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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Citation for published version (APA):

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4. PRESENTING TOPIC SHIFTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

4.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why is the excerpt an example of a topic shift?

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

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

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

100 In the overall debate, Pechtold’s standpoint on assimilation should be viewed as a reason that supports his standpoint that Wilders’s views with regard to Islam (and thus the release of Fitna) are bad for our society. The reason can be analyzed as a (sub-)standpoint, though, because Pechtold explicitly asks for Wilders’s point of view, and Wilders explicitly states that he disagrees.
Several choices made here are of help to make it seem as if this response is conclusive in the discussion on assimilation (which means that Pechtold should retract his standpoint +/p). A choice that concerns the content of the move is to evade part of Pechtold’s question. Wilders responds explicitly only to the standpoint that assimilation is bad and not to the reason for this judgment. Pechtold claims that assimilation is bad because in our society people with different beliefs have to live together. Wilders’s response does not provide but only suggests a full answer: by stripping the word “assimilation” of its negative connotation, he seems to claim that “if assimilation is not bad, it will cause no problems for Muslims and non-Muslims who have to live together”.101 Wilders then presents the argumentation that supports his standpoint that assimilation is not bad as conclusive. His arguments are that the French’ policy has also been aimed at assimilation and that they have employed this policy for years. Wilders presents these arguments as a sufficient defense by repeating the standpoint twice, right after the arguments.102 He first says “So, there is nothing bad about that [assimilation]” and then “Assimilation is absolutely no problem”. The use of the argumentative indicator “so” and the intensifier “absolutely” emphasize that nothing more needs to be said about assimilation.103 The advantage to Wilders of this way of formulating his response is that it gives him an opportunity to end the discussion on an awkward issue. Furthermore, it helps him to clear the way for the introduction of a different issue while showing the audience that he is not evading difficult questions.104

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

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

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

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

The opponent or the Chair could consider the standpoint to stop Muslim immigration ‘not at issue’ at this point because it has already been addressed in (at least) the discussion with Marijnissen. In order to prevent such criticism, Wilders has to provide a reason for introducing the standpoint again. Several presentational choices are instrumental in making it seem as if such a reason exists. These choices suggest that the whole utterance is an answer to Pechtold’s question, while in fact only the first part (“There … no problem”) can be reconstructed as such. Only this first part can be seen as an indirect answer that if assimilation is not bad, it will cause no problems for Muslims and non-Muslims who have to live together. The issue of Muslim immigration is introduced in the second part of Wilders’s response. He starts this part by saying: “Again, I explained to our colleague Marijnissen why I think that Holland should no longer have Islamic schools.” The use of “schools”, a word used earlier by Pechtold in the meaning of ‘Islamic schools’, also helps to present this part of Wilders’s contribution as an answer to Pechtold’s question. Using a word or phrase of the preceding speaker is referred to as *immediate other-repetition* (Shimojima et al. 2002, 117).105 The advantage of using this form of repetition is that this standpoint, Wilders agrees with Pechtold on something you might not expect him to agree on, namely, Pechtold’s presupposition that Wilders wants Muslims to assimilate. Instead of denying this presupposition, he implicitly confirms that Pechtold is right. Giving such a (partial) consent is a way to strengthen one’s ethos as a genuine debater because admitting something that is not opportune, even when done implicitly, gives the impression of being honest. In this case, Wilder’s consent makes it seem as if he would be willing to agree with Pechtold if Pechtold were right. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca give a comparable explanation of the effect of *concession*. They mention that this device can be used to “exhibit a sense of fair play and objectivity” (1969: 488).

