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# “I was only quoting”: Shifting viewpoint and speaker commitment

**Abstract:** When people are accused of having said something objectionable, for instance because it is considered false or inappropriate, various strategies are available for denying or diminishing the speaker’s commitment to the contested utterance (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021). In this chapter we take a closer look at one of these strategies, i.e. the so-called “viewpoint defence”, in which an arguer denies that the contested words were their own by attributing them to someone else. A typical instance is the claim that one was “just quoting”. Our goal is first, to provide an overview of the different forms the viewpoint defence may take and second, to provide criteria for determining if and when such a defence is a reasonable strategy or may be assessed as untruthful. We show that the very act of quoting triggers implicatures that are not easy to deny. Specifically, we argue in favour of a generalized implicature to the effect that the quoter is accountable for the contents of the quote – unless a convincing alternative purpose for the quote is provided or may be inferred from the context.

## 1 Introduction

At the start of a debate in the Dutch parliament in June 2011 on the integrity of the central bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten,<sup>1</sup> Eric Lucassen of the Party for Freedom (PVV) opened his contribution with the following statements:

(1) The country of Curaçao is being ruled by a corrupt crook. The central bank of Curaçao and Sint-Maarten is led by a fraud, and a blackmailing fraud at that.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These islands in the Caribbean constitute independent countries within the kingdom of The Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20102011-99-12.odt>. Unless indicated otherwise, translations from Dutch are ours (RB/HJ/MvL).

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Lucassen's speech was interrupted by the then Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Piet Hein Donner, who threatened to leave the room since he did not want to attend a debate where this kind of language was used with respect to ministers of other countries. However, in the ensuing argument, Lucassen defended himself by saying that the words in (1) were not *his* words, but that he was actually quoting statements made by Curaçao officials. He had intended to make this clear in the subsequent sentences of his speech. Other members of parliament backed up Lucassen by saying that "quoting is always allowed" and "never before has a Minister left the parliament because of a quote". Even though this defence appeased Donner, who decided to stay on for the debate, it may be questioned if quoting is as non-committal an act as the reactions of the parliamentarians suggest.

In this paper we take a close look at the particular defence strategy of denying commitment to something you said by pointing out that the contested words were not *your* words but the words of others. Defending oneself by claiming that one was "just quoting" the words of another speaker is a typical form of this defence. However, in this paper we regard this defence as an instantiation of the broader category of the "viewpoint defence" – as we call it – which includes all instances in which speaker commitment is denied by shifting responsibility for an utterance to another source. Our goal is not only to provide an overview of different forms the viewpoint defence may take, but also to determine if and when such a defence is a reasonable strategy or should be considered untruthful.

The viewpoint defence is a specific strategy that arguers can use when being accused of having said something objectionable. In section 2.1, we present our model of defence lines against accusations concerning controversial utterances, which is based on the general classification of types of defence from classical rhetorical status theory (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021). Classifying the viewpoint defence in terms of our model brings to light some complexities of this defence strategy and the evaluation thereof, having to do mainly with the inherently polyphonic nature of viewpoint shifts. After all, the accusation as well as the defence may concern either the original utterance being quoted or the act of quoting itself.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in (1), we may accept that Lucassen was conveying the opinion of officials from Curaçao, but this begs the question of whether he agrees with them and, if not, why he is quoting them to begin with. From the discussion in section 2.1, two critical questions

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<sup>3</sup> Since our definition of the viewpoint defence includes appeals to viewpoint shifts that are not explicitly marked as such (see the cases studies in section 3.2), we are using the terms *quoting*, *quoter* and *quoted utterance* in a broad sense (cf. fn. 9).

emerge in section 2.2 on evaluating whether a specific instance of the viewpoint defence counts as a reasonable one.

Our analysis of the viewpoint defence will be illustrated and elaborated in section 3 by discussing two groups of case studies from our corpus of viewpoint defences from Dutch politics and media. In the first group, it is undisputed that the contested words are not the speaker’s own since this is explicitly indicated, as in the case of direct and indirect speech or retweeting a message (section 3.1). In the second group (section 3.2), the speaker appeals to an implicit shift of viewpoint in the utterance under dispute, which raises questions about whether and how such a shift can be identified. On the basis of the case studies in section 3, we further specify, in section 4, our critical questions. In section 5 we mention a way to extend the analysis in future research.

## 2 Analyzing and assessing the viewpoint defence

When people are accused of having said something objectionable, either because it is considered false or inappropriate, various strategies are available for denying or diminishing the speaker’s commitment to the contested utterance. In Boogaart, Jansen and van Leeuwen (2021), we categorized these options by combining the four defence lines from classical status theory with the pragma-linguistic categories of explicitly and implicitly communicated meaning. We repeat the main points of our analysis here and then determine the position of the viewpoint defence with respect to these distinctions (2.1). We conclude this discussion with two main critical questions that are instrumental in determining when the viewpoint defence is reasonable (2.2).

### 2.1 Defence strategies and implicatures

Classical rhetorical status theory deals with the basic issues that may be addressed in a legal case, making a general distinction between four “statuses” (Leeman & Braet 1987: 76–90; Kienpointner 1997: 229; Braet 2007: 221–227). These are listed in the leftmost column of Figure 1. From the specific perspective of the defendant, they generate the four defence lines in the middle column. In the right-hand column, we illustrate how we applied the four defence lines to cases where the accusation concerns a controversial utterance (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021).

Status	Defence strategy used by the defendant	Applied to the denial of speaker commitment
(1) <i>Coniectura</i> : was the action performed?	<b>Denying</b> having performed the act	<i>I did not say that</i>
(2) <i>Definitio</i> : how should the act be defined?	<b>Redefining</b> the act in such a way that it is not illegal anymore	<i>I meant that differently</i>
(3) <i>Qualitas</i> : was the act justified?	Appeal to mitigating <b>circumstances</b>	<i>I was drunk I said it in the heat of the moment It was a slip of the tongue etc.</i>
(4) <i>Translatio</i> : has the (legal) procedure been executed correctly?	Appeal to a <b>wrong judge</b>	<i>Who are you to judge me?</i>

**Figure 1:** Main lines of defence according to status theory as applied to controversial utterances (summary of Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 230–231).

In classical rhetoric, the four defence lines of status theory were used to describe how one can defend oneself in response to an accusation of having committed an illicit act. In Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen (2021) we showed that if the accusation concerns an utterance rather than an act the defendant may exploit the difference between the literal content of what was said and the implicatures thereof (in the sense of Grice 1975). They may, for instance, only accept accountability for the literal content of their utterance and not for the disputed implicature that the accuser “read into” their words (“Those are your words, not mine!”).<sup>4</sup> If the accusation concerns the literal content of the utterance, the accused may choose the reverse strategy of claiming that they did not mean their words literally but, for instance, were exaggerating or being ironic or sarcastic. Thus, in our data consisting of denials of speaker commitment, we made a further distinction between these two scenarios, as has been represented in Figure 2.

