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Maneuvering strategically in a political interview: analyzing and evaluating responses to an accusation of inconsistency

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Publication date
2010

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Andone, C. (2010). *Maneuvering strategically in a political interview: analyzing and evaluating responses to an accusation of inconsistency*. SicSat.

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CHAPTER 2

Analytically relevant responses to an accusation of inconsistency

2.1 Introduction

In the Introduction to this study, I have shown by means of examples that a politician can give various kinds of responses to an accusation of inconsistency. He can avoid discussing the inconsistency of which he is accused, he can deny that there is an inconsistency, and he can retract the earlier standpoint his current standpoint is allegedly inconsistent with. These are only some examples of possible responses to an accusation of inconsistency. Depending on the specific point in the discussion and the results he wants to obtain, a politician can give different kinds of responses.

In this Chapter, I will specify a finite number of types of responses a politician can choose from in an argumentative confrontation when he is criticized for being inconsistent. Although in argumentative practice a politician can choose from countless options for responding to a charge of inconsistency, it is theoretically possible to establish certain types of responses that can be given to respond to criticism.

Before it can be determined which responses a politician can give in an argumentative confrontation to a charge of inconsistency (2.3), the communicative and interactional dimensions of an accusation of inconsistency will be clarified (2.2). Such a clarification is important because it provides useful insight into accusations of

inconsistency as ways of expressing criticism the purpose of which is to obtain a response that answers the charge. Next, I will discuss these responses in the context of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits.

2.2 Communicative and interactional purposes of an accusation of inconsistency

Accusing someone of something amounts to performing an assertive illocutionary act implying that the speaker commits himself to the truth, or more generally, to the acceptability of the proposition expressed and is supposed to have good grounds for putting it forward (Searle 1969). Accusations are made to serve a communicative purpose of bringing about illocutionary effects and an interactional purpose of realizing perlocutionary effects (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). What are these purposes and how can they be specified for the case in which the accusation concerns an inconsistency?⁸

The act of making an accusation has received relatively little scholarly attention. Searle (1969: 28) refers only briefly to the act of accusing, leaving it at an observation concerning the performative verb *accuse* realizing the illocutionary act of accusing: “[...]‘accuse’ or ‘blame’ all add the feature of [...] badness to their primary illocutionary point.” A similar observation is made by Fillmore (1970) in a semantic description of verbs of judgment, such as *accuse*, which bring with them the presupposition that something bad or blameworthy has been done by the addressee. Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 179) do not go much further in their account of the act of accusing than observing that an accusation is a public act, which, due to its mode of achievement, has a higher degree of strength compared to similar acts such as blame.

Closer attention to the illocutionary act of *accusing* is paid by Kauffeld (1986, 1998), who formulates the necessary and sufficient conditions for carrying out an accusation. Since it is one of Kauffeld’s aims to provide an account of ‘the essentials of accusing’ by specifying the felicity conditions that must obtain for an accusation, his views

⁸ A dictionary definition could provide the first clues to understand the act of accusing. The Oxford English Dictionary includes the following meanings of the verb to accuse: “1. To charge with a fault; to find fault with, blame, censure. a. Of persons. b. Of things. 2. (With the charge expressed.) To blame, charge, indict. 3. To betray, disclose. Hence, *fig.* to reveal, display, indicate, show, or make known. (*Rare* in mod. Eng., and when found, perhaps in imitation of mod. Fr., in which this is a common sense of *accuser*.)” The Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives two meanings: “1. to charge with a fault or offense... 2. to charge with an offense judicially or by a public process.”

may be taken as a starting point for explaining the communicative and interactional purposes of an accusation of inconsistency.⁹

Kauffeld proposes three basic conditions which the paradigmatic act of accusing (in which a speaker addresses directly his interlocutor) must fulfill: a speaker must “(i) state her charges by saying that some other party (*accused*) did *x*, implying that the speaker believes it may be wrong of *accused* to *x*; and (ii) demand that accused or accused’s representatives answer the charge by way of a denial, admission of guilt, justification, excuse, etc.; and (iii) act as if she intends that the charge and her demands provide her addressee with reason to answer to her charges” (1998: 252). As will be clear, these conditions include the basic requirements for a correct accusation. For each kind of accusation, more conditions apply in which the specific charges are mentioned as well as the expected interactional effects for each case. The conditions formulated by Kauffeld can be taken as a point of departure providing the most salient characteristics of an accusation as an ordinary phenomenon of language use.

