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"What's China's comment?" Confrontational maneuvering in spokespersons' argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Citation

Wu, P. (2020, February 25). "What's China's comment?" *Confrontational maneuvering in spokespersons' argumentative replies at the regular press conferences of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/85720>

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Issue Date: 2020-02-25

Chapter 7

OTHER MODES OF CONFRONTATIONAL MANEUVERING AND COMBINED MODES

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 to Chapter 6 we have discussed three prominent and also prototypical modes of confrontational maneuvering that the spokespersons adopt at China's MoFA's regular press conferences in disagreeing to resolve the difference of opinion at issue. These three modes of strategic maneuvering are dissociation (Chapter 4), personal attack (Chapter 5) and declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable (Chapter 6). By way of dissociation, the spokesperson tries to redefine the difference of opinion in favor of his/her own interests; by way of personal attack and by way of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, the spokesperson attempts in different ways to deny the need to make any attempt to resolve the difference of opinion at issue.

It can be observed from the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences that we collected for this research that, next to these three modes of strategic maneuvering, there are in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage in the argumentative exchanges at these press conferences still other prototypical modes of strategic maneuvering adopted by the spokespersons, but their use is less prominent in the sense that they occur only sporadically. These modes of confrontational maneuvering are changing the topic of discussion and putting pressure on the other party. Changing the topic of discussion boils down to making argumentative moves that attempt to change the difference of opinion; putting pressure on the other party involves making argumentative moves that attempt to exempt the difference of opinion from critical discussion. In addition, it can also be observed from the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies that in trying to make a convincing case they combine in some cases the use of several of these modes of strategic maneuvering.

To provide a more complete picture of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of the argumentative exchanges at China's MoFA's regular press conferences, this chapter will focus on confrontational maneuvering by changing the topic of

discussion and on confrontational maneuvering by putting pressure on the other party, thus complementing the discussion of the modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokespersons' argumentative replies addressed in Chapter 4, 5 and 6. Besides, we will also pay attention to how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage by combining several modes of confrontational maneuvering.

In Section 7.2, we will first conceptualize the notion of "changing the topic of discussion" from a pragma-dialectical perspective. Then we will describe how the spokespersons sometimes change the topic the questioning journalists intend to be discussed at China's MoFA's regular press conferences. In this section we will also explain how the spokespersons try to change the topic of discussion in such a strategic way that it is instrumental in making a convincing case for their primary audience. In Section 7.3 we will describe, starting from a pragma-dialectical conceptualization of "putting pressure on the other party", how the spokespersons sometimes utilize this argumentative move in their replies to the journalist's question. The instrumentality of this mode of confrontational maneuvering in making a convincing case will also be discussed in this section. Section 7.4 will be devoted to a discussion of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage by combining various modes of confrontational maneuvering that we have discussed. In this section we will first describe how such a strategic combination is realized empirically and then analyze how the spokespersons intend in this way to contribute to the convincingness of their replies to the primary audience. Section 7.5 concludes with a description of the research results.

7.2 Changing the topic of discussion

The definition given to the term *topic of discussion* varies in different research fields. In the field of Conversation Analysis, in which an abundant amount of research has been carried out on topic and topic shift, "topic" is loosely defined as what the conversation is about (Brown & Yule 1983). According to

Goldberg (1983), by organizing information globally, a topic keeps the conversation together. To determine whether the speakers in a conversation stay on the topic, Tracy (1984) introduces from the perspective of Conversation Analysis two rules of thumb. The first rule requires that there is a *local connection* between the speakers' utterances. Any new utterance by a speaker is supposed to be part of a chain with the last or the two previous utterances of the speaker. The second rule requires that there is a *global connection* between the speakers' utterances. Any contribution by a speaker should respond to the thrust of what has been said before. When either of these two rules is violated, the discussion has been terminated or a shift of the topic of discussion has taken place. Although, as Wanphet (2016, p. 97) rightly states, these observations concerning topic shifts in conversations by Tracy are useful, they do not provide a practical guideline for researchers on "how to clearly locate the boundaries of topics or, therefore, topic shift and termination in talk".

In the field of Argumentation Theory topic is usually defined in a different way than in Conversation Analysis. Goodwin (2002, p. 86), for one, points out that a topic is "a more or less determined object of contention that is, under the circumstances, worth arguing about". It seems that by this definition the term *topic* relates to the "bone of contention" in the difference of opinion that the parties in a critical discussion are out to resolve. In his expose of the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, van Eemeren (2010, pp. 96-101) understands the notion of "topic" more broadly. In the way in which he uses the term *topic* it has to do with the "viewpoint, angle or perspective from which the arguer selects the argumentative move or moves he makes in strategic maneuvering" (p. 100). In his view, arguers make topical choices in the empirical counterparts of all four stages of a critical discussion that can be distinguished in a motivated reply, i.e., the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage and the concluding stage. According to van Eemeren, it is only in the confrontation stage that "topic" concerns primarily the *issue of discussion* (the "virtual" standpoint); in the other three stages, "topic" concerns in the first place what kind of starting points (opening stage), arguments and criticisms (argumentation stage) or conclusions (concluding stage) are selected by the arguers.

In her doctoral dissertation, *Getting an issue on the table*, Tonnard (2011, p. 33) differentiates the term *topic* from *subject of discussion*, and distinguishes *topical shifts* from *shifts of subject*, terms which are frequently used interchangeably in Conversation Analysis (or "Speech Analysis"). As she sees it, "subject" is broader and more general, and "topic" is more limited and more specific. In an argumentative discussion the topic may have been changed while the same subject is still on. In order to show the subtle difference between these two concepts, Tonnard provides an example of a remark by Thieme, leader of the Dutch Party for the Animals. Thieme's remark follows after a question-answer exchange between the leaders of other Dutch political parties on how to control national debt in times of economic recession. Her remark is included in Example 7.1.

Example 7.1

Thieme: "Everything is about money, money, and again, money [...]. I would like to turn things around: what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the world?"
(*Proceedings Second Chamber 2008/2009, 2, 2-79. Cited from Tonnard (2011, p. 30)*)

As explained by Tonnard (2011, p. 31), in this example Thieme actually changes the subject of discussion from "economic recession" to "environmental welfare"; when this happens the topic of discussion has also been changed. However, even if the subject "economic recession" would not really have been changed, the topic of this discussion would still be changed the moment Thieme had started to talk about "what causes this economic recession" rather than about "how to control the national debt in times of economic recession" that was initiated by her opponents. As a rule, a change of topic includes a slight change in the content of the subject of discussion, but not necessarily a real change of subject. In cases of topic shift, the subject of discussion can remain the same.

A change of topic leads as a matter of course always to a change in the difference of opinion at issue, but a change in the difference of opinion at issue

is not necessarily caused by a change of topic. The difference of opinion could still be changed even if the topic is left unchanged. As the results of the analysis of dissociation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering in Chapter 4 show, the spokespersons change, for instance, in some cases the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist by way of dissociation, while the topic is not really changed. Take as another example again the remark by Thieme discussed above. When Thieme changed the topic from “economic recession” to “environmental welfare”, the difference of opinion also changed from “how to control the national debt in times of economic recession” to “what do the Netherlands represent in terms of sustainability, biodiversity, the distribution of food and welfare for the world”. However, even if Thieme has not changed the topic (and it had remained “economic recession”), the difference of opinion would still be changed the moment Thieme started to define the term *economic recession* differently from the way in which it is defined by her opponents.

