

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - The Reasonableness Of Retracting A Standpoint In A Political Interview



## *1. Responding to an accusation of inconsistency in a political interview*

Accusing a politician of being inconsistent is common practice for interviewers in a political interview. In a political interview, interviewers are interested in gaining information from their interlocutors but, more often than not, their questions require the politician to clarify and justify his views. Questions by means of which an inconsistency is pointed out are an excellent means of urging the politician to justify his views before the listening, reading or television-watching audience, that is, in fact, the primary addressee in a political interview. **[i]** The audience presumably values political consistency and expects a politician who is inconsistent to account for this lack of consistency.

A charge of inconsistency may affect the politician's image in the eyes of the public negatively. The politician, being well aware of the possible damage, more often than not tries to answer in a way that makes him no longer look inconsistent. Possible responses, among many others, are avoiding discussing the criticism of inconsistency, giving the inconsistency a positive connotation and retracting the earlier standpoint so that the politician is no longer committed to two inconsistent standpoints.

In this paper, I will concentrate on the cases in which the politician retracts a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency. I will be concerned with the evaluation of such responses from a pragma-dialectical perspective. **[ii]** The argumentative move at hand will be seen as an instance of strategic manoeuvring reconstructed as part of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion **[iii]** by means of which a politician is taken to be dialectically interested in defining clearly the difference of opinion and rhetorically in doing so in his own favor. The evaluation of the politician's move of retracting a standpoint will be carried out by applying a set of soundness conditions. These conditions will constitute the criteria for identifying the move as reasonable or unreasonable.

## 2. *Reasonable confrontational strategic manoeuvring*

In the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, the arguers' concern is to define the difference of opinion without hindering the critical testing procedure. Viewed from a dialectical perspective, the arguers are interested in clearly defining the issues that are at the heart of the difference of opinion and making explicit the positions they assume regarding these issues. From a rhetorical perspective, they are concerned with steering the confrontation towards a favorable definition of the difference of opinion and assuming a position that increases the chances of making their standpoint acceptable (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002). Confrontational strategic manoeuvring is considered reasonable as long as the combined pursuit of defining the difference of opinion and doing so favorably does not violate one of the discussion rules in accordance with which the critical testing procedure is applied. **[iv]**

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007, p. 380) have formulated three general soundness conditions for strategic manoeuvring. These conditions make clear what the general requirements are for a move not to violate the rules for critical discussion. In accordance with these general conditions, it can be judged whether the norms specified in the rules for critical discussion are violated. According to them, every instance of strategic manoeuvring, whether it is carried out in the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage or the concluding stage of a critical discussion, should in principle (a) *enable* an analytically relevant continuation of the dialectical route that is taken and should *lead to one of the outcomes* of the discussion stage concerned (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14); (b) *respond to the preceding move* in the dialectical route that is taken (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14), and (c) be *formulated* in such a way that it can be *interpreted* as enabling a relevant continuation and being responsive to the preceding move (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2009, p. 14).

Each discussion stage, however, has its specific strategic maneuvers which need to be evaluated differently depending on the outcome pursued at the stage concerned. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the soundness conditions in accordance with which *confrontational* strategic manoeuvring to which the politician's manoeuvring concerned belongs can be evaluated.

Taking the first general soundness condition into account, confrontational strategic manoeuvring should further the achievement of any of the possible

outcomes of the confrontation stage: creating a non-mixed difference of opinion, creating a mixed difference of opinion or ending the discussion. [v] Although these outcomes are not all favorable to an arguer, a participant who maneuvers strategically should allow for any of them to be reached and should not prevent the other participant from taking a dialectical route that may lead to a different outcome than the favored one. For example, the outcome favored by an antagonist who advances an accusation of inconsistency in the confrontation stage is to bring the process of defining the difference of opinion to an end. This outcome can be achieved by making the protagonist retract his standpoint in response to the accusation. In order for an accusation of inconsistency to be a sound move, however, it should leave open the protagonist's option to maintain his standpoint. Maintaining a standpoint could lead to a non-mixed or a mixed difference of opinion, outcomes which are both unfavorable for an antagonist who is making an accusation of inconsistency (Mohammed 2009).

