This study is an attempt to provide an elaborate argumentative account of a particular move in Prime Minister's Question Time in the British House of Commons. It is a pragma-dialectical examination of the Prime Minister’s responses with accusation of inconsistency to standpoints advanced by Members of Parliament (MPs) from the Opposition in which criticism is expressed concerning policies, actions or plans of the Government. Typically, the Prime Minister challenges the MPs’ commitment to their critical standpoints, on the basis of an alleged inconsistency between the MPs’ current criticism and some other positions with which they can be associated. In this study, basic pragma-dialectical tools are employed and further developed in order to offer an account that is both empirically adequate and critically insightful of the responses.

The Prime Minister’s responses at issue are characterised as a particular way of confrontational strategic manoeuvring in which a favourable outcome of the argumentative confrontation is pursued within the boundaries of reasonableness (*Chapter 2*). The characterisation reveals the strategic function of the responses as attempts from the Prime Minister to get his adversaries to retract their critical standpoints on the in-principle fair ground that one cannot hold two mutually inconsistent commitments simultaneously. Furthermore, the characterisation sheds light on the Prime Minister’s strategic choices of topics, audience frames and of stylistic devices, in his attempt to direct the MPs towards the retraction of the current criticism, rather than the retraction of the other position, as the means to repair the alleged inconsistency.

In order for the analysis of the responses to be faithful to the particularities of the institutional context in which the responses occur, the argumentative practice of Question Time is characterised as an argumentative activity type (*Chapter 3*). The institutionally conventionalised practice is characterised as a multi-layered activity type that is governed by parliamentary rules and conventions as well as by political considerations. The characterisation identifies a main discussion about a standpoint like *the performance of the*
Government is up to standard as well as another discussion about a standpoint like unlike the other party, we can provide good leadership, which runs simultaneously to the main discussion. Because the rules of Question Time stipulate that the MPs and the Prime Minister address only matters that relate to the responsibilities of the Government, the difference of opinion concerning the political competence of political parties can be addressed only through addressing the difference concerning the performance of the Government.

The activity type perspective sheds significant light on the institutional strategic function of the responses at issue (Chapter 4). For example, the activity type perspective makes it clear that the Prime Minister employs accusations of inconsistency in an attempt to live up to his institutional obligation to defend his Government in those situations where, on the one hand, refuting the criticism advanced by the Opposition is not easy, but on the other hand, the Prime Minister cannot just accept it. Furthermore, getting the MP from the Opposition to retract his criticism is often the Prime Minister’s only alternative to an institutionally undesirable outcome in which he would have to assume politically undesirable positions. In view of the activity type perspective, it becomes also evident that the accusation of inconsistency is not only an argumentatively opportune choice in the discussion about the performance of the Government, but is also an argument that the Prime Minister employs in support of the standpoint that unlike the Opposition, the ruling party can provide good leadership. An inconsistent Opposition can obviously not provide good leadership.

The in-principle reasonable ground that one cannot hold two mutually inconsistent commitments simultaneously does not guarantee reasonableness for the Prime Minister’s responses. Guided by the view that cases of strategic manoeuvring are reasonable only as long as they do not hinder the critical testing procedure, soundness conditions are formulated (Chapter 5). Institutional characteristics of the argumentative practice need to be taken into account in applying these conditions. The activity type perspective shows that particular attention needs to be given to the discussion of the competence of political parties to lead the country. Considerations that relate to this discussion can be crucial in judging whether a particular accusation is a fallacious attempt to silence criticism or rather a reasonable attempt to discuss the criticism in context. After all, in
Question Time, the performance of the Government is not assessed independently from the alternative offered by the Opposition.