Starting from the pragma-dialectical understanding of “topic” (van Eemeren 2010, p. 100) and “change of topic” (Tonnard 2011, p. 31), in our current study the terms *topic* and *change of topic* in the confrontation stage of an argumentative exchange are used as follows:

In the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion, topic refers to a specific issue arguers argue about when discussing a subject. A change of subject always includes a change of topic but a change of topic does not necessarily involve a change of subject. A change of topic always leads to a (minor or major) change of the difference of opinion of a critical discussion, while a change of difference of opinion may not necessarily be caused by a change of topic.

In the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences it can be observed that when for some reason the specific topic of discussion is changed, in most cases the spokesperson adheres to the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist.

Example 7.2 is a prototypical case of the spokesperson changing the topic of discussion while the subject remains the same.

Example 7.2

Q: A US Senator recently said that China could still step up pressure on the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] by using its influence over the country. What is China’s comment?

*A: We have repeatedly pointed out that it is the shared responsibility of all relevant parties to safeguard peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia and push forward denuclearization of the Peninsula. **All parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities.** As I said earlier, the international community is highly concerned over the current situation on the Peninsula and hopes for peace and stability on the Peninsula. We hope all parties concerned could meet the common aspiration of the international community and do more that is conducive to regional peace and stability, turn-around of the situation and improvement of relations between relevant parties, rather than the contrary.*

(April 10, 2013)

In Example 7.2 the question asked by the journalist concerns the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment announced on February 12, 2013. As we already mentioned in the analysis of Example 6.7 in Section 6.3, this unexpected announcement was condemned by almost all other countries involved, and also by the United Nations. In the question the journalist quotes a US Senator’s judgment that “China could still step up pressure on the DPRK by using its influence over the country”. It can be inferred from the question that the subject of discussion suggested by the journalist is “the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment”. Within this subject, the specific topic the journalist intends to be discussed is “China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK”. By asking “What is China’s comment?” the journalist requests the spokesperson to resolve the difference of opinion on whether China is, as the US Senator asserts, still capable of stepping up pressure on the DPRK.

As we have explained in Section 6.3, the North Korea nuclear issue has bothered countries such as South Korea, China, America and Japan since the 1990s. Since then, China has always been requested by other relevant countries, particularly by the US, to take much more responsibility than other countries for preventing the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons. However, instead of accepting such a request, China has always insisted that the only way out consists in peaceful multilateral negotiations and not in any intensification of the existing situation. In addition, one of China's main policies has always been to avoid raising any suspicion in other countries that China is pulling the strings behind the DPRK. In view of this background, defining the difference of opinion as suggested by the journalist puts the spokesperson in a difficult dilemma.

In the reply to the question the spokesperson does not touch upon the difference of opinion concerning whether China agrees with the US Senator's judgment that China is still capable of stepping up pressure on the DPRK, as the journalist presupposes in asking the question. By stating that "all parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities", the spokesperson re-defines the difference of opinion in the confrontation stage as pertaining to whether all the relevant parties should truly shoulder their responsibilities. In this way, the topic of discussion is eventually changed from "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK" to "who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track", while "the DPRK's nuclear missile experiment" is still maintained as the subject of discussion.

Despite the fact that, when changing the specific topic of discussion, the spokespersons virtually always prove to adhere to the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist, in a very few cases included in our corpus a spokesperson does change the subject of discussion and in doing so also the specific topic that is discussed. Example 7.3 is a case in point.

Example 7.3

Q: U.S. Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that it is easy to earn cheap applause by vilifying a former enemy, a statement showing America's un-

derstatement of the Japanese history of aggression. Do you have any comment on this?

A: I need to further check on the background and specifics of [the] relevant statement made by the US official. I have noticed that at the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the end of the World Anti-Fascist War, the attitude taken by the Japanese leaders on the past history of militarist aggression and the message sent out have been much talked about by the international community and within Japan for quite a time. For example, Japanese former Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama said that Japan's colonial rule and aggression over China and the ROK [Republic of Korea] is undeniable.

*Seven decades ago, the war of aggression launched by Japanese militarism plunged people from victimized countries of Asia including China into untold sufferings. Only by genuinely respecting the history and properly dealing with historical issues can Japan earn understanding and embrace the future. **We hope that Japanese leaders can heed the call for justice from the international community as well as [from] Japan, take a sensible attitude on relevant issues and send out a positive and right message [...].***

(March 2, 2015)

In Example 7.3 the journalist introduces Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's criticism of China's and Korea's constant protests against Japan's "irresponsible attitude" towards its history of aggression and colonization of other Asian countries. When Wendy Sherman made this criticism, the whole world was celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the UN and the end of the World Anti-Fascist War. Against this background it can be understood that all members of the international community, and in particular China and Korea, were shocked by this unexpected remark. It should be noticed that before the journalist raised the question, he/she could not help expressing his/her own standpoint concerning Wendy Sherman's statement: that this statement shows America's undervaluation of the Japanese history of aggression.

It is clear from the question that the journalist actually wants the spokes-

person to resolve two separate differences of opinion: the first one is about whether China agrees with Wendy Sherman's criticism and the second one is about whether China agrees with the journalist's standpoint on Wendy Sherman's criticism. In the first difference of opinion the topic of discussion is "China's attitude towards Wendy Sherman's criticism" and in the second difference of opinion the topic of discussion concerns "China's attitude towards the journalist's standpoint on Wendy Sherman's criticism". However, no matter which difference of opinion the spokesperson wants to see resolved, the subject of discussion is always "Wendy Sherman's criticism".

By declaring "I need to further check on the background and specifics of [the] relevant statement made by the US official", the spokesperson denies in the reply the feasibility of having a critical discussion on any of the two differences of opinion suggested by the journalist. From his /her statement "We hope that Japanese leaders can heed the call for justice from the international community as well as Japan, take a sensible attitude on relevant issues and send out a positive and right message" we can conclude that the spokesperson focuses the discussion on what attitude the Japanese leaders should take towards Japan's history of aggression and colonization of other Asian countries. In this way, the spokesperson in actual fact changes the subject of discussion, "Wendy Sherman's criticism", that was suggested by the questioning journalist - and as a consequence, the topic of discussion tackled by the spokesperson has automatically also been changed.

After describing how the spokespersons sometimes change the topic of discussion in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of their argumentative replies, we still need to explain how the argumentative moves involved can be instrumental in the spokesperson's convincing his/her primary audience. To this end, the three aspects of strategic maneuvering should be born in mind. From a pragma-dialectical perspective, changing the topic of discussion is a mode of confrontational maneuvering in which the spokesperson, in order to make a convincing case, implements a strategic design of making a selection from the topical potential, adapting to audience demand and making a choice of presentational devices. When changing the topic of

discussion, the specific strategic selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of topic has been changed, what kind of new topic has been selected and whether the subject of discussion has been changed when the topic is changed. The adaptation to audience demand manifests itself in an effort to connect with the general beliefs or values of the primary audience, i.e., the international general public, rather than offending this audience. The selection of presentational devices is manifested in the use of expressions that make the topic change seem reasonable. In discussing the way in which a spokesperson gives substance to each of these three aspects of strategic maneuvering, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences discussed in Chapter 3 should be considered, because these preconditions constitute vital constraints on the choices the spokesperson can make in giving shape to his/her strategic maneuvering.

To illustrate how spokespersons make an effort to convince the international general public by means of changing the topic, we will analyze how in the spokesperson's response in Example 7.2 the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices are strategically designed in such a way that they are optimally adapted to the demand of the international general public. Example 7.2 is chosen as our case in point because the strategic design adopted by the spokesperson in this example is characteristic of the strategic maneuvering by means of changing the topic carried out by the spokespersons in the corpus we collected.

