the result of the discussion is determined (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 59-62).}\]
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 there 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
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. 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...
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).23 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,

---

23 Van Eemeren proposes also a second distinction, namely between direct and indirect presentations of argumentative moves (2010: 120). This distinction will also be taken into account, but as a sub-category of the explicit-implicit distinction. See for a detailed explanation section 3.2.
1. Introduction

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.24 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
GETTING AN ISSUE ON THE TABLE

argumentative result according to a specific argumentative route. Such combinations of presentational choices will be referred to as \textit{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 discussant. 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.