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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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

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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.
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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”.

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 communicative function and the 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.

74 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 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).

75 The term communicative function (as an equivalent of Austin’s illocutionary force) has been coined by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992: 27).
In this study I only discuss presentational choices made at the level of the discussion stage and at the level of the discussion move.\(^\text{76}\) 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).
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FIGURE 3.1  Dialectical profile of the confrontation stage

\[1A \quad +/p\]

\[2B \quad \text{rud/p} \quad ?(+/p) \quad +/p \quad \text{[no discussion]}\]

\[3A \quad +/p' \quad \text{maintain +/p} \quad \text{retract +/p} \quad \text{[exit discussion]}\]

A = party A  
B = party B  
+/p = advancing a positive standpoint concerning a proposition p  
?(+/p) = casting doubt on +/p  
\text{rud/p} = requesting a usage declarative concerning proposition p (elucidation or precization)  
+/p' = advancing a reformulation of +/p  
\text{maintain +/p} = expressing the will to defend +/p  
\text{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

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\(^77\) 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),

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

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

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

\[\text{82} \quad \text{The available options vary for every slot in the profile. This can be made clearer by comparing the slot in which the antagonist casts doubt on +/p (as mentioned in the text) with, for example, the slot in which the protagonist puts forward +/p. The pragma-dialectical theory stipulates that the utterance used to fill in the slot of +/p has to be an assertive by means of which a standpoint is put forward, or should be reconstructable as such. Such an assertive is always an instance of the standard paraphrase ‘My standpoint concerning p is that p is the case’ (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 298). The options for the content of p depend on the context in which the standpoint is put forward.}\]
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.

**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></td>
<td>2 P</td>
<td>-/p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 PO</td>
<td>retract +/p</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.
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.

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\(^{85}\) 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

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

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?).\(^8\)

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).\(^9\)

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 \(r\) in an acceptable way to \(p\).\(^{10}\)

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\(^8\) 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.

\(^9\) 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).

\(^{10}\) 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-repetition91). 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

so by presenting the standpoint +/r as conditionally relevant to the standpoint +/p. In such a case, the one speech act is dependent on the presence of the other (for example, a question-answer exchange). The question of relevance then pertains to the relational dimension of relevance (2004: 82).

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></td>
<td>(2 P</td>
<td>-/p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3 PO</td>
<td>retract +/-p)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
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).

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.

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).

Two remarks can be made with respect to these sub-aims:
1. Sub-aim 3 can, again, be identified as the preferred interational (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.

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.

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.
3. PRESENTATIONAL CHOICES IN TOPIC SHIFTS AND POLARIZATION

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)

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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

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
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’ 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. 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.
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></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 P</td>
<td>+/-r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PO</td>
<td>+/-r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | |</p>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 PO</td>
<td>?(+/r)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 P</td>
<td>maintain +/-r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 PO</td>
<td>-/-r</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
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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 the 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).