The second condition that needs to be fulfilled for confrontational strategic manoeuvring not to hinder the critical testing procedure is that the move should be a relevant response to the preceding move. This condition requires that an arguer should ensure that his move is relevant to the move of the other party in the discussion. For instance, in the confrontation stage, a request for clarification should be responded to by means of a usage declarative that provides the expected clarification (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

Taking the third general soundness condition into account, confrontational strategic manoeuvring should be performed so clearly that the other party understands that the move is relevant to the previous move as well as that it aims to obtain a particular interactional effect. This condition is meant to eliminate any hindrance to achieving one of the possible outcomes of the discussion caused by the use of unclear language. For example, an accusation of inconsistency needs to be performed so clearly that the accused understands that the accuser attributes to him two inconsistent commitments and demands him to retract one of them (Mohammed 2009).

Each argumentative move that is an instantiation of confrontational strategic manoeuvring should meet the soundness conditions just outlined. Although each move should meet these conditions, specific soundness conditions need to be developed. Such conditions will provide the specific criteria for deciding when a rule for critical discussion is violated in each particular case. For example, every

form of criticism in the confrontation stage needs to meet the three general soundness conditions in order not to hinder the critical testing procedure. However, an accusation of inconsistency (as a form of criticism) needs to be evaluated by taking into account the following: (a) whether the accuser is justified in attributing the two inconsistent commitments (the second soundness condition), (b) whether the move is clear enough for the accused to understand what he should do in response to such a charge (the third soundness condition), and (c) whether the move precludes the accused from accepting or not accepting the accusation (the first soundness condition) (Mohammed 2009).

My analysis of cases in which an interviewer accuses various British politicians of being inconsistent revealed that the politicians who respond by retracting a standpoint acknowledge that there is an inconsistency but try to turn the discussion in their favor by reformulating the original standpoint (Andone 2010). In the political domain, the politician's role obliges him to avoid simply conceding that he was wrong. Reformulating the original standpoint is an effective way to live up to the institutional expectations while accepting that there is an inconsistency which cannot be maintained.

By reformulating his standpoint, a politician attempts to define the difference of opinion in such a way that the interviewer retracts his doubt concerning the standpoint and ideally he will not make another accusation of inconsistency. After all, a politician who constantly gives room to doubts about the consistency of his words or actions is perceived at least as unclear, indecisive and lacking well-founded principles. The politician's rhetorical attempt to define the difference of opinion in his favor has to be balanced by the dialectical attempt to remain within the boundaries of reasonableness. In order to judge whether the pursued balance is indeed realized I will formulate soundness conditions for the strategic manoeuvring concerned. In order to decide when a rule for critical discussion has been violated, criteria are necessary for judging whether the norms stipulated in the rules for critical discussion have been violated. It is precisely these criteria which my set of soundness conditions will provide for assessing the reasonableness of a politician's strategic manoeuvring.

### *3. Conditions for reasonably retracting a standpoint*

The first soundness condition for confrontational strategic manoeuvring stipulates that favorable as well as unfavorable outcomes resulting from defining the difference of opinion may both be reached after the move has been made. For the

manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, this implies that the protagonist should not hinder the antagonist in taking dialectical routes that lead to one of the three possible outcomes of the confrontation stage. In my characterization of the strategic manoeuvring concerned (Andone 2010), I have shown that the favorable outcomes at the juncture at which an accusation of inconsistency is made are as follows: leading the antagonist to retract his doubt (in a non-mixed discussion), and leading the antagonist to retract the opposite standpoint (in a mixed discussion). An unfavorable outcome of the strategic manoeuvring concerned is reached when the antagonist maintains his criticism expressed by means of mere doubt or by advancing and/or upholding the opposite standpoint.

The requirement that favorable and unfavorable outcomes should not be precluded means that the protagonist's manoeuvring should leave open two options for the antagonist: (a) accepting the protagonist's strategic manoeuvring by retracting his criticism and no longer advancing new criticism, and (b) not accepting the protagonist's strategic manoeuvring by upholding the current criticism and/or advancing new criticism. In order for the protagonist's confrontational manoeuvring to leave open these two options, the following *condition of openness* needs to be fulfilled:

Confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should leave open all the other party's available options to continue the current discussion, including the option of advancing a new accusation of inconsistency.