The viewpoint defence is a specific way to defend oneself against an accusation of saying something false or inappropriate; in terms of Figure 2 it may be defined as the third step in (2).

<sup>4</sup> In some respects, this itself is a kind of viewpoint defence since it shifts the responsibility for the contested implicature to the accuser, who is basically being accused of using straw man argumentation (Macagno and Walton 2017). We will not delve into this any further in the present paper, which deals with step 3 rather than step 2 in Figure 2.

	Scenario 1: <i>Denying literal meaning</i>	Scenario 2: <i>Denying an implicature</i> <sup>5</sup>
<i>Step 1</i>	Speaker says p and may implicate q	Speaker says p and may implicate q
<i>Step 2</i>	Hearer holds speaker accountable for p	Hearer holds speaker accountable for q
<i>Step 3</i>	Speaker denies commitment to p	Speaker denies commitment to q

**Figure 2:** Two scenarios for commitment denial based on the distinction between literal meaning and implicatures (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 212).

(2) *The viewpoint defence*

Step 1: speaker says p and may implicate q

Step 2: hearer holds speaker accountable for p and/or q

Step 3: speaker (S1) denies commitment to p and/or q by suggesting that another speaker (S2) is accountable for p and/or q<sup>6</sup>

The case of Lucassen’s statements cited in (1) is an example of this, as is Nancy Pelosi’s defence, cited in (3), after she was attacked for calling Donald Trump “morbidly obese”:<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> More precisely, we argued that Gricean *conventional implicatures* and *generalized conversational implicatures* behave like literal content when it comes to denial of commitment, so our category of implicatures is constituted by what Grice calls *particularized conversational implicatures* that are entirely context-dependent.

<sup>6</sup> An interesting variant of the viewpoint defence that is not, strictly speaking, covered by this definition is where speakers refer to themselves at a younger age (“I said that when I did not know better”) or in a different role (“I said that as a private person”). An example of the latter is the way in which Paul Abels, the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security, defended himself after a Dutch television program revealed that Abels had posted negative tweets about Dutch member of parliament Pieter Omtzigt. Abels was fiercely criticized for these tweets, since he was responsible for the security of politicians and for assessing the extent to which they are being threatened. Abels defended himself by stating (among other things): “I assume that *as a politically engaged private person* I have the right to intervene on Twitter or otherwise in discussions with and about politicians and political issues.” [our italics; RB/HJ/MvL] (<https://www.parool.nl/nederland/topambtenaar-onder-vuur-na-ontoelaatbare-tweets-over-pieter-omtzig~bf27f45b/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>).

<sup>7</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/19/politics/nancy-pelosi-donald-trump-fat-hydroxychloroquine/index.html>.

(3) I was only quoting what doctors had said about him so I was being factual in a very sympathetic way.

In her original statement, given in (4), Pelosi indeed suggested that there was some source for the phrase *morbidly obese*, while remaining vague about its precise origin, by adding *they say*:

(4) I would rather he not be taking something that has not been approved by the scientists, especially in his age group and in his, shall we say, weight group. *He's morbidly obese, they say*. [our italics and underlining; RB/HJ/MvL]

It is, however, not always as explicit as in (4) that contested words were meant as a quote.<sup>8</sup> For many cases, the term “quotative” is too restrictive because they concern less explicit forms of perspective taking. For instance, speakers may argue that they were not presenting their own thoughts on some matter, but rather temporarily taking someone else’s perspective, as in forms of free indirect speech and thoughts that are less clearly marked as quoting. We do include such appeals to implicit “represented speech and thought” in our concept of the viewpoint defence because, as is well known from the literature on indirect and free indirect speech (e.g. Fludernik 1993; Sanders 2010; Verhagen 2012), there is no clear cut-off point between explicit and implicit viewpoint shifts.<sup>9</sup> Such in-between cases constitute important examples in view of assessing the reasonableness of this defence strategy, as will be witnessed by the case studies in 3.2.<sup>10</sup>

So how can the viewpoint defence (“These are not *my* words” / “I was just quoting”) be characterized in terms of the four defence lines in Figure 1? The

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**8** The form of the quote used by Pelosi is already quite a bit removed from typical cases of direct and indirect speech. Leech and Short (1981: 333) consider instances where the reporting clause (*they say*) follows the represented utterance to be somewhere in between indirect speech and free indirect speech; Verhagen (2012) argues that such cases are much more like free indirect speech. For *they say*, in particular, it might also be argued that it functions as a lexical expression of “hearsay” evidentiality in English (e.g. Langacker 2017: 38), but in any case it does explicitly indicate a source of information other than Pelosi herself.

**9** These cases of viewpoint shifts that are not explicitly marked as such indicate that we are using the terms *quoting*, *quoter* and *quoted utterance* in a broad sense (cf. fn. 3).

**10** A famous example of a more or less implicit viewpoint shift can be found in the speech held by Philipp Jenninger in the German parliament in 1988, to remember the 1938 *Kristallnacht* (‘Cristal Night’). To try and explain the thoughts of the Nazis in the period leading up to Kristallnacht, Jenninger made use of free indirect speech. Within 24 hours after giving the speech, Jenninger had to resign from his position as chair because he had been too sympathetic towards the Nazi ideas. Still, there were many cues in the speech making clear both that Jenninger was “quoting” and that he was distancing himself from the thoughts being represented (Ensink 1992).

brief answer to this question is that this defence strategy is an example of the second defence line, i.e. redefinition. The defendant cannot and does not deny having uttered the contested words (i.e. defence line 1), but appeals to the way in which these words should be interpreted; a parallel in the domain of acts would be arguing that a killing is a case of manslaughter rather than murder. More precisely, the viewpoint defence can often be regarded as denying an implicature, as in step 3 of scenario 2 (Figure 2). Claiming that one is “just quoting” boils down to denying that the quote as such has certain implicatures, e.g. denying that the speaker agrees with the content of the quote and that they are using it to trigger new implicatures.