In order to specify what is ‘at stake’ in advancing an accusation of inconsistency, I take as a guide the four meta-theoretical principles adopted in the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 52-57). Following these methodological principles is vital because in this way both the *communicative* dimension of an accusation of inconsistency (as an illocutionary act) and the *interactional* dimension (as an act aimed at eliciting certain responses from the addressee) are taken into account. First, the principle of functionalization is followed in this study in order to do justice to the fact that an accusation of inconsistency is put forward through, and in response to, the performance of another illocutionary act (advancing a standpoint). By adopting a perspective based on functionalization, the act at hand is seen as being performed in an argumentative exchange that is viewed as a discussion in which standpoints are defended and refuted. An accusation of inconsistency plays a functional role in this exchange by expressing criticism with regard to the accused’s standpoint. Second, the principle of socialization is pertinent because an accusation of inconsistency is part of a dialogue in which also other people (the direct addressee and/or a third party) are involved. Third, the principle of externalization helps to identify an accusation of inconsistency as a discursive act that creates well-defined commitments both for the speaker and for the addressee, for which they can be held accountable. Fourth, the principle of dialectification is followed because in this way it becomes possible to examine an accusation of inconsistency as a move making an appeal to reasonableness in a critical testing procedure. According to the pragma-dialectical view, an inconsistency is an obstacle to the resolution process (van

⁹ In his account, Kauffeld concentrates on the analysis of the burden of proof incurred by an accuser. He formulates the essential conditions an accusation should fulfill in order to show how different kinds of obligations are created for an accuser as a result of performing the illocutionary act of accusing.

Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a: 95) and pointing out that the other party is inconsistent is part of an effort to remove this obstacle.

Guided by the four methodological principles, I will formulate the constitutive conditions that must be fulfilled for an utterance to count as an accusation of inconsistency. I will specify what the consequences are if making an accusation fails to meet one or more conditions.¹⁰ The speaker must fulfill the constitutive conditions if he wants to perform an accusation of inconsistency. The addressee may regard them as having been fulfilled when he treats an utterance as such an accusation. In principle, as will be shown, they have consequences for both speaker and addressee.¹¹

Similar with other illocutionary acts, there are two groups of conditions applying to an accusation of inconsistency: (1) *identity* conditions, which can be used to recognize an utterance as an accusation of inconsistency, and (2) *correctness* conditions, defining what counts as a correct illocutionary act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 42).¹² The identity conditions, which include the essential condition and the propositional content condition of an accusation of inconsistency, read as follows (Andone 2009a: 155):

Essential condition:

An accusation of inconsistency counts as raising a charge against an addressee for having committed himself to both *p* and *-p* (or informal equivalents thereof) in an attempt to challenge the addressee to provide a response that answers the charge.

¹⁰ These consequences will be discussed based on van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 43-46).

¹¹ The important role played by the addressee is also underlined by Moeschler (1982) and Alston (1991) in their criticism of Searle (1969). Moeschler (1982: 66) demonstrates that the sincerity condition which defines the psychological state of the speaker is not a necessary condition for assertives. In his view, “in the process of communication, what matters is not so much the truth of the belief (that is the psychological state) of the speaker, but its being recognized by the hearer.” Moeschler’s view coincides with van Eemeren and Grootendorst’s (1984: 42) opinion that a speaker is held committed to what he externalizes irrespective of whether he is sincere or not. It is for this reason that van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) propose to refer to the sincerity conditions as responsibility conditions in order to make it clear that, no matter whether the sincerity condition has been met or not, the speaker takes upon himself a certain responsibility to which he can be held. Searle (1969), on the other hand, believes that a genuine promise is made only when the sincerity condition has been fulfilled.

¹² When formulating the conditions that must obtain for a felicitous performance of the illocutionary act of accusation in which an inconsistency is pointed out, I assume that Searle’s (1969) “normal input and output conditions” are fulfilled: the language users act seriously, willingly, mean what they say and are bound by what they say.

Propositional content condition:

Ascription to the addressee of a commitment to both *p* and *-p* (or informal equivalents thereof).

In this formulation of the essential condition that must be fulfilled for an utterance to count as an accusation of inconsistency, I establish an explicit link between the performances of the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary effect of securing a response that answers the charge raised by the speaker against the addressee.¹³ As Kauffeld explains, an accusation always requires the accused to answer for an alleged offence and “the accuser must openly speak with an intention which resembles the purpose speakers have in asking questions” (1998: 252).¹⁴ Kauffeld is of the opinion that the answer should “tell why the accused acted as alleged” (1986: 105). Whether this is the only possible response to an accusation of inconsistency will be discussed in section 2.3, in which I will turn my attention to the perlocutionary effects of an accusation of inconsistency.

A failure to meet the essential condition of an accusation of inconsistency means that the utterance in which the inconsistency is pointed out is not an attempt at securing a response that answers the charge raised. That is to say that the addressee will not be able to recognize the speaker’s utterance as an accusation of inconsistency. It is possible that the speaker has not even performed the illocutionary act of an accusation of inconsistency. He may, for example, merely have pointed out that an inconsistency is at issue for the information of a third party.

The formulation of the propositional content condition indicates that a charge of an alleged inconsistency is based on the assumption that an assertion or a non-verbal act have been performed before. The speaker expresses that the assertion or non-verbal act performed at the moment at which the discussion takes place create commitments that are incompatible with commitments assumed by the same speaker on the same issue in the past.

¹³ Searle (1969: 71) suggests that the perlocutionary effect to be achieved by the speaker should be included in the formulation of the essential condition of an illocutionary act such as a directive when he states that “requesting is, as a matter of its essential condition, an attempt to get a hearer to do something.” The attempt to get a hearer to do something is referred to as the perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary act of requesting. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 43) formulate the essential condition of the speech act of argumentation by connecting it with an attempt at achieving the perlocutionary effect of convincing, with which argumentation is conventionally linked. These authors have made it their principle that in the case of all illocutionary acts, including assertives, the intended perlocutionary effects are the core elements in the formulation of the essential condition.