As discussed earlier, the subject of discussion suggested by the journalist in Example 7.2 is "the DPRK's nuclear missile experiment" and the specific topic of discussion the journalist intends the spokesperson to discuss is "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK". In what follows, we will first address why the spokesperson in his/her response accepts the subject of discussion proposed by the questioning journalist but changes the topic of discussion from "China's capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK" to "who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track". Next, we will discuss how the spokesperson changes the topic to make his/her standpoint seem reasonable.

Generally speaking, unless the subject of discussion is too sensitive or not ready to be discussed, the spokesperson hardly ever changes the subject suggested by the questioning journalist in order to make a “reasonable” and “sincere” impression on the international general public, as is required by the 3rd institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences (see Section 3.3). The subject of “the DPRK’s nuclear missile experiment” in Example 7.2 is not really sensitive since this subject has in fact always been on the table in discussions among China, Korea, the US and Japan since the 1990s. All this time, China never hesitated to express its more or less “neutral” standpoint that “peaceful multilateral talks” are the only way out. More importantly, the press conference reported in Example 7.2 was held just after the DPRK announced its “successful” nuclear missile experiment and the international general public (in particular the public in South Korea and Japan) was still in panic and eager to know what measures the relevant countries would take to diminish this nuclear horror. Against this historical background, it can be imagined that the international general public should be very much concerned about China’s attitude regarding this subject. Therefore, it would be weird, and even raise suspicion, if the Chinese spokesperson refused to take on this subject.

For the spokesperson, accepting to discuss the subject does not necessarily mean that the specific topic suggested by the journalist needs to be discussed. As explained in the analysis of Example 6.7 in Section 6.3, since the 1990s China has always been cautious in stating its standpoint on the DPRK’s nuclear issue, because other countries, particularly the US and Japan, always maintained that China should take much more responsibility than other countries in preventing the DPRK from developing nuclear weapons, thus implying that China had been pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue. After the DPRK announced its nuclear experiment, China became even more cautious in stating its stance on this matter. Given this background, it can be understood that the spokesperson could hardly make a suitable comment on the specific topic of discussion suggested by the questioning journalist, “China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK”, because he/

she can neither confirm China’s capability/willingness of stepping up pressure on the DPRK nor negate China’s capability/willingness to do so. If he/she confirmed this capability/willingness, this would be equivalent to admitting that the accusation from the US and Japan of China pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue was correct; if he/she denied it, it would seem to the international general public that China has no sincere intention of dealing with the crisis that caused such an enormous international panic. If this topic is not a suitable choice for the spokesperson, then the question is: how does the new topic chosen by the spokesperson, i.e., “who are to take responsibilities in getting the DPRK back on track”, suit his/her own interests?

As we see it, the new topic offers in the first place a different perspective to the international general public: while the topic suggested by the journalist focuses on what China should/can do, the new topic chosen by the spokesperson should make the international general public think about who else should also shoulder the responsibilities. With this new topic, the spokesperson reminds the international general public that it is not only China, but also the US, Japan and South Korea that have been trying to negotiate with the DPRK on its development of nuclear weapons. In this way the spokesperson, as always, intends to shake off the accusation by the US and Japan of China pulling the strings behind this nuclear issue. In addition, since the difference of opinion on this new topic, i.e., “All parties concerned should truly shoulder their responsibilities”, as it has been redefined by the spokesperson, does not really spare China from taking certain responsibilities for this nuclear issue, this redefinition would also be helpful for the spokesperson to construct a “sincere” and “responsible” image of China in the eyes of the international general public. Last but not least, the redefined difference of opinion on the new topic is fully in line with China’s longstanding attitude towards the DPRK’s nuclear issue, viz. “peaceful multilateral talks” are the only way out. This “consistence” in standpoint is explicitly required by the 4th institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences: “the spokesperson should firmly stick to the stances taken by China’s government”.

As for the way in which the spokesperson makes use of presentational

devices in changing the topic, it is worthwhile to note how the spokesperson avoids bringing the original topic suggested by the questioning journalist to the foreground. Upon closer inspection, it can be observed that throughout the reply neither “the DPRK”, which is the central country in connection with this emergent issue, nor “the nuclear experiment”, which is the cause of the international panic, is mentioned by the spokesperson. Instead, he/she used two more general expressions: “Korean Peninsula” and “denuclearization of the Peninsula”. The use of these two expressions makes it clear to the international general public that the subject proposed by the journalist is still on, and the avoidance of mentioning “the DPRK” and “the nuclear experiment” is instrumental for the spokesperson in keeping a certain distance from the specific topic raised by the questioning journalist.

Just as happens when he/she declares a standpoint unallowed or indisputable, as discussed in Section 6.4, the spokesperson is simultaneously conducting two critical discussions when he/she changes the topic of discussion suggested by the journalist: one with the immediate opponent whose criticism is quoted in the journalist’s question and another one with the international general public. In both discussions the change of topic takes place in the confrontation stage. By changing the topic in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion with the immediate opponent, the spokesperson fabricates an imaginary standpoint of his/her immediate opponent that involves criticism of China whereas this standpoint has not been put forward by this opponent.

In this critical discussion the spokesperson’s change of topic could be a derailment of strategic maneuvering that amounts to the notorious “straw man” fallacy because it involves a violation of the 3rd rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, “Attacks on standpoints may not bear on a standpoint that has not actually been put forward by the other party” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 191). However, it goes without saying that in determining whether a change of topic by the spokesperson is indeed a fallacy in the critical discussion with his/her immediate opponent, just as in the case of other modes of strategic maneuvering, the in-

stitutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences should also be taken into consideration. In the critical discussion he/she is conducting with the international general public, in principle the change of topic by the spokesperson does not necessarily involve a violation of the 3rd rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, because the international general public is an imaginary audience that may have its doubts but is not supposed to already have a fixed standpoint of its own. It is the international general public’s doubts that the spokesperson is out to remove by means of a reasonable exchange.

7.3 Putting pressure on the other party

According to Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1979, p. 1424), *pressure* refers to “a condition of distress; oppression; affliction” or “demands requiring immediate attention; urgency”. Pressure could be either physical or mental. It goes without saying that the pressure the one party exerts on the other party in a reasonableness-oriented argumentative exchange is as a rule mental pressure of an emotional kind. According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 109), putting pressure on the other party is an argumentative move made in the confrontation stage intended to prevent the other party from casting doubt on a standpoint or advancing a standpoint of their own. Viewed in this way, putting pressure on the other party amounts to creating an obstacle to a free development of a critical discussion. A possible consequence of putting pressure on the other party is that the discussion gets stuck in the confrontation stage and is not continued.

An arguer exerts mental pressure on his/her opponent through the arousal of human feelings which are, according to Aristotle (1991, p.121), “the things on account of which the ones altered differ with respect to their judgments” and which are “accompanied by pleasure and pain: such as anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries”. From the perspective of rhetorical persuasion, O’Keefe (2002, p. 28) holds that such persuasion in which emotions are involved “has a common underlying idea, namely, that one av-

enue to persuasion involves the arousal of an emotional state, with the advocated action providing a means for the receiver to deal with those aroused feelings". In a rhetorical approach to argumentation that puts persuasion at the center, arousing certain emotions in the audience or putting pressure on the audience is deemed to be a legitimate (and in some rhetoricians' view also reasonable) way to win over the audience, because it is the effectiveness of argumentation that matters most. The focus of the relevant research in this approach is therefore always on what kind of emotions can be aroused and the ways in which what kind of persuasive effects can be realized. In recent years a psycho-cognitive perspective has been integrated into the rhetorical-persuasion approach in order to explain the psychological mechanism involved in persuading the audience by arousing certain emotions (see O'Keefe 2002; O'Keefe 2013; Simunich 2008; Griskevicius, Shiota & Neufeld 2010).