However, this analysis may need some elucidation since the viewpoint defence strategy is complex: there are always two utterances involved. On the one hand, there is the original (quoted) utterance; on the other hand, there is the “quote as quote” uttered by the accused speaker at a later time. Now, both utterances may have their own implicatures attached to them. Specifically, when a speaker claims to be referring to the views of someone else, they must have their reasons for doing so at this particular point in the discourse. If one were, literally, “just quoting”, this would be at odds with Grice’s (1975) maxim of Relation. The act of quoting by S1 will have implicatures in the new context other than, or in addition to, the original utterance by S2 did. The complex structure of quoting may thus be represented as in (5):<sup>11</sup>

(5) S1 quotes [S2 says p and implicates q1] and implicates q2

As an illustration, let us look more precisely at the Pelosi defence that was cited in (3). After Pelosi had been called “a sick woman” by Trump for labeling him “morbidly obese”, she claimed that she was “only quoting what doctors had said about him”. In terms of (5):

S1: Nancy Pelosi

S2: “doctors”

p: Donald Trump is *morbidly obese*

What could be the different implicatures referred to as *q1* and *q2* in (5)? The term “morbidly obese” as used by S2 (“doctors”) is a term of science that is well defined

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**11** The representation in (5) is not meant to suggest that, in addition to what S2 “said”, S1 is also quoting the implicatures of the quoted utterance (*q1*). In fact, the Pelosi case makes clear that *q2* may be quite different from *q1*. We do regard it as a generalized and thus defeasible implicature of the very act of quoting that S1 agrees with the contents of the quote and the implicatures thereof (see below). This, however, is itself an implicature at the utterance level (*q2*), to be distinguished from cases of “embedded implicature” discussed in the literature (e.g. Huang 2017: 167–171).

in terms of a person's BMI and that may be used to describe the condition of a patient. As such, it may for instance suggest that the patient should improve his condition and lose weight (q1). However, in the non-medical context in which Pelosi used the quote, p has different implicatures. In (4), Pelosi refers to Trump's condition to suggest that he should not be taking the antimalaria drug hydroxychloroquine to prevent getting Covid. So the latter is at least one of the implicatures of the quote as quote (q2), but there clearly are others: ultimately, in using the term, Pelosi may even be trying to suggest that Trump is not fit to be President. This becomes clearer if we look at Pelosi's full statement in (6).

(6) "I gave him a dose of his own medicine. He's called women one thing or another over time, and I thought he thinks that passes off as humor in certain cultures," Pelosi told reporters at her weekly press conference. "I was only quoting what doctors had said about him, so I was being factual in a very sympathetic way."<sup>12</sup>

From (6), it appears that by calling him "morbidly obese" Pelosi was trying to get back at Trump for having offended women for their weight in the past, which is an instantiation of the fourth defence line ("who are you to accuse me!"), and she was clearly trying to be funny, which may be regarded as an instance of "redefinition" (second defence line), but a different one from appealing to a shift of viewpoint. In actual fact, Pelosi's inconsistent defence in (6) shows that her claim that she was "just quoting" and, therefore, "being factual" is simply a false one.

The Pelosi case illustrates quite well the viewpoint defence that may thus be analyzed as redefining the interpretation of the contested utterance (defence line 2) by denying an implicature (scenario 2), more specifically one or more of the implicatures attached to the act of quoting itself (q2 in (5)). In addition to particularized implicatures that are entirely context-dependent, there seems to be a generalized implicature q2 to the effect that quoters subscribe to the contents of a quote unless the context makes clear that they do not, or they explicitly distance themselves from it. For instance, even after it was clarified that Lucassen in (1) was quoting, there was no doubt that these quotes were reflecting and supporting Lucassen's own view on the administration of Curaçao and Sint-Maarten. In principle, people may of course quote all kinds of utterances they do not agree with, e.g. to ridicule someone else's opinion, but then either the context or the speaker will make clear that this is the case. This is precisely what a *generalized* conversational implicature is: in the absence of clues to the contrary, the hearer is entitled to assume that it holds. If it is not can-

<sup>12</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-donald-trump-nancy-pelosi-politics-6f658ee91cc411eb2ed54b535d35314f>.

celled immediately, such a generalized implicature is very hard to deny in response to an accusation at a later stage (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 213).<sup>13</sup>

We conclude this section by taking a brief look at the other defence strategies in Figure 1 from the perspective of the viewpoint defence. The first defence line, i.e. denial, we restrict to cases in which the defendant claims not to have uttered (nor quoted) the contested words at all. This is what happens, for instance, if, in response to an accusation of having used abusive language in a tweet, the defendant claims that their twitter account was hacked (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 223). If this really happened, the defendant does have a point that someone else is entirely responsible for the abusive statements since they never wrote them, or even quoted them, so this rather exceptional type of viewpoint defence would constitute an instance of the first defence line.<sup>14</sup> As for the third and fourth defence lines, we certainly do encounter them in our case studies to be discussed in section 3, but they do not concern the viewpoint defence as such. Of course, defendants may appeal to the circumstances to explain *why* they used an ‘objectionable’ quote (defence line 3), or they might launch a counterattack against the accuser (defence line 4), as Pelosi did in (6), but such supporting arguments do not themselves constitute instances of the viewpoint defence.

## 2.2 Evaluating the viewpoint defence

When using the viewpoint defence, a speaker is denying commitment to something they said by shifting responsibility to another speaker who is supposed to have uttered these words and/or to have held these views at some earlier time. In (5), we represented the “quotative” context that is being appealed to in the viewpoint defence as follows:

(5) S1 quotes [S2 says p and implicates q1] and implicates q2

To assess if a specific use of the viewpoint defence constitutes a reasonable defence, there are, then, two main critical questions that both need to be answered positively:

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<sup>13</sup> Boogaart, Jansen and van Leeuwen (2021) provide a discussion of the distinction between *cancellation* and *denial* (cf. Mazzarella, Reinecke, Noveck & Mercier 2018).

<sup>14</sup> In our previous paper, we stated that defending oneself by claiming that you were hacked is an instance of the third defence line (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 223). This is incorrect: an appeal to the third status boils down to an acknowledgement of having committed the act and pointing out extenuating circumstances. Saying that your account was hacked implies that you were not the acting person in the first place (i.e. denying being the wrongdoer).

CQ1: Are the contested words (p) of S1 really a quote?

CQ2: Is it reasonable to assume that S1 is not committed to the quote, including its implicatures (q1 and q2)?

As for CQ1, the case of Lucassen's statements cited in (1) already illustrated that the viewpoint defence is sometimes used in cases in which the alleged shift of viewpoint in the contested utterance is not fully explicit (see also the case studies in section 3.2), so in such instances in particular the question will be raised if there were sufficient linguistic or contextual clues for the hearer to identify the shift of viewpoint. This is not to say that CQ1 is irrelevant if the viewpoint shift in the disputed utterance is more clearly marked, because more specific questions may be raised about the identity of S2 and the reliability of the quote, i.e. did S2 actually say or think that p?