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

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

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

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

*Does the strategic maneuvering derail?*

In this section I will examine whether Wilders’s maneuvering to shift the topic from the desirability of assimilation to stopping Muslim immigration violates any of the pragma-dialectical discussion rules. Some of these rules pertain to the confrontation stage (the freedom rule, the standpoint rule, and the language use rule109), but, since a topic shift can also involve argumentation, rules pertaining to other stages could be at stake as well. In this particular excerpt, the rules that are violated are the standpoint rule, the argument scheme rule and the concluding rule.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, Wilders’s potential electorate might have gotten the idea that, after Pechtold’s accusation, Wilders is no longer strongly committed to his anti-Islam standpoints. To eliminate this possible thought, the second part of his contribution (about the Islamic schools and mosques) is therefore addressing the electorate. It is meant as a confirmation towards his primary audience that he sticks to his initial standpoint despite Pechtold’s claim that closing Islamic schools and mosques is bad for the unity of our society. The electorate should believe that since Wilders is of the opinion that there is nothing wrong with assimilation, he is not going to change his mind about the closing of Islamic schools and mosques, or – his most important issue – the immigration of Muslims. Hence, Wilders’s contribution about Islamic schools and mosques is relevant to the discussion with the electorate. However, in the discussion with Pechtold the contribution could be considered a straw man: Wilders responds to a standpoint (something like ‘Islamic schools and mosques are here to stay’) that Pechtold cannot be held committed to, at least not in this particular part of the exchange. 113

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

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

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

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

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

114 At the time, the Government consisted of a coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Labor Party (PvdA). Mrs. Vogelaar was one of the Labor Party Ministers. In Dutch, the forty city districts chosen to be restored by the Minister are known as ‘Vogelaarwijken’, or as “prachtwijken” (prize neighborhoods) or “krachtwijken” (powerful neighborhoods).
introduction of the new standpoint (+/r) is accomplished by changing the initial issue into the issue of whether or not providing some paint and extra youth centers is the right policy to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh. Although Wilders seems to talk about the same means to the same end, both the means and the end are different from what is proposed by Vogelaar. By reading the end mentioned by Vogelaar as if it was to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh, Wilders introduces the danger of Islam as a topic of discussion into a debate that was originally not about Islam but about improving disadvantaged neighborhoods.

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁷ See also Slot (1993: 131).
neighborhoods can only be improved if Muslims are prevented from murdering people like Theo van Gogh.

The implication that everybody, including the Minister, knows that the Minister’s standpoint cannot be true, sounds quite plausible due to the *ridiculous and simplified reformulation* chosen in referring to the Minister’s standpoint. In the first part of Wilders contribution he reformulates “good housing” as “some extra paint and youth centers” and in the second part as “window frames that are painted once more”. In the second part of his contribution, he reformulates problematic neighborhoods as “Mohammed B killing Theo van Gogh”. In both reformulations the figure of *pars pro toto* (or *synecdoche*) is used. Painting window frames could be one of the measures to improve bad housing, and Muslims killing people like Theo van Gogh could be viewed as one of the results of living in a disadvantaged neighborhood.[118] Yet, Wilders did not pick just any part to describe the whole. Painting window frames is just a very minor measure to improve a disadvantaged neighborhood. Choosing this particular measure to describe the Minister’s plan portrays this plan as ineffective. Mohammed B’s killing of Theo van Gogh is a well known but extreme example of what a Muslim who grew up in one of the so-called bad neighborhoods could end up doing. Choosing this particular example portrays the problem of disadvantaged neighborhoods as something huge caused by Muslims – as if the presence of Muslims were the (only) real problem of these neighborhoods. These phrases reformulate the problem and the Minister’s solution in a simplified and exaggerated manner, which makes the Minister’s argumentation look ridiculous. [119] By taking the effect of the rhetorical question and the simplified and exaggerated reformulation together, Wilders makes it seem as if the Minister was stupid in putting forward the standpoint as she did: how can she make anyone believe that she can prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh by providing some extra paint and youth centers?