¹⁴ The same is suggested by Drew (1978) in his analysis of the grounds for the accusation of a witness’ action.

If the propositional content condition is not fulfilled, this means either that the speaker has not expressed a proposition or that he has expressed a proposition in which no inconsistent commitments are ascribed to the addressee. In the first case, the assertion put forward is void and there is nothing for the addressee to respond to. In the second case, the speaker may have expressed a speech act with a different illocutionary force (for example, blaming), and the addressee would have to respond to this other act.

In the case in which an inconsistency is pointed out, the felicitous performance of an accusation requires furthermore the fulfillment of a set of correctness conditions. These conditions include the preparatory conditions and the sincerity conditions. The latter, in van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1984: 21) terms, count as responsibility conditions. These two kinds of conditions are formulated as follows (Andone 2009a: 156):

Preparatory conditions:

- (a) The speaker believes that the addressee who is inconsistent will accept that an inconsistency is indeed at issue;
- (b) The speaker believes that the addressee will acknowledge that the presence of an inconsistency obstructs the argumentative exchange he and his interlocutor are engaged in;
- (c) The speaker believes that the addressee will take on the obligation to provide a response that answers the charge of inconsistency.

Sincerity conditions:

- (a) The speaker believes that the addressee is inconsistent;
- (b) The speaker believes that the presence of an inconsistency constitutes an obstruction to the exchange he and his interlocutor are engaged in;
- (c) The speaker wants the addressee to respond in such a way that he answers the charge.

If the first preparatory condition for the illocutionary act of an accusation of inconsistency is not met, the performance of the illocutionary act is superfluous, as it is a waste of time to express an accusation of inconsistency if the speaker believes that the addressee will not even accept having committed himself to an inconsistency. The same happens in case the second preparatory condition is not met. It is a waste of effort to raise a charge when the speaker already expects that the addressee will not acknowledge any wrongdoing. The addressee, for example, may have a different view of inconsistency according to which

holding inconsistent commitments is not an obstruction to a discussion.¹⁵ If the third preparatory condition is not met, this implies that the speaker does not believe that the addressee will take on the obligation to respond to the charge. In that case, the performance of the illocutionary act is pointless from the accuser's perspective. In practice, it depends on the accused whether this assumption is correct or not.

If the first sincerity condition is not met, this implies that the speaker acts as if he believes that the addressee is inconsistent, whereas he does not believe that. The speaker's utterance can then be described as a case of lying. Failure to fulfill the second sincerity condition implies that the speaker does not believe that the presence of an inconsistency is an obstruction to the argumentative exchange in which the participants are involved. The speaker wrongfully acts as if he believes that there is an obstruction, whereas, in fact, he does not believe this. Failure to meet the third sincerity condition implies that the speaker deceits the addressee by pretending to have the intention of obtaining an answer that he does not want to obtain.

Turning back to the essential condition for an accusation of inconsistency, I linked the performance of the illocutionary act at hand with securing a response that answers the charge. In terms of van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1984) distinction between the inherent perlocutionary effect of acceptance and consecutive consequences, the responses to an accusation of inconsistency can be said to constitute the consecutive consequences.

2.3 Responses to an accusation of inconsistency

In the case of illocutionary acts such as an accusation of inconsistency, characterized by an essential condition in which a goal to be achieved with the addressee is indicated, there is an inherent perlocutionary effect of *accepting* preceding any consecutive consequences (such as responding by dealing with the charge). According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 57), acceptance is a commissive illocutionary act performed by the addressee which entails certain commitments with regard to his further behavior.¹⁶ The way in which these commitments are brought about can be identified on the basis of the

¹⁵ In formulating the correction conditions, it is assumed that the participants to the discussion share the idea that being inconsistent is an obstruction to the discussion. Should the participants adopt, for example, paraconsistent logic (Priest 2006), which does not consider an inconsistency as obstructive in a discussion, the preparatory conditions do not apply.

¹⁶ According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 57), when a speaker performs a speech act, minimally he wants to obtain the perlocutionary effect of acceptance and optimally he wants to bring about other consequences as an extension of the acceptance. The consecutive consequences are different for each illocutionary act.

relevant identity and correctness conditions applying to the illocution of *accepting* (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 71). As Cohen remarks, acceptance is “a speech act of assent whereby a person may orally (or in writing) agree to the truth of a proposition whether or not this oral (or written) agreement accords with his actual state of mind” (1995: 23) and “people are held responsible and accountable for what they accept or fail to accept.” This acceptance implies, among other things, acceptance of the consecutive consequences of the act and creates a presumption about how the addressee will act as far as he may be presumed to know these consequences.¹⁷

With regard to the *propositional content*, the acceptance of an accusation of inconsistency concerns the inconsistency pointed out by the accuser. The *essential condition* is that the acceptance must count as an act of agreement with the speaker’s charge and consequently as an expression of the success of the speaker to secure a response dealing with the charge. The *preparatory condition* stipulates that the speaker who performs the act of acceptance of an accusation of inconsistency must believe that the one expressing the accusation of inconsistency attempts seriously to secure a response to the accusation. As a result, he becomes committed to providing a response to the charge. The *sincerity condition* indicates that the speaker commits himself to the belief that the proposition expressed in the accusation is correct.