CQ2 pertains to issues that were discussed in some detail in section 2.1. Whenever a speaker (S1) quotes another speaker (S2), or, more generally, shifts perspective to some other source, they must have a reason for conveying the represented utterance or thought. Otherwise, the speaker is violating the maxim of Relation and the resulting discourse will be incoherent. In the default case, we may assume that S1 is committed to the quote (p) and its implicatures (q1) and is using it to trigger other or additional implicatures (q2). However, on the viewpoint defence, S1 is denying some aspect of this, depending on what the accusation pertains to (either p or q1 may already be controversial by itself, or the accusation may pertain to implicatures triggered by the quote as quote, i.e. q2). Such a defence is certainly not unreasonable a priori since there may be sufficient indications in the communicative context that S1 is not committed to the quote and, instead, had another purpose (q2) with the act of quoting. In that case CQ2 gets an affirmative answer.

In section 3, we will apply the theoretical notions from this section to actual instances of the viewpoint defence, taken from Dutch politics and media. This will also enable us, in section 4, to specify the critical questions CQ1 and CQ2.

### 3 Case studies

In this section we illustrate and elaborate our analysis by discussing two groups of case studies from our corpus of viewpoint defences that have been used in Dutch politics and media. In the first group, the viewpoint shift in the contested utterance is indicated explicitly (section 3.1). In the second group (section 3.2), the speaker appeals to a shift of viewpoint in the utterance under dispute that is more implicit.

### 3.1 Explicit viewpoint shifts

In this section, we present instances in which CQ1 does not arise since it is unambiguous that the contested utterance contained a quote, nor is it being disputed that the quote is reliable. The viewpoint defence in these cases consists of denying commitment to the contents of the quote, i.e. denying the generalized implicature (q2) that the quoter agrees with what they are quoting – either in blunt form, or by providing an alternative implicature.

#### Denying an implicature

Our first example case illustrates that a viewpoint defence in blunt form (“These are not *my* words” / “I was only quoting”) is normally not reasonable. The Dutch politician Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV), defended himself in this way in 2010 in a parliamentary debate after being interrupted by his Green Left colleague Femke Halsema:

**(6) Mr Wilders (PVV):**

However, even established political parties are waking up. This is something new. Christian Democrats in Germany are starting to understand it more and more. (. . .) The party leader of the CSU, Horst Seehofer, actually goes even further. He wants a complete halt to the immigration of Turks and Arabs to Germany. (. . .) He says: multiculti is dead. Even the German Chancellor, Mrs Merkel, says that the multicultural society has proved to be an absolute failure. Not a slight failure, but an absolute failure. *If she says that, it is saying quite a lot.* (. . .)

**Ms Halsema (GL):**

You are saying: Islam does not belong in our country. At least, that is what I assume.

**Mr Wilders (PVV):**

*No, I did not say that.*

**Ms Halsema (GL):**

No, but you quote German politicians and I assume that this is what you mean.

**Mr Wilders (PVV):**

*No, I only quoted them.*

**Ms Halsema (GL):**

Are you now standing there, quoting all those German politicians because they are so brave and dare to say all that, and then concluding that you do not dare to say it yourself?

**Mr Wilders (PVV):**

*I used a quotation, nothing more.*<sup>15</sup>

[all italics are ours, RB/HJ/MvL]

It is clear that Wilders is referring to other viewpoints here (cf. CQ1 in section 2.2): he explicitly refers to the words of Horst Seehofer and Angela Merkel by quoting them in the form of direct and indirect speech (“He says . . .”; “Mrs Merkel says that . . .”). Knowing Wilders’ political background it is obvious that he agrees with the content of these quotes: warning of problems related to what Wilders calls “the Islamification of the Netherlands” has been the central point of Wilders’ political agenda over the last decade. In other words, in terms of (5), the discussion between Halsema and Wilders concerns the question of what Wilders’ is implicating by quoting these German politicians in the “here and now” of the current debate setting (i.e. q2): Wilders is vague about this (“If she says that, it is saying quite a lot”). Halsema tries to explicate the implicature (“You are saying: Islam does not belong to our country”), which is denied by Wilders (“no, I did not say that”), who bluntly appeals to a viewpoint defence twice (“I only quoted them”, “I used a quotation, nothing more”).<sup>16</sup> This is clearly uncooperative and unreasonable: denying a plausible implicature of the quotations in the current context without providing any alternative interpretation is at odds with Grice’s maxim of Relation, and unconvincing.<sup>17</sup> Why use these quotes if you are not agreeing? What other reasons could you have for using them?

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<sup>15</sup> <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20102011-13-7.html>; translation taken from van Haaften and van Leeuwen (2020).

<sup>16</sup> When saying “I did not say that”, Wilders is also exploiting the polysemy of the Dutch verb *zeggen* (‘to say’), which resembles its English counterpart in this respect. Whereas Halsema is clearly using the verb to indicate what Wilders *meant* to say (indicating speaker intended meaning), Wilders can deny, literally, having spoken these words; the distinction essentially boils down to Austin’s distinction between locutionary and illocutionary meaning. Wilders’ defence is also an example of defence line 2 (cf. Figure 1) and in fact equally comes down to denying an implicature by appealing to a strictly literal reading.

<sup>17</sup> From a different perspective, example (6) is also discussed by van Haaften and van Leeuwen (2020: 123–124). They observe that Wilders’ debating style in general is characterized by an unwillingness to provide answers to questions and to be involved in a ‘real’ debate. Van Haaften and van Leeuwen (2020) argue that this is part of a more overarching strategy of using “bad manners” in parliamentary debate in order to create and maintain an anti-elitist image.

## Providing an alternative implicature

In section 2.2 we stated that the viewpoint defence is certainly not unreasonable per se. A case in point is the Dutch journalist Bert Brussen who had to defend himself for reposting a tweet in which Geert Wilders was threatened with death because of his anti-Islamic standpoints. Brussen posted a screenshot of this tweet on his weblog, and accompanied the tweet (given in (7) below) with the title “This is how you threaten Wilders with death”:

(7) Handsome reward for the one who cuts Wilders’ throat. Preferably from right to left, but from left to right is okay too!<sup>18</sup>

The Dutch public Prosecutor began an investigation for prosecuting Brussen, because, according to the Prosecutor, reposting this threat was punishable. In other words, although Brussen was clearly “quoting” (by reposting a tweet it was obvious that he referred to the viewpoint of someone else, namely: the tweeter of (7)), Brussen was still held accountable for the content of the tweet. Brussen, however, defended himself by saying that he had quoted the tweet because he found it newsworthy, and that he had reposted it with an ironic intention.<sup>19</sup> In other words, in terms of (5), Brussen denied commitment to the content (p) of the original tweet by suggesting that he had used this tweet to trigger alternative implicatures (q2) with this post on his weblog.