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

[119] Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca describe the argumentative function of “inclusion of the part in the whole” in terms of a specific association scheme: “the whole is treated as similar to each one of its parts” (1969: 231). In this case the scheme works as follows: if a measure does not work to prevent Muslims from murdering people like Theo van Gogh, then the measure does not work to improve disadvantaged neighborhoods.
4. PRESENTING TOPIC SHIFTS IN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE

The problem though with this line of reasoning (claiming to be right by portraying the opponent as stupid) is that it could be taken as an insult to the Minister and, therefore, unreasonable. The ridiculing reformulation of the Minister’s standpoint might be of help to mitigate the offense in such a way that he is able to keep up the appearance that he is a reasonable discussant. As indicated by van Laar, such a choice of words might be taken as acceptable because “there is a fiction that humor does not count” (2008: 310). When the insult makes an appeal to the sense of humour of the listener, he is more likely to not take it seriously and let it pass.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How does Wilders maneuver strategically with presentational devices to shift the topic?
The presentational devices used by Wilders to formulate the move +/r can be analyzed as means to realize the aims of a topic shift described in section 3.3 while at the same time giving the impression (rightly or wrongly) of adhering to the rules for critical discussion. This means that the formulation of standpoint +/r can be analyzed as an attempt (1) to imply a standpoint –/p that, at the same time, gives an institutionally justified reason for the political opponent to retract his standpoint +/p (which would mean that there is no need to discuss the opponent’s standpoint +/p), (2) to provide an institutionally justified reason for the introduction of +/r (which would mean that the debate can continue because +/r seems to fit the parliamentary agenda). I will now analyze how Wilders attempts to realize these two aims by means of his formulation of the standpoint +/r.
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(1) The question by means of which Pechtold indirectly conveys his standpoint is based on two key concepts, “majority” and “Muslims”. Pechtold questions whether Muslims will be treated well if Wilders seizes the majority in Parliament. In his response, Wilders gives the impression of using the same two concepts as his opponent, Pechtold. He says: “Take it from me that if my party, the Party for Freedom, will ever get its share of power, we will deal with minorities much more nicely than when the Islam is in control” (my italics, YT). Wilders uses the concepts differently than Pechtold though. He opposes majority to minority and Muslims to non-Muslims and uses them the other way around: in his answer it is not his party that has the majority, but Islam, and, as a consequence, it is not the Muslims that constitute a minority, but the people who are not Muslims. In rhetoric there are figures of speech with similar characteristics. The crossing of words is typical for figures such as antimetabole and chiasmus; contrasting concepts can be found in the figure of antithesis. Chiasmus is a variant of the antimetabole, which, as Fahnestock explains “abandons the constraint of repeating the same words in the second colon, yet retains a pattern of reversion”. Instead of repetition, chiasmus uses words related in some recognizable way that change positions. The ways in which words are related could be of various kinds. Fahnestock points at synonyms, opposites, or members of the same category (1999: 123). In the excerpt, the crossing of words can be identified as a figure of chiasmus (there is a reversal of related words) that uses the figure of antithesis (the related words are opposites: Muslims versus non-Muslims and majority versus minorities).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Does the strategic maneuvering derail?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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130 I selected 13 discussion fragments in which Wilders shifts the topic to Islamisation. In four of these fragments, Pechtold is Wilders’s opponent (other opponents are Halsema (3), van Geel (3), de Wit (1), Vogelaar (1) and Dijsselbloem (1)).
131 Wilders joined the Liberal Party (VVD) in 1989 and was a policy advisor of this party from 1990 till 1998. In 1998 he became a Member of Parliament for the VVD. He left the party in September 2004, due to a disagreement with his colleagues on whether Turkey could join the European Union or not.
inconsistent behavior because he now “shouts” and “kicks” at the establishment of which he has been a member for such a very long time (+/p). The accusation implies that Wilders is insincere: because he has been part of the establishment – and thus knows how politics works – his proposals cannot be meant to solve the problems of the electorate, but solely to win their support. In his response, Wilders avoids having a discussion about Pechtold’s accusation by not saying anything about it. Instead, he puts forward a standpoint (+/r) by which he promotes himself as the politician who is fighting the problems of Islam (and simultaneously attacks the Liberal Democrats for failing to do so). By advancing this standpoint he actually attempts to get back to the original issue advanced in his speech, which is that the political establishment is no good. By sticking to this issue, Wilders is able to enter a discussion that shows that, in contrast to the political elite, he fights against one of his electorate’s biggest enemies, the multicultural society.