In short, accepting an accusation of inconsistency can be considered to involve the following: (a) the performance by the addressee of the speech act of assent by which it is admitted that the speech act expressed by the person putting forward the accusation was understandably and correctly performed¹⁸ and (b) the addressee’s immediate commitment to provide a response dealing with the charge raised, as indicated in the essential condition of the illocutionary act of accusation of inconsistency. Which are the responses dealing with the charge of inconsistency?

In order to answer this question, I will start from examining the responses to an accusation identified by other authors. That there is always a link between the illocutionary act of *accusation* (in this case an accusation of inconsistency) and the perlocution of *responding to the charge raised* (in this case dealing with the inconsistency) is similar to other authors’ views. How do other authors specify the responses to an accusation? Austin, for one, is of the opinion that the accused, or someone on his behalf “will try to defend his conduct or get him out of it. One way of going about this is to admit flatly that he, X, did

¹⁷ This observation coincides with Hamblin’s (1970a, 1970b) explanation of commitments. Hamblin points out that as soon as commitments are incurred, they entitle speakers to hold each other accountable for what they have expressed and for the consequences created by these acts.

¹⁸ Rogers (1978) refers to the act of accepting as amounting to a tacit admittance by the addressee that he understood the speech act, that he recognizes its performance as correct, and that the act becomes part of the common ground of the conversation in which he is involved.

do that very thing, A, but to argue that it was a good thing, or the right or sensible thing, or a permissible thing to do, either in general or at least in the special circumstances of the occasion. To take this line is to *justify* the action, to give reasons for doing it: not to say, to brazen it out, to glory in it, or the like. A different way of going about it is to admit that it wasn't a good thing to have done, but to argue that it is not quite fair or correct to say *baldly* 'X did A.' [...] In the one defence, briefly, we accept responsibility but deny it was bad: in the other, we admit it was bad but don't accept full, or even, any responsibility" (1956/1957: 1, original italics). Kauffeld (1998) remarks briefly that admissions of guilt, denial, justification, explanation, apology or excuse are appropriate responses to an accusation. Similarly, Drew points out that "it routinely happens that if an utterance is heard as an accusation, then this can set some sort of expectation concerning what kind(s) of utterances will, or, should follow: that is, there is a conventional procedure whereby the class(es) to which an utterance following after an accusation can be expected to belong to is limited to denials/acceptances/modifiers" (1978: 5). By modifiers, Drew refers to justifications and excuses.

Most notable in the case of these authors is that they lack criteria with the help of which they identify the responses to an accusation. A direct consequence of this is that any other response than those mentioned will do as long as it seems appropriate to the charge. To avoid such problems in identifying the possible responses to an accusation of inconsistency, a threefold distinction made by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 26-28) with regard to consecutive consequences (the responses dealing with the charge are the consecutive consequences of the perlocutionary effect *accept*) can be useful. First, a difference needs to be made between accidental and intended consecutive consequences. Doing justice to the principle of externalization mentioned earlier, I will concentrate on the responses to an accusation of inconsistency put forward with certain intentions, communicated verbally in the utterance performed. Second, a distinction needs to be drawn between consequences that are not brought about on the basis of an understanding of the accusation of inconsistency and consequences that are brought about by understanding. Understanding the accusation of inconsistency is a necessary preliminary for responding to the charge, as understanding always precedes acceptance. Third, van Eemeren and Grootendorst establish a distinction between consequences brought about on the basis of rational considerations on the part of addressee and those that are not the result of rational decision-making. The principle of dialectification invoked before calls for an exclusive interest in responses that are achieved on rational grounds.

Thus, the basic criteria to be applied in identifying responses to an accusation of inconsistency are that they should be intentional, brought about after understanding the charge and realized on rational grounds. In order to establish in a more systematic and precise way which types of responses meet these basic criteria in the context of an

argumentative confrontation, I will make use of the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage.

The dialectical profile of the confrontation stage specifies the sequential patterns of moves which two discussants in a critical discussion can make or have to make (van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans 2007a, 2007b). The moves are relevant to the dialectical goal of the confrontation stage to define the difference of opinion. The profile includes all dialectical routes which arguers can follow for the achievement of the dialectical goal of defining the difference of opinion and are therefore seen as normative representations. Because the moves in the profile could potentially make a contribution to a rational resolution of the difference of opinion, they are analytically relevant (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992a), i.e. they constitute an ideal argumentative confrontation aimed at a reasonable resolution. The various routes in the profile do not represent a description of how argumentative exchanges proceed in reality, but how an argumentative confrontation would proceed if it was aimed only at reasonably defining the difference of opinion. Starting from the illocutionary acts specified by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 105) in the ideal model of a critical discussion, Mohammed (2009: 31) sketches the basic dialectical profile of a single dispute (*Figure 1.1*) in the following way:

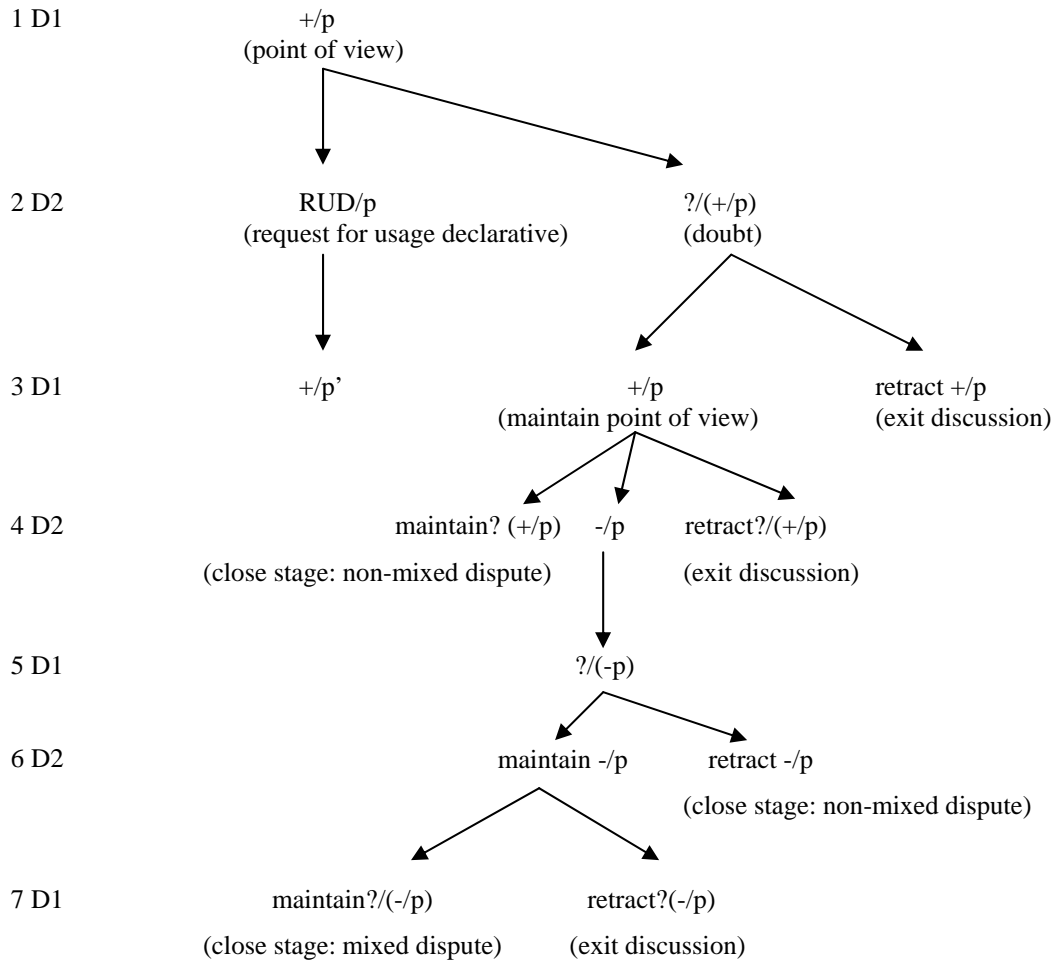


Figure 2.1 Basic dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a single dispute

In this dialectical profile of the confrontation stage the discussion is initiated by a protagonist (discussant 1, D1) who advances a positive standpoint (+/p) that is either doubted (?/+p) by an antagonist (discussant 2, D2) or required to be clarified by means of a usage declarative (RUD/p). In the latter case, the protagonist has to provide a usage declarative that clarifies the positive standpoint (+/p'). In response to the antagonist's doubt, the protagonist can either maintain his positive standpoint or retract it. In case the protagonist maintains his positive standpoint, the antagonist has three possibilities to react: he can maintain his doubt, he can advance a negative standpoint (-/p) or he can retract his doubt. When the antagonist advances a negative standpoint, the protagonist may respond by doubting it (?/(-p)). The antagonist may in turn react by maintaining the negative standpoint or by retracting it. In the last turn, the protagonist can either maintain his doubt regarding the antagonist's maintained negative standpoint or retract his doubt.¹⁹ By

¹⁹ For a complete account of all the dialectical routes that can be followed in the confrontation stage, see Mohammed (2009: 31-34).

following the outlined sequential patterns of moves, participants can obtain three kinds of outcomes in the confrontation stage: the discussion ends immediately (*turn 3*, *turn 4* and *turn 7*), the stage is closed with a non-mixed dispute (*turn 4* and *turn 6*) or the stage is closed with a mixed dispute (*turn 7*).