In traditional approaches in the field of logic (specifically the so-called "standard treatment of the fallacies") putting emotional pressure on the other party has always been deemed irrational, and not reasonable, because appealing to emotions is in most cases considered "irrelevant" to the defense of a standpoint. Hamble (2005, pp. 126-127), among others, explains the long-time "absence of emotions in [the logical approach to] argumentation theory" by observing that "our culture has inherited a persistent and bad idea, namely that rationality and emotionality are opposites. Arguing is identified with reason, which is held to be the opponent and discipline to passion". In informal logic, another strand of research in the logical field, exerting emotional pressure is sometimes viewed as a legitimate component of advancing argumentation. Gilbert (1997), for one, holds that the "emotional mode" of argument, which employs emotion as a reason for a conclusion or invokes emotions in expressing an argument, is one of the legitimate modes of argumentation. In the emotional mode of argument the strength of an argument depends on "such elements as degree of commitment, depth, and the extent of feeling, sincerity and the degree of resistance" (pp. 83-84). Carozza (2009, p. 133), inspired by the contemporary philosophical and psychological discussions about basic emotions such as anger, disgust, fear, joy (happiness),

sadness and surprise, holds that the list of human emotions might be expanded to include emotional states such as distress, guilt and shame. To explain how in argumentative discourse "emotive" meanings of terms are generated and manipulated by the arguers, Macagno and Walton (2019) analyze some pieces of speeches and messages of Donald Trump, the President of the US, in which emotional pressure is exerted on the audience. Their research results show that, the use of emotive words "triggers a set of inferences leading to a value judgment that can be the basis of an emotional response" (p. 250). The meaning of these emotive words can be represented and assessed by using argument schemes, and the manipulative risks of the misuse and redefinition of emotive words can be accounted for in terms of "presuppositions and implicit modifications of the interlocutors' commitments" (p. 221).

In the present research, which is conducted from the perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, we will consider putting pressure on the other party in an argumentation as a mode of confrontational maneuvering that might be employed by arguers (whether they are acting as a protagonist or as an antagonist) in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. Since putting pressure on the other party in dealing with standpoints amounts to nipping a discussion in the bud, it is a violation of the 1st rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, "Discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190). In this sense, putting pressure on the other party can be a fallacy that hinders the resolution of a difference of opinion on the merits. However, in judging whether this argumentative move is indeed fallacious in argumentative discourse taking place within a certain institutional context, the institutional preconditions applying to the communicative activity type concerned should be taken into consideration.

Based on the discussions above, we can summarize the pragma-dialectical definition of putting pressure on the other party in a critical discussion as follows:

Putting pressure on the other party is an argumentative move that a protagonist and an antagonist can adopt in the confrontation stage of a critical discussion. In making this argumentative move the arguers can resort to various emotions: pity, sympathy, anger, disgust, fear, joy (happiness), sadness, surprise, distress, guilt, shame, etc. As a mode of confrontational maneuvering, putting pressure on the other party is intended to prevent the other party from casting doubt on a standpoint or advancing a standpoint of their own, thus creating an obstacle to the development of the critical discussion. A possible consequence of putting pressure on the other party is that the discussion gets stuck in the confrontation stage.

In the corpus of the spokespersons' argumentative replies at China's MoFA's regular press conferences it can be observed that the way of putting pressure on the other party most frequently used involves pointing at negative sanctions. As indicated by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, p. 109), this kind of argumentative move always takes the form of "some suggestion of possible tiresome consequences for the opponent if he prevents the speaker from getting his way". In most cases the spokespersons tend to mention the consequences in a blunt way by saying things about their opponents like "they will face all the consequences" or "they will be responsible for all the consequences/troubles". Example 7.4 is a prototypical case in point.

Example 7.4

Q: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told the press on January 12 that if a foreign naval vessel transits Japanese waters for purposes other than "innocent passage", they will order a naval patrol to deal with it. Some Japanese media believe that this is a new policy by the Japanese government to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao. What is your comment?

*A: I have made our position clear yesterday. The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in [the] territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao. We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension. **Otherwise, they will face all the consequences.***

(January 13, 2016)

The subject at issue in this example is the longstanding dispute between China and Japan over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Dao Islands. In the question the journalist mentions the Japanese media's interpretation of the Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga's remark concerning the Diaoyu Dao Islands. As introduced by the questioning journalist, Yoshihide Suga expressed Japan's resolution to protect its sovereignty over the Diaoyu Dao Islands by ordering a naval patrol to "deal with" any foreign naval vessel that transits "Japanese waters" for purposes other than "innocent passage". According to the journalist, "some Japanese media" regard Yoshihide Suga's remarks as a signal of the Japanese government of how they intend "to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao". Judging from the co-text of the question, it can be observed that the difference of opinion the questioning journalist wants the spokesperson to resolve concerns whether China agrees with the Japanese government's new policy "to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near the Diaoyu Dao".

By stating "We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension" the spokesperson makes his/her negative standpoint in the difference of opinion suggested by the journalist clear in his/her reply: Japan should not take any provocative actions that ratchet up tension. In this statement, the spokesperson does not mention precisely the specific actions that the Japanese side is going to carry out as stated by Yoshihide Suga. Yet, taken into consideration the co-text of the question-reply between the journalist and the spokesperson as well as the context of this dispute between China and Japan, it can be inferred that "take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension" actually refers to the specific measures that the Japanese side is going to take. To prevent any disagreement with or criticism of his/her standpoint, the spokesperson, immediately after he/she has made clear what this standpoint is, puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanctions China has in store: "Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences". By putting pressure on the other party in this way, the critical discussion is blocked at the confrontation stage.

It can be observed that the spokesperson, before he/she puts pressure on

the other party by pointing at the negative sanction, states that “The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”. This statement appears to be a reason that has been put forward to justify the spokesperson’s standpoint. If this were the case, we may not say that the critical discussion is actually stopped at the confrontation stage. However, on closer inspection we can observe that the spokesperson treats this statement in fact like common ground he/she presupposes the audience to have already agreed with before this discussion started. That means that the critical discussion is indeed stopped at the confrontation stage the moment the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”.

Only in a few cases the spokesperson mentions the negative sanction in a relatively indirect or weaker way by using expressions like that China “reserves the right to make further response”, has “serious concern”, feels “strong dissatisfaction”, “cannot leave this problem unattended”, or that the Chinese “are going to reconsider what stance we should take”, and that China “will see what will happen”, or expressions such as “if this can be tolerated, what cannot?” and “do not blame us for not having forewarned you”. Example 7.5 is a prototypical case in point.

Example 7.5

Q: According to media reports, two shells fired from Myanmar fell in Zhenkang county, Lincang city of Yunnan Province last night and caused injuries. Please confirm this and give us more details. Has China lodged representations with Myanmar?

*A: We have taken note of the relevant report and are checking on this. Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger. **The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this, and has solemnly required the Myanmar***

*side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents. We urge relevant parties to cool down the situation and restore peace and stability to Northern Myanmar at an early date. **China reserves the right to make further response in light of the verification result.***

(May 15, 2015)

At issue in this example are the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar and the bad influence these conflicts have on the bordering cities in China. In the question the journalist introduces briefly the recent injuries in Zhenkang county in China that were caused by two shells fired from Myanmar. The journalist wants the spokesperson to first confirm the truth of this incident and then intends the spokesperson to make clear what China’s standpoint on this incident is by asking “Has China lodged representations with Myanmar?”.

