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Managing disagreement through *yes, but…* constructions:

An argumentative analysis *

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to examine the argumentative functions of concessive *yes, but…* constructions. Based on (N=22) interview transcripts, we examine the ways environmental activists negotiate their agreements and disagreements over climate change through *yes, but…* constructions. Starting from conversational analyses of such concessive sequences, we develop an account grounded in argumentative discourse analysis, notably pragma-dialectics. The analysis focuses on how in conceding arguments speakers re-present others' discourse, what types of criticism they exercise through particular sequential patterns, and which argumentative techniques they saliently use. We show in particular that, in disputing the standpoints supported by the complex argumentation they encounter, speakers raise different types of criticism (sufficiency, relevance, acceptability). We discuss how examining not only the sequencing of agreements and disagreements, but also to the argumentative relations that generate these, may extend our understanding of such concessive constructions.

Introduction

An environmental activist responds in the following way to a video in which climate "sceptics" contest the scientific consensus on the human causes of climate change:

> […] yes, it's true, in the past years, of the past of the Earth, millions of years, there was many many climate changes, but now we are provoking these climate changes. It's us with our pollution, so…

We are clearly in an argumentative situation here – a speaker addresses opposing views and supports her own with reasons (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). One explicit element of this argumentative discourse are linguistic markers or indicators – prominently, the *yes, but…* construction. One may wonder, however, what exactly do such elements *mark* or *indicate*? In other words, while the linguistic form *yes, but…* is clearly present in this and many other argumentative exchanges, what are its functions?

Our goal in this paper is to investigate the *argumentative* functions of *yes, but…* and similar constructions, extending the literature that has dealt with such concessive patterns. Until now the predominant focus in conversation and discourse analyses that have looked at *yes, but…* constructions has been on describing the sequential patterns of agreement and disagreement (e.g. Antaki & Wetherell, 1999; Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson, 2000), without taking full account of their argumentative functions. We adopt the perspective of argumentation theory (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) for devising a theoretically grounded account of the functions of these concessive constructions, arguing that a mere sequential analysis cannot adequately account for these (see Jacobs & Jackson, 1989). We examine both the content and variability of the arguments, exploring (1) whether the same sequential pattern (*yes, but…*) can be used for conveying different types of argumentative criticism, e.g. sufficiency, relevance, acceptability (Johnson & Blair, 1994); (2) whether variations of this sequential pattern always convey different types of argumentative criticism; (3) what these concessive constructions further indicate concerning the dialogical uses of argumentation (e.g. re-presentation, dissociation); and (4) what functions these uses serve.

For that, we focus on exchanges from the climate change (CC) debate. The topic and type of situation we analyse lend themselves particularly well to argumentative analysis. CC is an ongoing debate with significant societal consequences, characterised both by a series of controversies and by a fragile societal consensus on some aspects (Hulme, 2009).

The paper starts with a summary of the literature that focuses on the sequencing of agreements and disagreements in concessive *yes, but…* constructions. We then provide an overview of how these concessive constructions are treated in argumentation theory. After presenting our corpus and methods, we follow with a detailed argumentative analysis of some representative examples of *yes, but…* from the corpus. Finally, we discuss two issues concerning re-signification emergent in our analysis: dissociation and re-presentation of others' discourse.

Sequential treatment of concessive constructions

Discourse and conversation analysts have long scrutinised the dialogical uses of *yes, but…* and similar constructions[i]. In her seminal study, Pomerantz (1984) treated *but* as a marker that allows expressing conversationally dispreferred disagreements under the conditions of the preference for agreement. The partial agreement signalled by the *yes-*clause was seen to delay and soften the confrontational elements contained in the *but-*clause. Much of the following literature has confirmed and extended Pomerantz's analyses (Mulkay, 1985; Billig, 1991; Antaki & Wetherell, 1999). For instance, Mulkay (1985) and Billig (1991) have shown how initial expressions of agreement, or *agreement prefaces,* are used for devising argumentation in a more agreeable way. The initial agreement has also been examined as a device for mitigating the face-threatening nature of confrontational, argumentative discourse in conversation (Czerwionka, 2012; Holtgraves, 1997; Obeng, 1997; Rees-Miller, 2000; Sifianou, 2012).