This outline of the analytically relevant moves in the confrontation stage is not a representation of the moves which arguers carry out in practice. In argumentative exchanges as they occur in reality, arguers often fail to achieve a definition of the difference of opinion that does not hinder the critical testing procedure or they may simply stop the process. Moreover, arguers do not necessarily perform all the moves prescribed in the dialectical profile. For instance, an antagonist (D2) can express doubt by means of an opposite standpoint immediately after the positive standpoint has been advanced. To do justice to the gap that exists between reality and the ideal model, van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans (2007b) propose to regard the illocutionary acts playing a constructive role in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits (advancing a standpoint, casting doubt, etc.) as slots. That is to say that they could be realized in practice in different kinds of ways (by asking a question, using a certain presentational device, etc.) filling up these slots, which are then reconstructed into one of the illocutionary acts represented in the dialectical profile. The reconstruction makes clearer the argumentative function of each move in the context of defining a difference of opinion. For example, a rhetorical question can be assigned the argumentative function of expressing a standpoint and is thus a realization of the slot of advancing a standpoint.

Taking into account the analytically relevant moves from the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage, carrying out an accusation of inconsistency can be seen as a way of expressing criticism concerning the protagonist's standpoint.²⁰ The responses to the accusation of inconsistency will be instantiations of the slots from the dialectical profile that are adjacent to the slots filled by the charge. That means that an accusation of inconsistency fills in a slot in a dialectical route, the continuation of which is filled in by the response to the charge. With the help of some invented examples, I will illustrate which slots from the dialectical profile an accusation of inconsistency and the corresponding responses can fill in.

One of the slots which an accusation of inconsistency can fill in is that of casting doubt at turn 2 in the profile. At this turn, the antagonist criticizes the protagonist for a standpoint advanced at turn 1. This dialectical route can be continued by the protagonist in two ways: either he maintains his standpoint (*P1* below) or he retracts his standpoint (*P2* below):

²⁰ Obviously, an accusation of inconsistency can also be carried out by a protagonist, but in this study I concentrate on an accusation of inconsistency put forward by an interviewer playing the role of antagonist and on the politician's responses to it, playing the role of protagonist.

P: I think students should pay higher fees.

A: How can you say that when three years ago you were in favor of lowering fees?

P1: Well, I now think students should pay higher fees.

P2: Well, indeed, maybe it is not such a good idea.

In this example, A's accusation of inconsistency is the realization of an expression of doubt concerning P's standpoint that students should pay higher fees. More precisely, A's accusation conveys that P cannot hold this standpoint because it shows a commitment to an increase in fees that is incompatible with an earlier commitment that students should not pay higher fees. In response to that, P can maintain his standpoint (P1) or he can retract his standpoint (P2). By making the latter choice, the difference of opinion ends in the confrontation stage, because the basic ingredients (at least a standpoint and doubt regarding this standpoint) are not there anymore.

Apart from the simple case in which a protagonist advances a standpoint (turn 1) and the antagonist casts doubt on it (turn 2), in the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage the antagonist can advance the opposite standpoint (turn 2) immediately after the protagonist advances a positive standpoint (turn 1). Van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans (2007a: 26) observe that when this is the case two situations can be created: (a) the antagonist reduces the opposite standpoint to doubt (turn 4) after the protagonist maintains his standpoint (turn 3), and (b) the antagonist maintains the opposite standpoint (turn 4) after the protagonist maintains his standpoint (turn 3). Because the antagonist's opposite standpoint in the first case is reduced to doubt, van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans describe the difference of opinion as non-mixed. In the second case in which the antagonist maintains the opposite standpoint, the difference of opinion is mixed. The two situations just outlined can be represented in the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage as in Figure 1.2 (the opposite standpoint is reduced to doubt) and Figure 1.3 (the opposite standpoint is maintained):

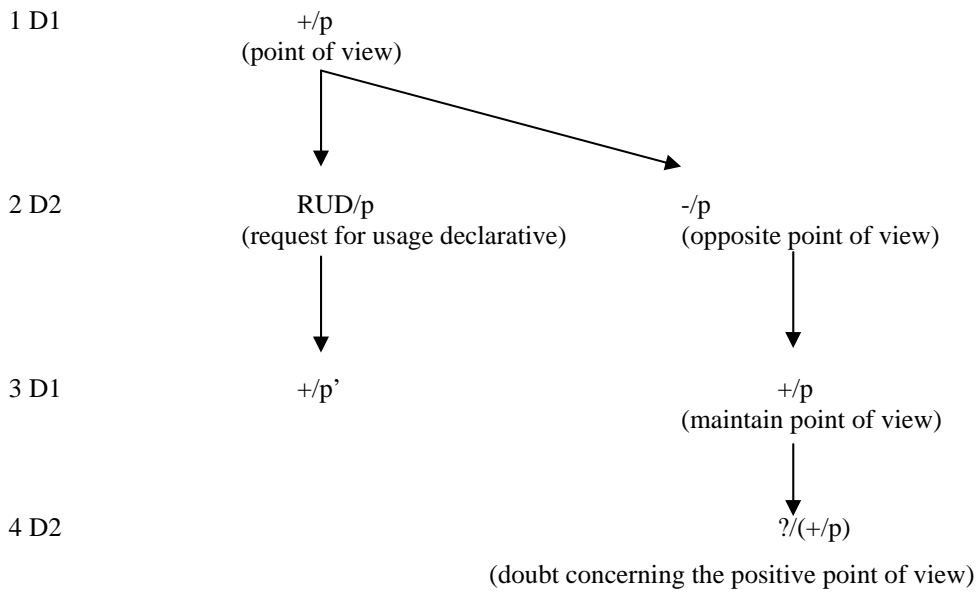


Figure 2.2 The first four turns of a dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a single non-mixed dispute in which the opposite standpoint is reduced to doubt