In the reply, the spokesperson more or less confirms the truth of this news as requested by the journalist and then defines two interrelated differences of opinion: the first one concerns the standpoint that China cannot tolerate incidents in which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fall into China; the second one concerns the standpoint that China expects the relevant parties involved in the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar to do their share. As for the difference of opinion about the first standpoint, the spokesperson makes clear that China has always gone against such “incidents” as reported here and has requested the “Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents”. By stating that “The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this” the spokesperson sends a euphemistic signal to the audience that sanctions will be considered if the Myanmar side does not accept the first standpoint. As for the difference of opinion about the second standpoint, the spokesperson makes clear that China hopes the “relevant parties to cool down the situation and restore peace and stability to Northern Myanmar at an early date”. By stating that “China reserves the right to make further response in light of the verification result” the spokesperson once more sends a euphemistic signal to the audience that serious sanctions will

be implemented if the relevant parties do not accept the second standpoint. That is to say, to prevent disagreement or criticism of his/her standpoints in the two differences of opinion he/she has defined him/herself, immediately after he/she makes clear what his/her standpoint is, the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing in an indirect but clear way at the negative sanction that will follow. In this way, the critical discussions taking place in this argumentative discourse are actually blocked at the confrontation stage.

It can be observed that before the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative consequences, the spokesperson actually mentions the “rationale” for this sanction: “Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger” and “The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents”. In the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, a motivated rationale that the spokesperson assumes to be known by the audience is always provided to back up the necessity of pointing at the negative sanction. As we see it, when offering a rationale for pointing at the negative sanction the arguer is in actual fact conducting a sub-discussion in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which putting pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction takes place. The ultimate purpose of this sub-discussion is to provide argumentation that warrants the justificatory force of the rationale for pointing at such a negative sanction in the main discussion.

The pressure that the spokesperson exerts on the other party could also consist of speculating on their sympathy, although in the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies collected for this research this only seldom occurs. When it occurs, it boils in most cases down to an attempt by the spokesperson to arouse his/her audience’s sympathy, particularly the international general public’s sympathy, by describing how much efforts China

has made, how difficult it has been to China, or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue. By doing so, the spokesperson hopes to make the other party agree with (or at least not cast doubt upon) China’s standpoint concerning the subject at issue. This mode of confrontational maneuvering can be named *putting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy*. Example 7.6 is a case in point.

Example 7.6

Q: Is China currently in formal negotiations with the US over trade issues? And how are such talks progressing?

*A: [...] I am honest with you that in pursuing dialogue and consultation, **China is 100% sincere and has done enormous work. However, the US side has been missing one opportunity after another to properly resolve the relevant issue through talks.***

*We hope that the US side could have **a clear understanding of the current situation, remain level-headed, listen to its business community and general public, discard unilateralism and trade protectionism as soon as possible, and work with China to resolve trade disputes through dialogue and consultation.***

*Meanwhile, the consultations we are talking about here are ones based on international law and international trade rules, **not on some domestic law of the US side.** And parties to such consultations shall treat each other with respect and equality and demonstrate mutual understanding and willingness to compromise, instead of **one party condescendingly issuing threat and making unreasonable demands to the other.***

(April 4, 2018)

In Example 7.6 the subject at issue is the latest round of trade frictions between China and the US that started to manifest themselves around April, 2017. Up until now (September 2019), this round of Sino-American trade frictions has not really come to an end. By the time the press conference in Example 7.6 was held the US had announced and implemented several major punitive

measures against China, such as launching a series of trade investigations, raising tariffs on products imported from China, and forbidding Chinese corporations to purchase certain American products. As a counter-measure, China had announced and implemented several punitive tariff policies on products imported from the US. Up until the press conference was held, no real formal negotiations had taken place between China and the US. The two interrelated questions raised by the journalist, “Is China currently in formal negotiations with the US over trade issues?” and “how are such talks progressing?”, are actually informative questions. These informative questions give the spokesperson ample room for replying in his/her own way. He/she could simply update the questioning journalist with the latest developments in the Sino-American trade frictions, as requested by the journalist; he/she could also seize this opportunity to elaborate on China’s stance on this issue; he/she could even combine in his/her reply the update of the developments in the frictions between China and the US with an elaboration on China’s stance.

In the actual reply, instead of giving a simple answer to the informative questions asked by the journalist, the spokesperson first states how much efforts China has made to have a dialogue with the US: “I am honest with you that in pursuing dialogue and consultation, China is 100% sincere and has done enormous work”. Then, by stating “However, the US side has been missing one opportunity after another to properly resolve the relevant issue through talks”, the spokesperson to some extent describes what a “helpless” situation China was dealing with. By way of stating his/her “hope”, the spokesperson accuses the US side indirectly of the following “misbehaviors” to emphasize the “helplessness” of the situation: the US side does not “remain level-headed” nor “listen to its business community and general public”; the US side neither “discards unilateralism and trade protectionism” nor “works with China to resolve trade disputes through dialogue and consultation”; the US insists on carrying out consultations based on “some domestic law of the US side” rather than “international law and international trade rules”; and the US side “condescendingly issues threat” and “makes unreasonable demands” to China.

Why does the spokesperson make such a sharp contrast between “how

the US side makes dialogue impossible” and “how the Chinese side makes a sincere effort to pursue dialogue and consultation”? As we see it, by doing so, the spokesperson actually focuses, on the one hand, the difference of opinion on “can formal negotiations be held between China and the US” and expresses implicitly also his/her standpoint in this difference: “formal negotiations between China and the US cannot be held now”; on the other hand, similar to what we observed in the cases of putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson provides a “rationale” for calling for sympathy. This rationale can be seen as a topic of discussion in a sub-discussion in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion in which putting pressure by appealing to sympathy takes place. The ultimate purpose of this sub-discussion is to provide argumentation that warrants the justificatory force of the rationale for calling for sympathy in the main discussion.

It can be observed that in his/her reply the spokesperson neither addresses any accusation launched by the US against China nor discusses seriously what prevents China from having formal negotiations with the US. This means that the spokesperson indicates that he/she does not really intend to have a serious critical discussion on this difference of opinion. Instead, to avoid eliciting any doubt on his/her standpoint, the spokesperson attempts to exert pressure on the other party by appealing to their sympathy for China’s “helplessness” in pursuing formal negotiations with the US.

How can exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or appealing to sympathy be instrumental in convincing the primary audience – the international general public? In order to answer this question, first of all, we have to look into the two critical discussions the spokesperson carries out simultaneously when the argumentative move of exerting pressure is made, i.e., the critical discussion with his/her immediate opponent (the secondary audience), and the critical discussion with the international general public (the primary audience).

As we see it, the pressure exerted by the spokesperson on the other party by pointing at the sanction is mainly directed at the immediate opponent mentioned in the journalist’s question. The international audience cannot be

sanctioned or is not likely to be threatened by the sanction mentioned by the spokesperson. Viewed in this way, exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at the sanction takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and his/her immediate opponent. By pointing at the sanction, the spokesperson intends to prevent the development of a serious discussion on his/her standpoint. Simultaneously, in the critical discussion with the international general public the exertion of pressure by pointing at the sanction is used by the spokesperson as a justification of the unavoidability of this sanction against the immediate opponent if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted. In the critical discussion with the international general public putting pressure by pointing at the sanction is then a strategic move in the argumentation stage of this discussion.

The other way around, the pressure exerted by the spokesperson in putting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy is mainly directed at the international general public rather than the immediate opponent mentioned in the journalist's question, since the immediate opponent is not likely to agree with the sympathetic picture given by the spokesperson of the difficult situation China is in due to the immediate opponent. Viewed in this way, exerting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy takes place in the confrontation stage of the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public. By appealing to sympathy, the spokesperson intends to prevent a serious discussion on his/her standpoint from taking place. Simultaneously in the critical discussion with the immediate opponent, exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy is used by the spokesperson in justifying why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without really believing that it will be accepted). In this critical discussion putting pressure by appealing to sympathy can then be seen as a move in the argumentation stage of this discussion.