Brussen’s defence seems reasonable. He did not distance himself explicitly from the controversial content of the tweet, but a media expert who investigated the case for the Prosecutor concluded that Brussen published his message on a platform aimed at a general audience where Brussen frequently wrote about newsworthy political and societal topics. According to the media expert, it was sufficiently clear for the intended audience that Brussen did not agree with the content of the tweet, especially since he had written critically elsewhere on his blog more than once about negative treatments of Wilders in the media.<sup>20</sup> As such, Brussen’s defence that the tweet was “newsworthy”, and that the title of his web post was intended to be “ironic” seems reasonable indeed. In the end, this was also the conclusion of the Prosecutor, who decided to drop the case.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/socialmediadna/dreigtweet-op-het-weblog-van-bert-brussen>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nu.nl/internet/2306487/journalist-moet-retweet-verantwoorden-bij-politie.html>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/socialmediadna/dreigtweet-op-het-weblog-van-bert-brussen>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ad.nl/show/blogger-bert-brussen-niet-vervolgd-voor-bedreiging-wilders~a8328424/>.

As Brussen's case illustrates, a viewpoint defence can be reasonable if an alternative implicature  $q_2$  is explicitly provided or clear from the context. It goes without saying, however, that giving such alternative reasons for quoting does not necessarily lead to a reasonable defence: this depends completely on the plausibility of the alternative interpretation of the quoted words being suggested. For instance, the Dutch member of parliament Thierry Baudet, leader of the right-wing populist party Forum for Democracy, once retweeted a message from Erkenbrand, a Dutch study group linked to the alt-right movement. The message consisted of a photo of Baudet lying on his piano with the photo-shopped head and hands of Pepe the Frog – a symbol of the alt-right movement and white supremacists.<sup>22</sup> Baudet retweeted this photo adding the text 'LOL'. After being criticized for flirting with the alt-right movement and showing sympathy for its ideas, Baudet defended himself by saying that he did not know the associations connected to the meme of Pepe the Frog, and that he had posted it just because he thought it was a funny picture: "I found the tweet hilarious; I see the frog as an energetic comic character expressing a positive campaigning energy."<sup>23</sup> In other words, Baudet defended himself by appealing to an implicature ( $q_2$ ) other than the implicatures attached to the original photo ( $q_1$ ). Although the text that he added ("LOL") supports Baudet's interpretation, his defence does not seem very credible: at many occasions, Baudet had been showing off his intellectual background (indicated, for instance, by a PhD in philosophy of law) and claimed to be a man of wide reading. This makes it hard to believe that he was not familiar with the associations connected to the photo that he retweeted and at the very least making it dubious whether Baudet could deny accountability for the implicatures connected to the photo of the original tweet.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <https://twitter.com/thierrybaudet/status/817494829882048513>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/03/16/alt-right-beweging-juicht-op-het-web-hard-voor-baudet-7415174-a1550730>.

<sup>24</sup> As such, Baudet's tweet seems to be an instance of a "dog whistle" or "calculated ambivalence", i.e. a case in which one can deny a possible interpretation while at the same time conveying exactly that message for those who are happy to receive it (cf. Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 222 and the references mentioned there; see also Chapter 7). Scott (2021) provides a more elaborate discussion of the communicative intentions that can lie behind retweeting information.

## 3.2 Implicit viewpoint shifts

In our examples of the viewpoint defence discussed thus far, there is no discussion about the question of whose words the contested utterance resonates with: whenever a speaker is retweeting a message or using direct or indirect speech, it is evident that the viewpoint of another party besides S1 plays a role. However, as we mentioned in section 2.1, there are also instances in which this is less evident. In this section, we discuss three such cases, in which a shift of viewpoint is being appealed to, but this shift is actually difficult to identify in the contested utterance.

### Representing the view of the novelist

Our first example case in this section again involves the Dutch politician Thierry Baudet, who became the subject of a controversy because of a review by his hand of *Sérotonine*, a novel written by the French writer Michel Houellebecq.<sup>25</sup> Immediately after the publication of the review, which Baudet had announced in a tweet,<sup>26</sup> he was attacked for his negative views on abortion, euthanasia and the right of women to work.<sup>27</sup> Baudet responded with another tweet, saying that this news coverage was partisan and that fellow politicians had displayed fake indignation in their search for voters (defence line 4).<sup>28</sup> Playing the victim and blaming the critics remained his strategy also in an interview, the next day, with journalists of the provocative medium *GeenStijl*.<sup>29</sup> However, when the interviewer asked him if he had put some of his own feelings in the review, Baudet appealed to the viewpoint defence:

(8) I feel kindred to Houellebecq and his analysis of society and criticisms of the late-liberal community we are in, where we wonder about the fulfillment of life (. . .). I recognize that, so I did put something in it of myself, *but it still remains an analysis of the way Houellebecq sees the world.* [our italics; RB/H]/MvL]

<sup>25</sup> The review can be found at [https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2019/05/houellebecqs-unfinished-critique-of-liberal-modernity/#.XOJeOgOyP\\_c.twitter](https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2019/05/houellebecqs-unfinished-critique-of-liberal-modernity/#.XOJeOgOyP_c.twitter).

<sup>26</sup> <https://twitter.com/thierrybaudet/status/1130383296561647616>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/baudet-oogst-kritiek-met-houellebecq-essay-over-individualisme-b9e25fca/>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://twitter.com/thierrybaudet/status/1130510303316336642>.

<sup>29</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9-8XewBIP8>. He also made use of an outright denial: “. . . they are making an issue now of women’s rights, but [my article] is not about them and I certainly do not call them into question.”

Did Baudet put forward a reasonable defence by claiming that the review presented Houellebecq's views? If you read the review, it is striking that it is full of viewpoint ambiguities. Baudet makes clever use of a mix of paragraphs containing literal quotations of Houellebecq's novel, and paragraphs that describe Houellebecq's views in a more paraphrasing fashion. The literal quotations are marked in an unconventional way (i.e. not with quotation marks but with a footnote reference providing the original French wording). In contrast, the latter paragraphs often describe views and ideas without mentioning an author they can be ascribed to; in these cases it is not clear until the next paragraph that Houellebecq is intended to be their source.