The condition of openness provides a criterion for judging whether the norm for critical discussion specified in the Freedom Rule has been violated. The Freedom Rule stipulates that "discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into discussion" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). The condition of openness is not fulfilled in the case in which the antagonist's freedom to advance moves that realize illocutionary acts consisting of the illocutionary negation of the commissive *accepting* is obstructed. Just as the protagonist has the right to replace his original standpoint by advancing a modified standpoint, the antagonist should also enjoy the right to advance new criticism against the same protagonist. The freedom of advancing new criticism includes advancing another accusation of inconsistency.

The violation of the condition of openness by a protagonist who maneuvers

strategically by retracting a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency and advancing a modified standpoint blocks the revision and flux of opinions, because the antagonist is prevented from exercising his rights in the discussion. This blocking may obstruct the process of resolving a difference of opinion in several ways. Two prominent cases of possible violations of the condition of openness are putting pressure on the antagonist by threatening him with sanctions and by attacking him personally. A protagonist who resorts to threats violates the antagonist's freedom by means of an *argumentum ad baculum* aimed at eliminating the antagonist from the discussion. A protagonist launching a personal attack becomes guilty of an *ad hominem* fallacy aimed at silencing the opponent.

In the activity type of a political interview, it seems sensible to assume that politicians will often find subtle ways of violating the condition of openness. This assumption stems from the institutional characteristic that politicians try to give an account of their words or actions while striving at the same time to create a positive image of themselves for the audience at home. The politicians' aspirations to appear as political representatives whose words and actions are up to standard motivate them to design their strategic manoeuvring in such a way that the interviewer is prevented from advancing and maintaining impending criticism. Since obviously, by virtue of his role, the interviewer has to criticize the politicians so that they answer for their words and actions, the politicians can as a rule only hope to soften the harshness with which they are questioned.

The politician's attempt at minimizing the critique with which he is confronted in a political interview can sometimes go as far as trying to preclude the interviewer from continuing to pursue a critical line of inquiry. Using very subtle means of attacking the interviewer, the politician tries to prevent his interlocutor from putting forward criticism, especially such fierce criticism as an accusation of inconsistency. Such is the case in an argumentative exchange from the BBC *Politics Show* in which Jon Sopel interviewed Alan Duncan on December 9, 2007. At the time, Duncan was Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in Great Britain. Asked by Sopel to express a view on the issue of nuclear energy, Duncan advances a standpoint according to which he favors the use of nuclear energy. This standpoint is met with criticism, because, according to Sopel, it is inconsistent with a previously expressed standpoint. Sopel quotes Duncan's earlier words which are an indication of an unfavorable

attitude towards the use of nuclear energy. Because denying the inconsistency is almost impossible, Duncan's remaining option is to distance himself from the current standpoint, which he does in the following way:

(1)

Alan Duncan:

*I think what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy. I think it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words and I think the policy as it has always been is exactly as I've just explained.* [vi]

In his reply, Duncan introduces a dissociation. Without doing so explicitly, he assumes a distinction between the nuclear waste *policy* (of which he now approves) and nuclear waste *practice* (which he claims to have opposed earlier). [vii] The introduction of the dissociation enables Duncan to give a particular interpretation of his standpoint - presented as the less important one (concerning the practice) - in which he gives up this standpoint, while maintaining another interpretation of the standpoint (concerning the policy) presented as the most important one.

The tactic employed by Duncan is potentially rhetorically advantageous, because it connects well with the preference of the watching audience for a consistent politician. Duncan does away with the inconsistency by claiming that his standpoint now concerns the policy, while in the past it concerned the practice. But the attempt to be rhetorically strong transgresses the bounds of reasonableness. The way in which his strategic manoeuvring is formulated is an attempt at precluding Soper from maintaining his criticism. Duncan's remark that *it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* is an indirect attack on Soper conveying two things: (a) that it is of no use to discuss the issue of being inconsistent (*it's unhelpful*), and (b) that Soper is obsessed with minor aspects (*it's unhelpful to get hooked on two words* contains the presupposition that Soper "got hooked on two words").