After explaining how the two different critical discussions taking place at the same time interact with each other when the spokesperson exerts pressure on the other party, it has become clear that the question "How can exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction be

instrumental for the spokesperson in convincing the international general public?" can be further specified as "How can pointing at a negative sanction be instrumental in justifying that this sanction against the immediate opponent would be unavoidable if the spokesperson's standpoint is not accepted". In addition, the question "How can exerting pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy be instrumental in convincing the international general public?" can be further specified as "How can appealing to sympathy be instrumental in preventing the development of a critical discussion on the spokesperson's standpoint?"

From the perspective of Pragma-Dialectics, answering the two specified questions mentioned above boils down to explaining how the spokesperson in exerting pressure on the other party creates a strategic design by making a selection from the topical potential as well as making a choice from the presentational devices in order to adapt to the international general public's demand. When putting pressure on the other party, whether by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy, the selection from the topical potential manifests itself in what kind of "pressure" is exerted (for instance, what kind of sanction or sympathy) and what kind of "rationale" is given for this "pressure". The adaptation to audience demand may boil down to making an effort to connect with the general beliefs or values of the international general public rather than offending this public. The selection of presentational devices may manifest itself in the use of expressions that make putting pressure on the other party seem reasonable.

To illustrate how the spokesperson tries to convince the international general public by exerting pressure on the other party, we will present an exemplary analysis of Example 7.5 which shows how in the spokesperson's response the selection from the topical potential and the choice of presentational devices are designed in such a way that they are optimally adapted to the demand of the international general public. As analyzed above, in Example 7.5 the pressure that the spokesperson exerts on the other party consists of pointing at the sanction "The Chinese side expresses strong dissatisfaction over this" and "China reserves the right to make further response in light of

the verification result". The rationale provided by the spokesperson to back up the necessity of this sanction is "Conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar have lasted for over three months, during which multiple shells fired by the Myanmar side fell into China and put the life and property security of the Chinese people as well as [the] stability of the China-Myanmar border area in great danger" and "The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents".

Why does the spokesperson adopt this rationale? How can this rationale be optimally adapted to the international general public's demand? In the rationale which is used to back up the necessity of a negative sanction the spokesperson is supposed to highlight how *urgent* the issue concerned is and how *necessary* the sanction. As a matter of course there are a great many urgent issues in the conflicts in the Kokang area of Northern Myanmar the spokesperson could concentrate on. Yet, the greatly endangered "life and property security of the Chinese people" is undoubtedly deemed an urgent situation by the international general public, since it has always been one of the noble doctrines in wars and battles that no harm should be done to the innocent. To make the international general public understand the "necessity" of the sanction the spokesperson refers to the long duration of the problems ("over three months") and to what China has done before to avoid such problems ("The Chinese side [...] has solemnly required the Myanmar side to take effective measures to preclude similar incidents"). From these two "facts" the international general public should easily infer that the conflicts have lasted for quite a long time and that China's "solemn requirement" has been to no avail. Therefore, they should understand that in this case negative sanctioning seems to be China's only choice in protecting the "life and property security of the Chinese people". To sum up, the rationale chosen by the spokesperson to back up the necessity of the sanction is perhaps not the only way in which the urgency of the issue concerned and the necessity of the sanction could be effectively highlighted, but it fits very well into the international general public's recognition of the "urgent situation" and the "necessary sanction" that are focused upon here.

As for the presentational devices that may help to make exerting pressure

on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction seem to be reasonable, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the way in which the spokesperson attempts to make the negative sanctioning clear (otherwise the pressure cannot be really exerted) while avoiding seeming to be abusing power. Compared with other modes of confrontational maneuvering, exerting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction can be more easily seen as playing the bully by the international general public. To avoid making such a negative impression on the international general public, the spokesperson points in Example 7.5 in a very euphemistic way at the negative sanctioning. The two expressions used to refer to the negative sanctioning, i.e., "express strong dissatisfaction" and "reserve the right to make further response", are likely to seem rather self-restrained and diplomatically polite to the international general public, which is also required by the 2nd institutional precondition ("The expressions used by the spokesperson should not go to extremes") and the 5th institutional precondition ("The spokesperson should keep his/her emotions in control") of China's MoFA's regular press conferences. However, all the parties involved are supposedly familiar with diplomatic language use, and to them these two expressions will therefore be informative in an appropriate way, because it is well-known that in the field of diplomacy such kind of expressions always refer to negative sanctioning.

According to the 1st rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, "Discussants may not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or from calling standpoints into question" (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, p. 190), the spokesperson's exertion of pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction could easily be a fallacy of *ad baculum* in the imaginary critical discussion with the immediate opponent because it prevents the immediate opponent from calling this standpoint into question. In the discussion with the international general public, which takes place simultaneously, these moves need not necessarily be considered fallacious, since they do not hinder a smooth development of this critical discussion but are used to justify the unavoidability of taking this negative sanction against the immediate opponent if the spokesperson's

standpoint is not accepted. The soundness of such a justification mainly depends on whether the argumentation involved really support the unavoidability of this sanction without any flaws.

Likewise, according to the 1st rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse, the spokesperson's exertion of pressure on the other party by appealing to sympathy in the critical discussion with the international general public could easily be a fallacy of *ad misericordiam* because it discourages the international general public from calling the standpoint into question. In the imaginary critical discussion with the immediate opponent, which takes place simultaneously, these argumentative moves need not necessarily be considered fallacious since they are not intended to hinder a smooth development of this critical discussion, but are used to justify why the spokesperson's standpoint should be accepted. The soundness of such a justification depends on whether the argumentation involved really supports the acceptability of the spokesperson's standpoint without any flaws.

It goes without saying that in determining the soundness of the argumentative moves in all critical discussions conducted by the spokesperson, i.e., between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent and between the spokesperson and the international general public, in which pressure is exerted on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to sympathy, the institutional preconditions of China's MoFA's regular press conferences should in all cases be taken into consideration.

7.4 Combining various modes of confrontational maneuvering

Up until this section we have discussed how the spokespersons use such modes of confrontational maneuvering as dissociation and changing the topic to redefine the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist and we have looked into how the spokesperson uses such modes of

confrontational maneuvering as personal attack, declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable and putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction or appealing to sympathy to prevent a real critical discussion on the standpoint at issue. To make clear which role these modes of confrontational maneuvering play in the spokespersons' responses to the journalist, we discussed each of them separately. Yet, this does not mean that in argumentative practice these modes of strategic maneuvering are indeed always used separately by the spokesperson. On the contrary, in many cases these modes of strategic maneuvering are combined. This deliberate combination is either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering we discussed or at reaching a more convincing effect than each single mode of maneuvering could reach by itself by a concerted effort consisting of an accumulation of several modes of strategic maneuvering.

To give an impression of how such a strategic combination is generally realized in our empirical material and how in this way the spokespersons intend to contribute to the convincingness of their responses to the international general public, we will return in this section to some cases we have already analyzed in the previous chapters and the previous sections of this chapter with a focus on a particular mode of confrontational maneuvering. In this section, we will make clear how in the cases concerned different modes of confrontational maneuvering are combined in a strategic way. Our "re-analysis" of these cases will start with Example 4.6.

Example 4.6

*Q: Spokesperson John Kirby of the US State Department issued a statement on the one-year anniversary of the so-called mass detention of **human rights** lawyers in China. What is your response?*

*A: The US has been creating headlines with the topic of the so-called human rights issue in China for many years. What it cares about is not the **human rights of 1.3 billion people in China, but those of a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation.** China is a law-based country.*

Our judicial authorities handle relevant cases in accordance with the law and guarantee the suspects' legal rights and interests pursuant to Chinese law. Whoever violates the law, regardless of who he is or what he does, will be punished by the law.