Despite several of such viewpoint ambiguities in Baudet's review, it is exactly the views for which he was criticized – on abortion, euthanasia and women's right to work – that are his own without any doubt. It is true that Baudet's stance on abortion and euthanasia can be found in a section that starts with Houellebecq's view that the liberation of the modern world, with its emphasis on the "emancipation of the individual", "has left our lives empty, without purpose, and, above all, extremely lonely". But immediately after this representation of Houellebecq's point of view, Baudet proposes a further elaboration, claiming that the "maximization of individual autonomy" lies at the heart of both social-democratic and liberal ideology.<sup>30</sup> No mentioning of Houellebecq can be found in this further exploration; on the contrary, Baudet refers to Dutch legislation on abortion and euthanasia, not mentioned by Houellebecq in his novel, in order to illustrate his point:

(9) Today, even new life (in the womb) may be extinguished to avoid disturbing the individual's freedom. In the Netherlands (where I live), suicide is facilitated to ensure that here, too, no constraints – such as the duty to care for your parents – are placed on the individual.

Baudet's contested stance on women with jobs is also clearly his own. It is introduced with the statement that Houellebecq's view of the world "is validated all around us" – a claim that Baudet supports with reference to "the emancipation of women and the feminist ideology" and the prediction of a gloomy future that will result from this.<sup>31</sup>

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**30** Baudet claims that these movements hold maximum individual autonomy as their ultimate principle to which everything else is subordinate. Moreover, he predicts that this principle will weaken, "over time, all such institutions that the individual requires to fully actualize a meaningful existence – such as a family and a connection to generations past and future, a nation, a tradition, perhaps a church", and make it "eventually disappear".

**31** According to Baudet, these ideologies expect women "to reject the traditional role of supporting a husband and strive instead for an 'equal' relationship in which 'gender roles' are interchangeable".

(10) An inevitable result of all this is the demographic decline of Europe. Another outcome is constant conflict, constant competition – and in the end, fighting, divorce, and social isolation – and a new generation of boys and girls growing up in such disfigured settings.

From the above we conclude that Baudet’s viewpoint defence fails on the first critical question, i.e. the question whether he was really quoting. As our analysis reveals, there are textual indications that unambiguously show that the controversial remarks represent Baudet’s subscription to and elaboration of Houellebecq’s views. Because of the negative answer to the first main critical question, the second main question – whether the arguer could be held committed to the quote’s content – does not require examination. Baudet can be held committed to the views he had been criticized for and his denial thereof in (8) seems insincere.

### Representing the view of the victims

Our second example in which it may be questioned if the viewpoint of another party than S1 is involved, concerns a case involving Selçuk Öztürk, member of the political party DENK, in a debate in Dutch parliament, in November 2019, about the killing of 70 citizens of the Iraqi city Hawija by a bomb fired by a Dutch jet fighter.<sup>32</sup> That incident had taken place in June 2015, but parliament had never been informed about it; the case was disclosed through the work of journalists.<sup>33</sup> In his interruptions of other speakers Öztürk kept talking about “murder” in relation to the casualties, and also called the responsible Minister a *liijkenverstopper*, i.e. someone who hides dead bodies.<sup>34</sup>

Öztürk’s choice of words caused a lot of commotion, both within parliament and outside. In his response a day later, Öztürk came up with a viewpoint defence: he said that he only had been representing the views of the people in Iraq who had been hurt by the bombing.<sup>35</sup> In a way, this defence made sense, as it is true that Öztürk’s own contribution to the debate – which came after his interruptions of others – emphasized the feelings of the Iraqi victims. In particular, he posed a rhetorical question by asking how these victims must have felt when hearing the

<sup>32</sup> See <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-idUKKBN00K27A20150604>.

<sup>33</sup> See <https://spectator.clingendael.org/nl/publicatie/de-kleine-en-grote-leugens-de-geheime-oorlog-tegen>.

<sup>34</sup> See <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20192020-19-23.html>.

<sup>35</sup> In Dutch: ‘Het enige wat ik heb gedaan, is de gevoelens van de mensen daar, die slachtoffer zijn geworden, hier in ons parlement weergeven’. See: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20192020-19-23.html>.

words that the Defense Minister had used to indicate the casualties: “unintentional collateral damage” [in Dutch: *onbedoelde nevenschade*]:

(11) This Minister does not see the seriousness of this murder. This Minister says that 22 dead women and 26 dead children are ‘collateral damage’. Imagine: you are a victim who lost his wife, child or parents, and then you hear the Minister say, ice-cold, that this was unintentional collateral damage. What does this do to these people?<sup>36</sup>

And when he was criticised for using – again – the word “murder” in this contribution, he explicitly ascribed the use of the verb “murder” to the victims by using the form of indirect speech (“People say that . . .”).

(12) People say that their loved ones, their dear ones have been murdered. This is an emotion that should be expressed as well.

The phrases in (11) and (12) do indeed indicate that by using the word “murder” Öztürk (S1) shifts the viewpoint to the victims (S2). Nevertheless, his appeal to this viewpoint shift may already fail on the first main critical question, i.e. whether the word “murder” was indeed used by S2. Even though it is likely that the word accurately describes the victims’ feelings, Öztürk does not mention a source so we cannot be sure whether a word like this was used by the victims with respect to the incident (and we have not been able to find such a source). Moreover, the reasonableness of Öztürk’s viewpoint defence surely fails when applying the second main critical question, i.e. whether he may be assumed to agree with the appropriateness of using the word “murder” in the context. We draw this conclusion on the basis of what Öztürk also said in the debate:

(13) People have been murdered over there. *I cannot* [think of] other words for this.

These words (“*I cannot* . . .”) leave very little room for thinking that Öztürk was “only quoting”. Even if we accept the viewpoint shift as based on an actual source, the example above shows that his shift to the viewpoint of the victims in some utterances does not discharge him from his own commitment to the use of the word in other utterances, such as (13). Öztürk was probably aware of this himself, as he came up with the following remarks:

(14) I did not say that our soldiers and our Minister knowingly and deliberately killed people. I did not say that. What I did say, is that people have the feeling that they haven’t known for four and a half years what exactly happened. It should be allowed to express those words and emotions here as well. In this way I try to put right what has been misunderstood in my opinion.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/h-tk-20192020-20-8.html>. Examples (12)-(15) have also been taken from this source.

In (14), Öztürk suggests that, since he was expressing “those words and emotions” (S2), he himself (S1) is not committed to the conventional meaning of the word “murder” (i.e. “knowingly and deliberately killing people”). This defence was not accepted. As a fellow member of parliament maintained, it is just not possible to retract commitment to this conventional interpretation:<sup>37</sup>

(15) (. . .) the gentleman Öztürk should realise that if he uses the word ‘murder’ in this house, it deals with ‘premeditation’, ‘knowingly and deliberately’ and ‘intentionally’. Take back those words if you are a big boy.