By means of this double attack, Duncan tries to put an end to the discussion about the Conservatives' view on the use of nuclear energy. In the first place, his attempt could prevent Soper from maintaining his criticism because it highlights that his constant questioning on the matter is simply unhelpful: according to Duncan, the Conservatives' position at the moment is obviously related to the policy, which is a different matter than the previous position which had to do with the practice of using nuclear energy. Further discussion on this, Duncan seems to

suggest, is not useful because things are clear now. Presenting Soper's questioning as unhelpful can prevent him from going on with his line of inquiry. Because the interview is directed at an audience, which judges the performance of the politician as well as that of the interviewer, if Soper were to continue in the same way, it would look as if he was nitpicking. This is obviously an image which Soper would rather avoid in a political interview. Had the same remark been used in a conversation between friends, the other party would have had more freedom to continue the discussion by maintaining criticism. There would be no concern for an audience that could prevent him from persisting in criticizing his interlocutor. In this context, this possibility is precluded.

The second part of Duncan's attack is equally harsh as the first part in which he highlights the uselessness of the discussion. He points out that Soper is obsessed with Duncan's words about nuclear energy, which after all, are just "two words." Apart from the strong negative qualification that Soper is hooked, the reference to "two words" is an endeavor to present the disagreement at issue as just a matter of verbal disagreement. Duncan wants to suggest that Soper is overprecise about his use of words with regard to the use of nuclear energy. In reality, Soper remarks that Duncan's statements in another interview indicate a change of position with regard to the use of nuclear energy, which needs to be clarified and justified. Soper's criticism, fully pertinent in a political interview, is presented by Duncan as concentrating on a matter that is irrelevant. He seems to leave the impression that instead of discussing matters of interest and importance for the public, Soper concentrates in the exchange on a minor issue of language use.

The second general condition of reasonableness for confrontational strategic manoeuvring requires that a move be responsive to the move that precedes it. This means that the politician's strategic manoeuvring should be a relevant reaction to the expression of criticism advanced by the interviewer in his accusation of inconsistency.

Whether a move can be considered relevant depends on the goals with which it is put forward. Since every move constitutes an illocutionary act, it is by definition put forward with a communicative and an interactional goal. The communicative goal concerns obtaining understanding of the illocutionary act, and the interactional goal concerns obtaining acceptance of the illocutionary act (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). As a reaction to an accusation of inconsistency, the manoeuvring at hand is considered relevant when it shows understanding of



the accusation of inconsistency and it indicates acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency. Acceptance implies, among other things, that the speaker understood the accusation and takes the accusation to be correctly performed. Taking the accusation to be correctly performed means assuming that the speaker has the intentions and preferences specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation of inconsistency. In order to 'fully' accept the antagonist's accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should not only recognize that the antagonist has certain intentions and preferences - as specified in the correctness conditions for an accusation - but he must also share these intentions and preferences or be ready to share them (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984).

The politician who in his response accepts the accusation of inconsistency implicitly agrees that the inconsistency should be resolved so that the discussion is no longer obstructed. His strategic manoeuvring should at least convey that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to another standpoint on the same issue. Unless the manoeuvring resolves the inconsistency, it cannot be a relevant response to the accusation to which it reacts. In pragma-dialectical terms, the politician's strategic manoeuvring by means of retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is relevant to the accusation of inconsistency when an interactional relation is envisaged between the two elements (the politician's manoeuvring and the accusation of inconsistency). This relation is functional in light of the goal of defining the difference of opinion clearly (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992). Pragma-dialectically, defining the difference of opinion that is free of inconsistencies is part of this contribution (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, p. 95)

That the politician's response should resolve the inconsistency of which he is accused does not make it possible to judge fully the relevance of the manoeuvring. It is specific of the move of retraction that it involves the illocutionary negation of an earlier illocutionary act. That is to say, a protagonist who retracts a standpoint makes it understood that he is no longer committed to the propositional content of the earlier standpoint. For the manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it to be relevant, it needs to count both as a relevant reaction of acceptance of the accusation of inconsistency and as a relevant reaction of non-acceptance of a previous standpoint (i.e. the retraction should concern the standpoint advanced earlier which is no longer found acceptable). In order for the strategic manoeuvring to be evaluatively

relevant in these two senses, the following *condition of relevance* needs to be fulfilled:

In confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency, the protagonist should give up one of the inconsistent standpoints altogether, thus resolving the inconsistency.