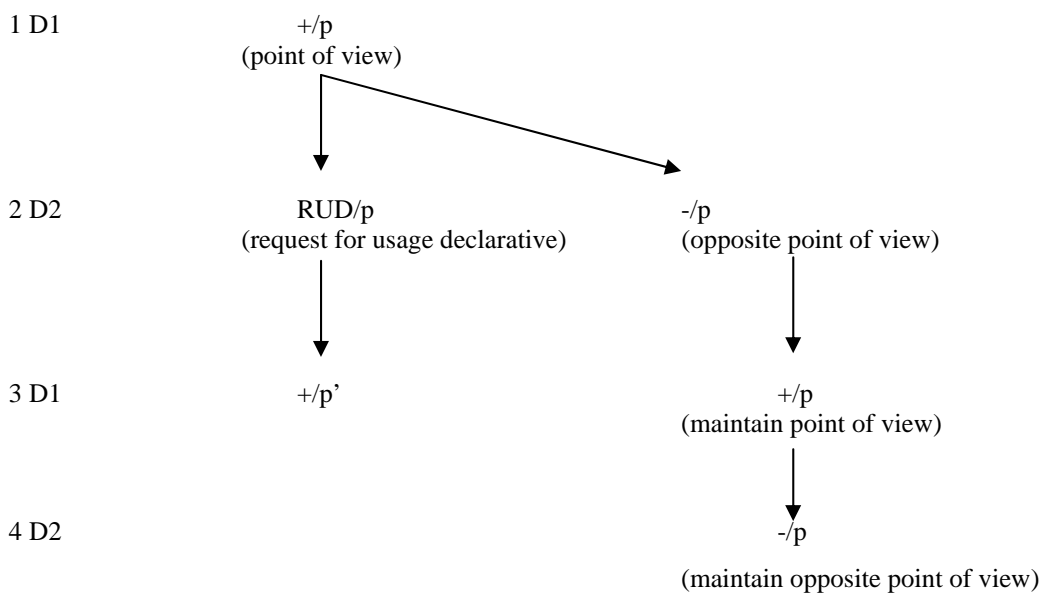


Figure 2.3 The first four turns of a dialectical profile of the confrontation stage of a single mixed dispute

In the case in which the antagonist advances the opposite standpoint immediately after the protagonist advances a positive standpoint and subsequently reduces it to doubt, an

accusation of inconsistency can fill in the slot of casting doubt on the protagonist's maintained positive standpoint. Such is the case in the following invented example:

P: I think students should pay higher fees.

A: I don't think so. The fees they pay are high enough.

P: Well, not if you compare them to other countries. Then you'll realize that students should really pay higher fees.

A: It's strange you say that. Three years ago you were in favor of lowering fees.

P1: Well, I now think students should pay higher fees.

P2: Well, maybe indeed they are high enough.

This example shows that when the antagonist reduces the opposite standpoint to doubt (as A does in his second reply) and criticizes the protagonist for being inconsistent, the latter can maintain his standpoint (*P1*), indicating that he does not accept the antagonist's criticism, and he can retract his standpoint (*P2*) to indicate that the antagonist's criticism of inconsistency is correct.

In the case of a single mixed difference of opinion, an accusation of inconsistency can be made by means of the move of advancing the opposite standpoint, as in the following example:

P: We have a realistic plan for dealing with so many immigrants.

A: I wouldn't think your plan, which so obviously goes against your party's principles, is realistic at all.

P1: I think it is. It does not go against any of our principles.

P2: If you think of our principle of equality, indeed you can say it's not realistic.

In this example, the antagonist's accusation that the protagonist's plan goes against his party principles, embedded in the expression of the opposite standpoint that the protagonist's plan is not realistic, is rejected by the protagonist who denies that the plan is not realistic as the antagonist claims (*P1*). On second thoughts, the protagonist accepts the antagonist's charge (*P2*) by granting a concession: if one thinks of the principle of equality, his plan is indeed not realistic.

In addition to the slots of casting doubt and advancing the opposite standpoint, an accusation of inconsistency can fill in the slot of maintaining a negative standpoint at turn 6 in the dialectical profile of the confrontation stage.²¹ Just like in the previous case, in

²¹ An accusation of inconsistency can also fill in the slot of maintaining doubt at turn 4 concerning the protagonist's standpoint. But because the antagonist's maintained doubt at turn 4 ends the confrontation stage at this point, the protagonist cannot provide a response in this stage.

which the accusation of inconsistency filled in the slot of casting doubt at turn 2, the protagonist has two possibilities for responding: in this case either he maintains doubt regarding the antagonist's negative standpoint (*P1* below) or he retracts his doubt concerning the antagonist's maintained negative standpoint (*P2* below):

P: It's quite strange that your party is considering increasing tuition fees.