### Representing the view of the general audience

While Öztürk – falsely or not – attributed the represented thought to an identifiable group of people, a viewpoint defence can also appeal to a more general or abstract source. In such cases the hearer could not reasonably have recognized the viewpoint shift, which means that it has to be characterized as such afterwards, i.e. after the arguer has been criticized for what they said. An example of this rather vague type of viewpoint defence arose in a clash in a popular Dutch television talk show, in May 2015, between co-host Sylvana Simons and guest Martin Šimek. While talking about his experiences helping African boat refugees coming ashore nearby Šimek’s residence in South Italy, he used the term *zwartjes* – a diminutive term that literally means “little black people”.

Simons, being a black woman herself, asked Šimek what was his motivation for using the word: was it meant to be funny, or cynical? Šimek replied that it was neither of these two and took recourse to a rather general viewpoint defence by responding “it is just the way we talk about them.” By thus implying that this phrasing represents the conventional way of talking about people with an African background, Šimek shifted the viewpoint to the supposed general audience.<sup>38</sup> In the course of the discussion he also mentioned some other

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<sup>37</sup> In this respect, the word *murder* is emotionally charged and has a specific legal meaning, as well as behaving a bit like an expressive element in the sense that, even if it is used within a quote, the responsibility for using it is attributed to the quoter (Potts 2007); see also the case of racial slurs in the next case study (and fn. 43).

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.bnnvara.nl/dewerelddraaitdoor/videos/269066> at 8:44; see also <https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/sylvana-simons-de-vrouw-die-zich-niet-laait-beteugelen~bb43c00b/>. A more benevolent interpretation is that Šimek is using the controversial word when he is “quoting” what people, including himself, say to themselves. This interpretation of his words, suggested by Šimek’s statement that he was “ridiculing himself”, is potentially more reasonable since one does not have to fully agree with all the things a “voice in your head” is saying.

arguments why he should not be held committed to have used a derogatory word to indicate black people, namely that his wife and children are persons of colour, that he has been kind to black people (i.e. that he had been helping the refugees), and that a discussion about the word “zwartjes” distracts from the more important message he wants to convey, namely that the strict immigration policies of Europe put refugees into the arms of criminals.<sup>39</sup>

Although Simons seemed to accept Šimek’s defence, her acceptance does not imply that it is a sound one. Let us first have a look at the reasonableness of his viewpoint defence. It immediately fails on the first main critical question that addresses the quote’s reliability. Presenting the use of *zwartjes* as “quoting” the general audience is simply presenting a falsehood, as it is not “just the way we talk about them”. On the contrary: *zwartjes* has a derogatory connotation and is a term avoided in public discourse for exactly this reason. It may be the case that the word is still in use in some circles, but if you do not want to get into trouble, you do not use it.<sup>40</sup>

As Šimek’s viewpoint defence was based on a falsehood, it is only natural that he also made use of additional arguments. However, they were not reasonable either. That Šimek’s wife is a person of colour does not make it reasonable for him to use a derogatory term for people with a black skin: this is irrelevant argumentation. The same refutation holds for the claim of his having been helpful to refugees. Moreover, Šimek’s defence that a discussion about the alleged word distracts from the more important issue of how these people are maltreated by Europe seems a distraction itself and creates a false dichotomy as one can pay attention to both issues at the same time.

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**39** Referring to his kindness, Šimek literally used the word *lief* (“sweet”). Its more accurate translation *sweet* may sound strange in this context, and arguably derogatory as well, but it also does in Dutch.

**40** It should be noted that the general opinion about potentially racist or discriminatory wording has changed rapidly the last couple of years, given the ongoing reconsideration of many words that imply biased ideas about minorities of all kinds. In the Netherlands sensitivity regarding racial minorities may be reinforced by the vehement discussion about *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), initiated by Dutch people with an African background who have been demanding their position in Dutch society for some time now. The Šimek/Simons case dates from 2015 and from today’s perspective it is incomprehensible that talk show host Matthijs van Nieuwkerk behaved very casually about the matter (“We are here to discuss something else”) and that many Dutch people in fact were critical of Simons and found it disgraceful that she had even dared to ask her question.

## 4 Specifying the assessment criteria for the viewpoint defence

In section 2.2 we distinguished two main critical questions for assessing the reasonableness of the viewpoint defence (CQ1 and CQ2, repeated below). In order to be reasonable, both questions need to be answered positively. Based on the case studies discussed in the previous sections, we can now specify these critical questions by formulating several sub-questions that serve as guidelines for answering CQ1 and CQ2.

In order to answer CQ 1, three critical sub-questions can be distinguished:

### **CQ1: Are the contested words of S1 really a quote?**

- (a) Can the shift of viewpoint be recognized on the basis of textual evidence?<sup>41</sup>
- (b) Is there a source for the represented thought or utterance, i.e. is S2 identifiable?
- (c) Is the quote a reliable representation of S2’s point of view, i.e. did S2 actually say p and/or implicate q1?

Sub-questions (a) and (b) – about the presence of textual evidence for the quote and an identifiable source – are closely connected and play a role in each of the case studies that we have discussed. Affirmative answers can be given in cases where the viewpoint shift is presented in an explicit way, i.e. with clear textual indicators and mentioning of S2. Wilders explicitly referred to the words of Horst Seehofer and Angela Merkel in the form of direct and indirect speech and a retweet always shows the original sender (see section 3.1).