The manoeuvring that involves retracting a standpoint and reformulating it is a violation of the soundness condition of relevance when the protagonist gives the impression that the original standpoint has been retracted, but in fact maintains some interpretation that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. This way of manoeuvring is fallacious because it prevents the original standpoint from being criticized by conveying the false impression that the original standpoint is given up. The antagonist will no longer challenge the protagonist for the original standpoint because he is led to believe that the protagonist is not committed to it any longer. This view is supported by Kauffeld's observation that commitments are undertaken by speakers in order to generate presumptions which provide addressees with reason to act in ways desired by the speaker (2003). A speaker who retracts a standpoint undertakes a commitment generating the presumption that he can no longer be held committed to the acceptability of an earlier standpoint. That means that an antagonist can no longer challenge the protagonist with respect to the standpoint he gives up.

This immunization strategy may constitute the violation of two pragma-dialectical rules. The derailed manoeuvring is a violation of the *Freedom Rule*, because the antagonist is prevented from calling the original standpoint into question. The fallacious manoeuvring can also be a violation of the *Obligation-to-defend Rule*, because the protagonist may abusively exploit that he is (supposedly) no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend the original standpoint if challenged to do so. The *Obligation-to-defend Rule* stipulates that "discussants who advance a standpoint may not refuse to defend this standpoint when requested to do so" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p.191).

a fallacious way of manoeuvring strategically is at issue in the following fragment from a discussion between Jon Sopel and William Hague on November 12, 2006. At the time, Hague, former Conservative Party leader, was the British Shadow Foreign Secretary. The interview from which the exchange has been taken concerns the Conservatives' support to the British government concerning the

issue of combating terrorism. One aspect related to this issue concerns the introduction of biometric identity cards. Drawing on the institutional convention of discussing political matters for which the politician can be held to account, Soper makes an issue of one of the Conservatives' political stances indicating lack of support for the government's proposal to introduce biometric identity cards. The Conservatives' non-supportive attitude is met with criticism from Soper because, according to him, it is inconsistent with an earlier supportive attitude towards the introduction of biometric identity cards. In response to the charge of inconsistency, Hague acknowledges that attributing an inconsistency to him is correct. But he argues subsequently that the original standpoint (indicating a supportive attitude) concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards, whereas the current standpoint (indicating a non-supportive attitude) concerns the practice of introducing biometric identity cards. By responding like this, Hague justifies his words, as he is institutionally obliged to do, and can give the impression that the inconsistency has been repaired:

(2)

William Hague:

*We supported, I and Michael Howard supported the principle of those. Subject to how the details were worked out. The details are not impressive and the grasp of detail and the ability to control the costs of the current government is so terrible, that it's not a scheme that we can support.*

In this fragment, the aiming for rhetorical advantages seems to override the concern for reasonableness. Despite accepting that a commitment to the current standpoint cannot be held simultaneously with a commitment to an earlier standpoint on the same issue because the standpoints are inconsistent, Hague retracts only 'part' of the original proposition of the standpoint he advanced earlier (concerning the principle of introducing biometric identity cards). In itself, there is nothing wrong with this manoeuvring. After all, making a dissociation, which involves retracting an interpretation while maintaining another, is not by definition fallacious. On the contrary, as van Rees (2009) shows, it can be an excellent way of making a clarification.

What derails in Hague's manoeuvring is that he makes it seem as if Soper can no longer call the original standpoint into question. Duncan claims that the original standpoint concerned the principle of introducing biometric identity cards. However, the original standpoint, as can be inferred from the accusation of

inconsistency, concerned the unitary concept of support for the introduction of biometric identity cards. Otherwise, there would not have been an accusation of inconsistency, or the inconsistency could have been easily denied because it is unjustified. This manoeuvring of maintaining a certain interpretation of the standpoint and retracting only one interpretation of the original standpoint is a way of immunizing against further criticism the original standpoint that the Conservatives support the introduction of biometric identity cards. In a political interview, claiming that the original standpoint had a different interpretation is easy to get away with. The record of the original interview is not immediately available, which makes it very hard for Sopel to refute Duncan's claim. Because Sopel cannot easily find evidence that would reject Hague's claim (especially since the earlier interview took place around two years before), he cannot uphold a demand for justification.