Making irresponsible remarks on the normal handling of cases by China's judicial organs is in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law. More importantly, it is a blatant interference in China's domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty.

For so many years, the US has been trying to disrupt China by interfering in China's domestic affairs using the so-called human rights issue, only to find these attempts futile.

(July 11, 2016)

In Section 4.4 this example has been discussed as a prototypical case in which the spokesperson *dissociates* Term II from Term I by explicating or implying that Term I is used by the opponent in a way that narrows the meaning of the original term improperly and that the way in which term II is used by the spokespersons actually conveys the “exact” meaning of the Term. As explained in Section 4.4, in this example two meanings of the Term “human rights (in China)” are dissociated from each other by the spokesperson: Term I, “human rights (in China)” as used by the US, according to the spokesperson, refers to the “human rights of a dozen or several dozen people under China's judicial investigation”, and Term II, “human rights (in China)” as viewed by the spokesperson himself/herself, refers to “the human rights of 1.3 billion people in China”. Through this deliberate differentiation the spokesperson suggests that the meaning given to Term I by the US is much narrower or even biased compared with the “exact” meaning of Term II, which is broader, more inclusive and impartial. Upon closer inspection, apart from the **dissociation (indicated in bold lines)**, two other modes of confrontational maneuvering, i.e., declaring a standpoint *unallowed (indicated in italicized lines)* and personal attack (indicated in underlined lines), are used as well. In what follows we will provide a re-analysis of this case to make clear how these different modes are strategically combined.

The journalist's question in Example 4.6 concerns criticism by John Kirby, a spokesperson of the US State Department, of China's so-called mass detention of Chinese human rights lawyers. By asking “what is your response?” the journalist intends the Chinese spokesperson to focus the discussion on John Kirby's criticism. Among the options the spokesperson has in replying to John Kirby's criticism as quoted by the journalist are: he/she could deny John Kirby's criticism and justify this denial with reasons; he/she could simply clarify / justify China's standpoint on the so-called mass detention of Chinese human rights lawyers; he/she could change the topic of discussion suggested by the journalist. In giving the actual reply, the spokesperson makes the following three strategic moves.

The first strategic move consists of launching an indirect personal attack on the US by accusing the country of having “suspicious motives” and “suspicious interests” in criticizing China's dealing with human rights: “The US has been creating headlines with the topic of the so-called human rights issue in China for many years” and “For so many years, the US has been trying to disrupt China by interfering in China's domestic affairs using the so-called human rights issue, only to find these attempts futile”. As discussed in Chapter 5, by launching such an indirect personal attack the spokesperson attempts to cut down the credibility/authority of his / her immediate opponent, in this case the US side, in stating criticisms against China's human rights situation, thereby making the US' criticisms of “China's detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” seem less convincing or even unconvincing to the international general public.

The second strategic move consists of dissociating the “improperly narrowed or even biased” meaning given to the term “human rights (in China)” by the US spokesperson from the “exact” meaning of this term. As discussed in Chapter 4, this move aims, again, at undermining the authority / credibility of the immediate opponent (in this case the US) in criticizing China's human rights situation, thus trying to convincing the international general public of the lack of integrity of the US' criticisms of “China's detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”.

The third strategic move consists of declaring any standpoint on “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”, particularly the standpoint of the US side, unallowed. This unallowed declaration is implicitly realized by claiming that “Making irresponsible remarks on the normal handling of cases by China’s judicial organs [detention of Chinese human rights lawyers] is in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law. More importantly, it is a blatant interference in China’s domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty”. By making this claim, the spokesperson also provides a “Necessity Rationale” for this unallowed declaration. This rationale is warranted by two reasons: any standpoint/remark from the US side relating to “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” is “in itself a violation of the spirit of the rule of law” and it is “a blatant interference in China’s domestic affairs and judicial sovereignty”. These two reasons have their roots in the 1st Principle (mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty) and the 3rd Principle (mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs) of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” that China refers to as the Necessity Rationale for declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable (see Sub-section 6.3.1). As discussed in Chapter 6, the fundamental purpose of declaring a standpoint unallowed or indisputable is to exempt the standpoint at issue (in this case any standpoint/remark relating to “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”) from a real critical discussion.

How do the three strategic argumentative moves just discussed interact with each other? As we see it, the third strategic move -- declaring any standpoint on “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”, particularly the standpoint of the US side, unallowed -- is the dominant mode of confrontational maneuvering in the spokesperson’s reply, since it serves the fundamental purpose of this reply to deny directly the need to have a serious critical discussion on the criticism made by the US side (represented by its spokesperson John Kirby), and also prevents any similar criticism of China’s human rights situation by the international general public from being made.

The other two strategic moves, i.e., launching an indirect personal attack on the US and dissociating the two meanings of the term “human rights (in

China)”, constitute peripheral but nevertheless vital modes of confrontational maneuvering in the spokesperson’s reply. By cutting down the US’ credibility/authority in criticizing China’s human rights situation and thus making the American criticism of “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers” seem less convincing or unconvincing to the international general public, the first and the second argumentative move reinforce the strategic function of the first argumentative move: if the US side does not really have the “credibility / authority” required for criticizing China’s human rights situation, how can the country then criticize “China’s detention of Chinese human rights lawyers”?

In his expose of the extended theory of Pragma-Dialectics, *Strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse*, van Eemeren (2010, pp. 45-46; 2018, p. 116) points out that each instance of strategic maneuvering is actually part of a broader category of strategic maneuvering connected with one or more of the four stages of a critical discussion. If (and only if) the strategic maneuvers carried out in a particular stage hang together in such a way that they can be regarded as being systematically coordinated, can it be said that they are part of a specific argumentative strategy (confrontational strategy, opening strategy, argumentational strategy, concluding strategy, general discussion strategy). Viewed from this perspective, the three interrelated argumentative moves (strategic maneuvers) discussed above do constitute together a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Silencing the other party*.²⁴

Another confrontational strategy consisting of various strategic modes of strategic maneuvering shows up in cases in which spokespersons declare a standpoint unallowed. As can be observed in the corpus of the spokespersons’ argumentative replies collected for the current research, it happens frequently that the spokespersons, immediately after they make clear that no standpoint can be expected from them, change the topic of discussion suggested by the questioning journalist into another one. Take for instance, Example 6.9.

²⁴ In briefly discussing certain confrontational strategies in this chapter we refrain from specifying how exactly the two levels of coordination (the ordering of argumentative moves and the three aspects of strategic maneuvering) are represented in the various strategies (van Eemeren 2018, pp. 116-117), because this is not vital to what we want to demonstrate.

Example 6.9

Q: Can you comment on the recent Iranian media reports that [the] China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is taking over Total's stake in [the] South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran? Does this mean that [the] CNPC has secured an exemption from the US sanctions?

A: I am not aware of the specific situation you mentioned. What I can tell you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal.

(November 27, 2018)

As discussed in Section 6.4, by claiming not to be “aware of the specific situation” mentioned by the journalist, the spokesperson declares in the reply that from him or her no standpoint on the CNPC’s take-over from Total can be expected, thereby preventing the discussion of the issue raised by the journalist from coming off the ground. Taken into consideration that the context of this exchange that the US had threatened to sanction all corporations that continued to do any business with Iran, including this large gas project, it can be concluded that the spokesperson’s purpose in refusing to provide any clear standpoint on this particular topic most probably is to avoid unnecessary criticism from the US before the take-over is realized.