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

(1+2) Wilders’s response can be analyzed as an attempt to make the shift of topic go by unnoticed: he actually presents the new standpoint as if it were just a critical response to Pechtold’s contribution. Making such a move is in fact a way to accomplish all topic-shifting aims in one go: if r seems to resemble p, then the discussion about +/p simply seems to continue. But how does Wilders make it seem that his response is nothing but a critical response towards the standpoint put forward by Pechtold?

The fact that Wilders does not say anything about the accusation (neither implicitly nor explicitly) means that the only relevant meaning that can be deduced from his response is that he does not want to discuss his supposedly inconsistent
behavior. However, this is probably not what Wilders wants to communicate: such a response would make it appear as if he were not prepared to take a position on this particular issue. A way of rendering this interpretation less likely is to make it appear as if the response is not meant to break off the inconsistency issue. Wilders attempts to establish this effect by referring to very specific parts of Pechtold's contribution. What is most striking in this response is the use of “twenty years”. Pechtold used these words to emphasize Wilders's inconsistent behavior, Wilders repeats them to emphasize his determination to fight the multicultural society. As explained in previous analyses (section 4.2 and 4.4), *immediate other-repetition* (using a specific phrase of the previous speaker) is a way of making it seem as if the discussion continues because the repetition appears to make the answer topically relevant.

A second presentational choice that is of help in establishing the effect that the response is relevant is the use of the expression “very concrete” to describe the PVV’s proposals. This *intensified adjective* creates a sort of *antithesis* with the way in which Pechtold describes the PVV’s proposals: first Pechtold calls them “illusions”, then Wilders claims that they are “very concrete”. In doing so, Wilders seems to imply that the one description excludes the other – concrete proposals cannot be illusions. This argumentation appears plausible because something which is an illusion (in the meaning of a dream) is indeed the opposite of something concrete (in the meaning of ‘real and existing’). Furthermore, it is generally known that the PVV’s proposals are indeed very concrete (van Leeuwen 2009: 9). To name just a few examples from their electoral platform: “Turkey in the EU means that The Netherlands are out”, “At most 1000 asylum seekers a year” and “Social security only for those who speak Dutch”.

The choice to describe his proposals as “very concrete” might thus give the potential electorate the impression that Wilders’s response denies and even refutes Pechtold’s claim. An additional advantage of Wilders’s response is that it may repair the damage Pechtold’s accusation may have caused. Pechtold’s accusation is a way to portray Wilders as insincere. In his response, Wilders emphasizes that he is in fact more sincere than Pechtold, because, in contrast to D66, he at least stands up for the real victims of the multicultural society.

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132 These are three of the many concrete proposals to be found in the PVV's electoral platform for 2010-2015 (www.pvv.nl).
Does the strategic maneuvering derail?
Wilders’s strategic maneuvering to shift the topic from an accusation of inconsistent behavior to a statement about the dichotomy between the political elite and the people should be viewed as fallacious. His response violates the language use rule because he uses unclearness to mask the actual meaning of his response.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

135 Van Leeuwen (2009) compared Wilders’s language use with that of Minister Vogelaar in her political speeches about integration. Wilders used substantially more repetitions, parallel phrases and main clauses than Vogelaar.

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

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

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

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

Hamer: “Do I understand you correctly that you are of the opinion that the State should no longer be occupied with social security, education and health care, but should organize the Olympic Games?”
Rutte: “I will tell you what the State should not be occupied with. Your party has contributed to the coalition negotiations that welfare mothers no longer have to apply for jobs. […] You think that you promote the people’s happiness, while in fact you are in the way of their happiness.” (my italics, YT)
(Proceedings Second Chamber 2008-2009, 2, 2-79)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thieme reacted in the following way:

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

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

In all these phrases, the politicians repeat the Prime Minister’s words to introduce their own priority topic as a response to the Prime Minister’s defense.