The third soundness condition for confrontational strategic manoeuvring requires that a move be formulated in such a way that the antagonist can interpret it as a relevant response to the previous move and that all possible continuations of the discussion (leading to the creation of a non-mixed discussion, the creation of a mixed discussion, or the end of the discussion) are allowed. The first two soundness conditions for strategic manoeuvring by means of retracting a standpoint and advancing a reformulated standpoint stipulate that (a) the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism or advancing new criticism, and (b) the inconsistency should be resolved. If the antagonist does not accept the politician's manoeuvring, he should be allowed to maintain his criticism or advance new criticism if he finds this necessary. He may express his non-acceptance of the protagonist's manoeuvring by denying that it answers the charge of inconsistency, as required by the essential condition of an accusation of inconsistency.

In order for the first two soundness conditions to be fulfilled, the strategic maneuvers should be adequately formulated. That means that the protagonist should be so clear that the antagonist understands what his options are for continuing the discussion and that the protagonist's response resolves the inconsistency as required by the accusation of inconsistency. Otherwise, the antagonist may not understand that the protagonist's manoeuvring is an attempt at eliminating the inconsistency. The strategic manoeuvring concerned should fulfill the following soundness *condition of clarity*:

The moves in confrontational strategic manoeuvring that involve retracting a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency should be formulated as clearly as required for a proper understanding.

Failure to fulfill soundness condition (c) constitutes a violation of the *Language Use Rule* of a critical discussion. This rule requires that “discussants may not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous” (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p.195).**[viii]** A formulation that is not clear enough for the purpose of the communicative exchange may amount to the fallacy of misuse of unclearness.**[ix]** An example of fallacious manoeuvring that violates the soundness condition of clarity is an obscure wording that gives the false impression of resolving the inconsistency.

In order to show how the soundness condition of clarity can be applied, I will evaluate Yvette Cooper’s manoeuvring in the discussion with Sopel on July 15, 2007 on the issue of housing in Britain. At the time of the interview, Cooper was the Housing Minister of Great Britain. As can be expected, Cooper is interviewed on an issue for which she is in the first place responsible: housing in Great Britain. Sopel criticizes Cooper with regard to the power of the local councils to take decisions on the issue of housing, because, as he puts it, she said in the beginning of the interview that local councils are free to take decisions about housing, whereas later in the same interview she said that local councils are not in fact free to do so. Cooper replies as follows:

(3)

Yvette Cooper:

*No, we’re clear that the way that the regional planning process works and the way that local councils have to wait together, they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes. Where they have the flexibilities around where within their community the homes should be built, you know, what the best location is, whether they’ve got good brown fields available and what kinds of homes.*

By embedding a clarification in her answer, Cooper accepts that what she said in the beginning of the interview has been unclear. In her answer, addressing directly Sopel’s accusation of inconsistency, she admits that her original (unclear) standpoint about the power of the local councils is tenable only if a more limited interpretation is given: local councils have the power to decide about the location, the brown fields and the kinds of homes. Cooper restricts the decisional power of

the local councils originally advocated by retracting her standpoint and reformulating it in terms of responsibilities (*they will all have to accept their responsibility to deliver more homes*). In this way, she leaves the impression that there is no inconsistency and clarifies what might have been unclear. Cooper goes for a middle solution: she retracts what she said in the beginning, reformulates that in terms of responsibilities and clarifies how these responsibilities are divided. Cooper clears herself from an apparent inconsistency by retracting her standpoint advanced in the beginning of the interview that local councils have the freedom to decide what the best location is. Following this retraction, she emphasizes that whether to build or not is not a matter of decision for the local councils. Finally, she outlines what kinds of decisions local councils can take, namely decisions with regard to the location of houses and the kinds of houses that are to be built.

Cooper's strategic manoeuvring is a good example of how the soundness condition of clarity is fulfilled. Her response is clear enough for the purpose of the exchange in which she and Sipel are involved. In virtue of her role in a political interview, she clarifies her view with regard to the matter on which she is interviewed and subsequently justifies it to give the account expected of her. The clarification is sufficiently precise for Sipel, the audience at home and the local councils to understand how responsibilities are divided and where the flexibilities lie. In this way, Sipel is not in any way prevented from continuing the discussion asking for more clarification or justification if he wants to.