In some other cases, either of these questions or both ((a) and/or (b)) should receive a negative answer. Whereas Pelosi did use an explicit indicator of there being some S2 (question (a)), i.e. *they say*, the reference to the source was very vague (question (b)). Baudet claimed to have presented Houellebecq’s viewpoint on women’s rights etc., but textual indicators actually pointed to the

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<sup>41</sup> Some quotes can be recognized on the basis of common knowledge even in the absence of textual indicators or a specific, identifiable source. For instance, it is not very plausible that one can quote the German (!) phrase “Wir haben es nicht gewusst” (‘We didn’t know’) without having any association with World War II and the Holocaust, as Thierry Baudet did claim once (<https://nos.nl/artikel/2285628-baudet-heeft-bij-habe-es-gewusst-geen-associatie-met-wo-ii>). This denial, in fact, resembles his insistence that he was not aware of the associations triggered by the Pepe the Frog meme (section 3.1).

contrary (question (a)). Öztürk did ascribe the word “murder” to a source (question (b)), i.e. the Hawija victims, but did so only after being criticized, and therefore failed to satisfy question (a).<sup>42</sup> Šimek, finally, never provided any textual indicator of shifting viewpoint when using the word *zwartjes* (‘little black people’) (question (a)).<sup>43</sup>

The relevance of sub-question (c), i.e. the question of whether the quote really represents S2’s point of view, can be illustrated with all the cases discussed in 3.2 and the case of Pelosi from section 2. In the case of Baudet’s book review, it can easily be demonstrated that some of the views that Baudet, in his defence, ascribes to Houellebecq are not in fact to be found in the novel he is reviewing. In Öztürk’s case it may be questioned whether the Hawija victims actually used a word like *murder* for the incident, since we did not find evidence for this on international websites.<sup>44</sup> As for the racial slur used by Šimek, it is quite clear that “the general public” does not normally use this diminutive form to refer to black people. In Pelosi’s case, one can doubt whether *morbidly obese* is a generally accepted category in medicine with regard to gradations of obesity: WebMD does use it, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do not. Moreover, Trump’s weight does not tip the scale of WebMD’s interpretation of the “morbidly obese” category, which makes it unlikely that “doctors” qualified him as such.

A positive answer to CQ1 is a necessary condition for a reasonable appeal to the viewpoint defence, but not a sufficient one: CQ2 needs to be answered positively as well. In order to find out whether this is the case, again three sub-questions can be formulated:

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**42** Also in the case of using a meme like Pepe the Frog, it is clear, at least for part of the audience, that the meme is being re-used (question (a)), but its origin is hard to pin down precisely (question (b)); see Dynel (2021) on the “epistemological complexity and ambiguity” of memes, “the voices behind which cannot always be categorically known”. (Dynel revisits this issue in Chapter 6.)

**43** Interestingly, even if he had attributed the use of the word to an explicit source, he might still have been accused of using racist language. In this respect, racial slurs seem to behave like other expressive elements that the speaker is accountable for, even if the expressive is embedded in another viewpoint (Potts 2007). Nowadays it is, for instance, not uncommon to be accused of racism when singing along with a song containing the n-word, or discussing the n-word as such, i.e. ‘mentioning’ rather than ‘using’ it (Herbert, under submission). For another view on the use of slurs in citation, see Allan (2016) who argues that “unintentional offence should be forgiven” (p. 226).

**44** Nevertheless, evidence might be found on non-English websites.

**CQ2: Is it reasonable to assume that S1 is not committed to the “quote”, including its implicatures (q1 and q2)?**

- (d) Can a meaningful purpose be assigned to S1 representing the words or views of S2, other than the generalized implicature (q2) that S1 agrees with the contents of the quote (p and q1)?
- (e) Is S1 known as someone generally subscribing to views expressed by S2 in p?
- (f) Can S1 be held committed to p, q1 or q2 on the basis of other contributions to the communicative context?

In sub-question (d) we capture the more general phenomenon that, on defence line 2 (see Figure 1), providing an alternative implicature always constitutes a stronger defence than simply denying one (Boogaart, Jansen & van Leeuwen 2021: 224–229). This is certainly true in the case of the viewpoint defence, as was clearly illustrated by the first two cases discussed in section 3.1: Wilders’ claim that he was “just quoting” without committing himself to any implicature failed, while Brussen’s defence succeeded since he provided an alternative reading (irony) and justification (newsworthiness) for retweeting the message. The appeal to a “meaningful purpose” such as newsworthiness in sub-question (d), moreover, enables us to account for the use of quotations in journalism, and interviews more generally, that are non-committal in the sense that the journalist/interviewer is not responsible for what the interviewee is saying.

The relevance of question (e) comes to the fore in the case of Lucassen that we started out this paper with. His political party (the Party for Freedom) had been very critical about the political leaders of Curacao and Sint-Maarten, using similar phrasings as the one that Lucassen claimed to be “just quoting”.<sup>45</sup> But this sub-question may also work the other way round: in the case of Brussen retweeting the Wilders death threat, the views expressed by Brussen elsewhere on his blog were an important argument for the Prosecutor to drop the case against him since it made an ironic reading quite plausible.

Sub-question (f), finally, plays a role, for instance, in the assessment of Nancy Pelosi “quoting” doctors. As we discussed in section 2.1, from other statements by her it could be inferred that Pelosi was trying to get back at Trump for having offended women for their weight in the past, so she was not “just quoting” without any additional intention. The relevance of sub-question (f) is also indicated by the Öztürk case (*murder*) discussed in section 3.2: one of his other contributions in the relevant debate was a clear signal that even if Öztürk had actually been quoting in

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<sup>45</sup> See van Leeuwen (2015: 122) for a discussion of concrete examples.

some instances (i.e. CQ1 could be answered positively), he had already expressed his own commitment to exactly this word.

## 5 Conclusion

Representing the words or views of another speaker is not always without consequences. If you are accused of having said something objectionable and you simply defend yourself by saying that the view you expressed was not your own, i.e. by using the viewpoint defence, this hardly ever constitutes a reasonable defence. To begin with, there should be sufficient indications in the contested utterance that the speaker was, indeed, shifting viewpoint to another speaker. In addition, the words used should of course be a reliable representation of the other speaker's viewpoint. In our case studies in section 3.2 these two conditions were not always fulfilled. But even if they are, speakers may still be committed to the words and views they are representing. This follows from the very act of "quoting", broadly defined, which triggers implicatures that are not always easy to deny. In particular, we argued in favour of a generalized implicature that, in principle, quoters agree with the contents of the quote. From our case studies in section 3.1 it appears that this implicature may be overruled only by contextual or situational information providing a convincing alternative purpose for the quote.

We showed that the viewpoint defence is used not only in cases in which it is undisputed that the contested words are not the speaker's own (as in the case of direct and indirect speech or retweeting a message), but also in cases in which the speaker appeals to a more implicit shift of viewpoint in the utterance under dispute. These more implicit viewpoint shifts turned out to have the same commitment issues as the explicit cases and played an important additional role in finding criteria for the evaluation of the viewpoint defence. Nevertheless, we think that assessing the relation between commitment and viewpoint could benefit from extending the analysis to cases that depart even more from literal quotes than our implicit cases in section 3.2. For instance: to what extent are you committed to an alleged homophobic petition that you signed, for singing along – as a white man – with a song that contains the n-word, or for banners at a demonstration you are attending? We aim to explore such questions in future research, in order to provide a more complete picture of the assessment criteria for deciding when exactly you can be held accountable for words that are not your own.

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