Immediately after this unallowed declaration, the spokesperson states a standpoint concerning the cooperation between China and Iran: “What I can tell you is that China and Iran maintain normal cooperation in various areas and that the cooperation is open, transparent, legitimate and legal”. In this way, the spokesperson changes the topic of discussion from “the CNPC’s take-over of Total’s stake in [the] South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran” to “the normal cooperation between China and Iran”. As discussed in Section 6.4, the primary purpose of this topic change is to leave ample room for explaining or justifying the possibility of future cooperation between China and Iran with regard to the CNPC’s takeover of Total’s stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran. The ambiguity of the expression “normal cooperation” plays an important role in helping the spokesperson to realize this purpose, since

it can be interpreted in different ways: “the CNPC’s take-over of Total’s stake in the South Pars Phase 11 gas projects in Iran” could belong to the “normal cooperation” between the two countries, but it could also not be part of it. That is to say, no matter whether or not the CNPC takes over Total’s stake after this press conference, China can hardly be accused of inconsistent acting, since the expression “normal cooperation” allows for various interpretations.

In addition, the change of topic also makes it easier for the spokesperson to exempt the difference of opinion suggested by the questioning journalist from critical discussion: if there is another topic worthier to be discussed, why to discuss the old topic suggested by the journalist, which is not suitable to be discussed? Viewed in this way, the two strategic moves the spokesperson carries out in Example 6.9, i.e., declaring a standpoint unallowed and changing the topic of discussion, are actually complementary to each other. They constitute together a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Distracting the other party*.

The last case we are going to re-analyze is the spokesperson’s reply in Example 7.4, which is in Section 7.3 discussed focusing on the spokesperson’s strategic use of putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction.

Example 7.4

Q: Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told the press on January 12 that if a foreign naval vessel transits Japanese waters for purposes other than “innocent passage”, they will order a naval patrol to deal with it. Some Japanese media believe that this is a new policy by the Japanese government to cope with Chinese naval vessels sailing near Diaoyu Dao. What is your comment?

*A: I have made our position clear yesterday. The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in [the] territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao. We advise the Japanese side not to take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension. **Otherwise, they will face all the consequences.***

(January 13, 2016)

As discussed in Section 7.3, to prevent disagreement with or criticism of the standpoint that the Japanese side should “not take any provocative actions

and ratchet up tension”, the spokesperson puts pressure on the other party by pointing at the negative sanction that China has in store: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”. Apart from this strategic move, in the original analysis of this case we also pay attention to the statement that is made by the spokesperson before he/she points at the negative sanction: “The Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”. We have made clear that the spokesperson treats this statement as common ground he/she presupposes the audience already to agree with before the discussion started. What role does this taken-for-granted statement play in this reply? As we see it, it serves as the “rationale” for the spokesperson declaring the standpoint that “the Japanese side should not take any provocative actions and ratchet up tension” indisputable. Given China’s longstanding standpoint that “China exercises full sovereignty over the Diaoyu Dao”, it is clear that, according to the spokesperson, this rationale is warranted by the 1st Principle (mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty) of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence” (see Section 3.3).

Our analysis shows that in preventing any disagreement with or criticism of his/her standpoint, the spokesperson makes two strategic moves successively: the first one consists of *declaring his/her standpoint indisputable* (backed up by the rationale that “the Chinese side has the right to carry out normal navigation and patrol in territorial waters of Diaoyu Dao”) and the second one is putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction: “Otherwise, they [the Japanese side] will face all the consequences”. Together these strategic moves constitute a confrontational strategy that can be provisionally named *Pressurizing the other party*.

When more than one mode of confrontational maneuvering is adopted by the spokesperson in his/her reply, the assessment of the argumentative soundness of this reply will be more complicated. First of all, we have to differentiate the two critical discussions that the spokesperson carries out simultaneously in the argumentative discourse, one with the immediate opponent and the other one with the international general public. Next we have

to check the soundness of each of the modes of strategic maneuvering that are in combination adopted by the spokesperson in each of the two critical discussions. In doing so, the relevant rules of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse in relation with the institutional preconditions of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences discussed in Chapter 3 should be taken into account.

7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, two modes of confrontational maneuvering used by the spokespersons have been discussed: changing the topic of discussion and putting pressure on the other party. In addition, an analysis is provided of how the spokespersons maneuver strategically at China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences by combining in their response to the questioning journalists several modes of confrontational maneuvering that we have discussed in this chapter and in the previous chapters.

As we have shown, changing the topic of discussion by the spokesperson is a mode of confrontational maneuvering aimed at redefining the difference of opinion posed or suggested by the opponent in order to make it easier to resolve it in the spokesperson’s favor. When the spokesperson changes the topic of discussion, he/she may or may not change the subject at issue. However, constrained by the 3rd institutional precondition of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences, the spokesperson will try to make a “reasonable” and “sincere” impression on the international general public by sticking to the subject at issue suggested by the questioning journalist unless he/she considers the subject of discussion too sensitive or not yet ready to be discussed.

As is shown in the exemplary analysis of the case reported in Example 7.2, both in the discussion between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent and in the discussion between the spokesperson and the international general public the change of topic takes place in the empirical counterpart of the confrontation stage. Changing the topic in the critical discussion between the spokesperson and the immediate opponent could be a derailment of stra-

tegic maneuvering that amounts to the notorious “straw man” fallacy, because it involves a violation of the 3rd rule of the pragma-dialectical code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse (the “Standpoint Rule”). However, in the critical discussion the spokesperson is conducting with the international general public in response to the questioning journalist, the change of topic does not necessarily involve a violation of the code of conduct, because the international general public is an audience that can be imagined to have its doubts but it is not supposed to have already a fixed standpoint of its own.

As the analyses of the cases reported in Example 7.3, Example 7.4 and Example 7.5 have shown, the spokesperson sometimes puts pressure on the other party either by pointing at a negative sanction or by appealing to its sympathy to exempt the standpoint at issue from a serious critical discussion. In putting pressure on the other party by pointing at a negative sanction, the spokesperson often mentions the negative consequences in a blunt way, but in a few cases these consequences are only hinted at in an indirect way. The pressure exerted by the spokesperson on the other party, in particular on the international general public, can also consist of trying to arouse its sympathy. In doing so, he/she appeals to the international general public’s understanding by describing how much efforts China has made, how difficult it has been to China or how helpless China is with regard to the subject at issue.

In the case of pointing out a negative sanction and in the case of appealing to sympathy the spokesperson handles the two critical discussions (one with the immediate opponent, the other with the international general public) in a different way: in pointing out a negative sanction, the sanction is directed at the immediate opponent and the spokesperson thus intends to deny the need to have a serious discussion of the standpoint at issue. In the critical discussion with the international general public which takes place simultaneously, the spokesperson exerts pressure by pointing at a sanction to convince the international general public that taking this sanction against the immediate opponent is unavoidable if his/her standpoint is not accepted. In appealing to sympathy, the spokesperson’s pressure is directed at the international general public to prevent the development of a serious discussion of his/her

standpoint by exempting it from the need to do so. In the simultaneous critical discussion with the immediate opponent, the spokesperson is exerting pressure by appealing to sympathy to justify why his/her standpoint should be accepted (without really believing that this appeal will really work).

In the argumentative practice of China’s MoFA’s regular press conferences all modes of confrontational maneuvering we have discussed in this study are strategically combined by the spokespersons. Such deliberate combinations are either aimed at reinforcing the strategic function of the predominant mode of confrontational maneuvering or at reaching a more convincing effect by using in a concerted effort several modes of strategic maneuvering than each single mode could achieve by itself. When they are used together in this way, the various combined uses of these modes of confrontational maneuvering constitute different types of confrontational strategies. Which type of confrontational strategy is used depends on which common purpose is served by the combined use of the various modes of strategic maneuvering that are employed.