#### *4. Conclusion*

In this paper, a politician's strategic manoeuvring involving the retraction of a standpoint and reformulating it in response to an accusation of inconsistency has been evaluated by applying criteria that relate to the norms of critical discussion. I have derived these criteria from a set of three soundness conditions that I have established in order to assess the reasonableness of the manoeuvring at hand. The starting point for formulating the soundness conditions has been that an instance of fallacious strategic manoeuvring occurs when a move or a sequence of moves inhibit the realization of the dialectical goal of the stage concerned. In the particular cases evaluated in this paper, the dialectical goal of the confrontation stage of defining clearly the difference of opinion has been taken into account.

The first soundness condition (condition of openness) ensures that a protagonist whose standpoint is declared inconsistent with another standpoint he advanced

previously and who responds by retracting a standpoint and reformulating it, leaves open all dialectically possible continuations of the discussion. That is to say that the antagonist should not be prevented from maintaining his criticism and/or advancing new criticism. The violation of this condition gives rise to fallacies in which the antagonist is attacked with the aim of excluding him from the discussion. The second soundness condition (condition of relevance) requires that the protagonist resolve the inconsistency with which he is charged by retracting one of the criticized standpoints altogether. This condition is not fulfilled when the protagonist maintains some interpretation of the original standpoint that is exploited afterwards to defend a standpoint that is easier to justify. Doing so conveys the false impression that the original standpoint is given up so that the antagonist no longer raises criticism about this standpoint. The condition of relevance is also violated when the protagonist abusively exploits that he is supposedly no longer committed to the original standpoint by refusing to defend it if challenged to do so. The third soundness condition (condition of clarity) requires a formulation of the strategic manoeuvring concerned that is as clear as necessary for a proper understanding. The violation of this condition takes place when the lack of clarity is exploited in such a way that the other party does not understand what his options are for continuing the discussion and to cover for the inconsistency not being resolved.

## NOTES

**i** An interviewer's accusations may point out an inconsistency between a politician's words and actions (between what the politician claims and what he does) or between his words (for instance, between two standpoints on the same issue).

**ii** In the pragma-dialectical approach, argumentation is viewed as part of a critical discussion in which the participants try to resolve a difference of opinion on the merits. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst define argumentation as "a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint" (2004, p. 1).

**iii** The accusation of inconsistency is seen as a way of expressing criticism (by casting doubt or advancing an opposite standpoint) concerning a standpoint.

**iv** In the ideal model of a critical discussion, the exchange of argumentative moves is regulated by a critical procedure specifying the rules in accordance with which the resolution of the difference of opinion could be achieved on the merits.

The rules for critical discussion constitute for each stage the norms of reasonableness authorizing the performance of certain types of kinds of moves.

**v** The idea that strategic manoeuvring should allow for both favorable and unfavorable outcomes to come about is already prescribed in the definition of strategic manoeuvring. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007) make clear that every move is by definition an attempt to steer the discussion towards a *favorable* outcome without overruling the commitment to having a reasonable exchange. Having a reasonable exchange of moves involves, among other things, that the parties should not prevent each other from expressing freely moves that might be unfavorable to the other party, such as criticisms.

**vi** All examples are presented as they are transcribed on the BBC website. For my purpose, a transcription that guarantees readability is sufficient, because prosodic and other conversational phenomena are irrelevant.

**vii** Van Rees (2009, pp. 31-44) provides various kinds of clues that can serve as indicators for the existence of a dissociation. Two of these clues are present in Duncan's response: (a) it comes in an attempt to resolve an inconsistency pointed out by the other party ('But you were completely different, you were very skeptical there'), and (b) one of the dissociated terms is valued as being more important ('what's important with nuclear is to explain the policy').

**viii** The Language Use Rule does not impose an obligation on the protagonist to formulate his move explicitly, since it is often perfectly possible for the antagonist, using sentence meaning and contextual information, to recognize what is intended with the move even if it is implicit.

**ix** A closely related fallacy amounts to the misuse of ambiguity, as in the cases in which the speaker is lexically ambiguous.

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