A: How can you be so sure that we are considering that?

P: I'm quite sure, actually.

A: Well, if I were you I would be less sure of that. We are not considering increasing tuition fees.

P: You want to bet?

A: I don't have time for betting. I can only repeat to you that we are not considering increasing tuition fees. Instead of losing your time judging me you should mind your own business. The word goes that you voted against religious schools, while you had a more positive attitude towards them last time I heard you talking about it.

P1: I know what I'm talking about. You'll see.

P2: OK, if you insist, maybe I'm wrong, then.

This confrontation is initiated by P expressing a standpoint that A's party is considering increasing tuition fees, which A doubts. In the next turn, P upholds his expressed standpoint, in response to which A chooses to advance an opposite standpoint according to which the party he represents is not considering increasing tuition fees. By means of this move, A conveys both that he upholds doubt concerning P's expressed standpoint and that he expresses a negative standpoint. The only option for P is to cast doubt on A's negative standpoint. In response to P's doubt, A upholds his negative standpoint and launches also an accusation of inconsistency against P. P has the freedom of either maintaining his doubt concerning the negative standpoint (*P1*) or retracting it (*P2*). If the first option is chosen, then the disagreement about this standpoint is confirmed. The confrontation stage closes with a definition of the difference of opinion as a mixed dispute in which the arguers have opposite standpoints. Furthermore, by upholding doubt concerning A's negative standpoint, P maintains his own positive standpoint. If P chooses the other option, of retracting his doubt concerning A's negative standpoint, the disagreement about this standpoint ends at this point. As a consequence of taking the second option, P implicitly retracts his own positive standpoint: he cannot maintain his positive standpoint having no doubt about its opposite.

To summarize, because an accusation of inconsistency is a form of criticism that can either be accepted or not, the protagonist of a standpoint has two analytically relevant

options for responding to a charge that his position is inconsistent with another position advanced previously: he can maintain his standpoint (and defend it later), and he can give in to the antagonist's criticism by retracting his standpoint.²² Do both options meet the three basic criteria distinguished earlier in relation to the consecutive consequences of an illocutionary act: intended, based on understanding and based on rational considerations? My answer to this question is that maintaining a standpoint fails to meet the first criterion and only the retraction of a standpoint meets all three criteria. An accusation of inconsistency, it will be recalled, is an illocutionary act put forward with certain intentions. An accuser wants to obtain *minimally* the perlocutionary effect of acceptance and *optimally* he wants to bring about other consequences as an extension of the acceptance. More specifically, the accuser wants to obtain minimally admission of 'guilt' and optimally he wants to secure a response that eliminates the alleged inconsistency. This does not mean that maintaining a standpoint is not a possible way in which the accused can respond to a charge of inconsistency. It only means that the sole *intended* response to the accusation is admitting that the charge is correct and that subsequently the inconsistency that is pointed out needs to be eliminated. The only option that conveys admission of the accusation and is at the same time an attempt at eliminating the alleged inconsistency is retracting a standpoint.²³

2.4 Conclusion

An accusation of inconsistency is an illocutionary act by means of which a speaker conveys criticism of his addressee: he points at the opposition between two of the addressee's statements or between his statements and his actions. The accusation of inconsistency is aimed at making the other party understand that he is being criticized for having done something which obstructs the discussion in which the participants are involved. Besides this communicative purpose, an accusation of inconsistency is made with the interactional purpose of obtaining a response from the addressee that deals with the charge raised.

²² By taking the first option, the difference of opinion may close the confrontation stage with a non-mixed or a mixed dispute, and by taking the second option the only possible outcome is that the discussion ceases to exist.

²³ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958/1976: 262-263) and Hamblin (1970b: 264) are also of the opinion that an inconsistency needs to be eliminated by retracting one of the inconsistent commitments. Likewise, Cohen (1995: 36) remarks that "acceptance is inherently motivated towards the elimination of inconsistency."

In an argumentative confrontation in which a protagonist advances a standpoint and an antagonist casts doubt on it, an accusation of inconsistency is a means used by the antagonist to point out that the protagonist is committed to two inconsistent standpoints. That is to say, the accusation criticizes the acceptability of the protagonist's current standpoint because it is the opposite of another standpoint advanced by the same protagonist on the same issue on a different occasion or earlier in the same discussion. The antagonist's criticism can be the instantiation of three moves in the ideal model of an argumentative confrontation: the move of casting doubt on a standpoint, the move of advancing the opposite standpoint and the move of maintaining the negative standpoint. Depending on the kind of criticism that the accusation instantiates, two types of responses that answer the criticism are possible: maintaining the standpoint and retracting the standpoint at issue. Although both types of responses are options a protagonist can choose from in order to take away the accuser's doubt to respond to the charge of inconsistency, the accuser's preference goes for the protagonist at least accepting that the charge is correct. If he is to give the preferred response, the protagonist needs to retract a standpoint in order to accept the charge and thereby admit that the accusation is correct.