Among the efforts to systematise the sequencing of agreements and disagreements one may count Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson's (2000) analysis of *cardinal concessives.* In this concede-and-contrast sequence co-produced by two speakers, B's concession (X') to A's original proposition (X), is a version of A's original point, which nevertheless allows B to uphold her own contrasting proposition (Y).

Speaker:	Structure:	Symbolically:
A:	Proposition	X
B:	Concession	X'
	Contrasting proposition	Y

B's sequence (X'-Y) can prototypically be realised through *yes, but…* constructions. Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson (2000) also discuss two important derivations of the *cardinal scheme.* In the first derivation, the contrasting position (Y) is not explicitly expressed, but only signalled by the – prosodic or semantic – way the concession is made (X' only implying Y). In the second derivation, which is well

documented (e.g. Antaki & Wetherell, 1999; Lindström & Londen, 2013), the contrasting position is expressed two times. Here, the concessive move comes only after the utterance of a contrasting position – an initial disagreement (Y) – which is reprised after the concessive move.

For Antaki and Wetherell (1999), this *proposition-concession-reprise* sequence (Y-X'-Y') is initiated by speaker B expressing her position, followed by a somewhat disingenuous *show concession*, and concluded by reasserting her initial position. "It makes a show of using a form which, ostensibly, is evidence that the speaker appreciates the other side's point of view, displaying to listeners that the speaker is not wholly blind to others' positions" (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999, p. 24). By contrast, "not making a show of it [concession] tends towards making it sound like its 'literal', dictionary definition of agreement and yielding" (p. 12). In other words, speakers can either make concessions (X') seriously, abandoning their position (Y), or just concede to X "for show", thereby being able to maintain Y.

However, Antaki and Wetherell (1999) also admit that the *proposition-concession-reprise* structure "is the sort of device that might be particularly advantageously used when the speaker is in an environment where being rational and fairminded is at a premium" (p. 25). In our view, this suggests that arguers can make genuine concessions (X') while upholding their initial position, and "re-launch it as a basis for further discussion and negotiation" (Lindström & Londen, 2013, p. 349). On these grounds, Lindström and Londen have argued that "the practice of conceding and reasserting does not limit itself to specific rhetoric purposes" and is a generally available device that "enhances intersubjectivity in interaction" (p. 331). A similar point is made by studies employing the approach of Social Representations (Castro & Batel, 2008; Mouro & Castro, 2012). These have emphasised how concessive constructions are orientated towards negotiation, playing an important role in the re-signification and hybridisation of conflicting meanings (Castro, 2012). This is achieved by distinguishing what is considered acceptable at the level of the societal debate (expressed in the *yes*-clause) from what is contested (in the but-clause) in the on-going interaction in which arguments are privileged according to other, contextual, specificities (Mouro & Castro, 2012). Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson (2000, p. 385) similarly observe that while in general "X and Y are understood by participants as potentially contrasting":

> [T]he nature of the potential contrast in the third move [Y] is open, since people's inferential capabilities are open. That is, the exact way in which X and Y are understood by the participants as contrasting is not definable in advance, but is interpreted and negotiated by the participants in

the situated context. In some contexts, for example, Y is taken by the participants to directly contrast with X, while in others Y may contrast with an inference from X, rather than X itself. (Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson, 2000, p. 382)

This summary thus highlights that "the nature of the potential contrast" between conceding (*yes…*) and (re)asserting (*but…*) remains somewhat obscure in the literature, and reinforces the need to develop a better understanding of what exactly happens – in terms of argumentation – between these two conversational units. Therefore, in the following section we take the clarification of the argumentative relations between the *yes-* and the *but*-clauses as our main task, and then focus on them in our analysis.

Argumentative functions of yes, but... constructions
From the perspective of argumentation theory, the first important clarification concerns the relations between the concession (X') and the contrasting proposition (Y). In her extension of the work of Anscombre and Ducrot on the argumentative functions of *but*, Snoeck Henkemans (1995) examines these relations at length. Consider the following constructed dialogue, based on an example ("This restaurant is good, but expensive") discussed by Snoeck Henkemans (p. 284):

> [Two friends discussing where to go for dinner]
> A: It's a good restaurant. (So let's go there!)
> B: Yes, it's good, *but* expensive. (So let's go somewhere else!)

In her utterance, B first accepts the good quality (X) of the restaurant, and then introduces another concern – its expensiveness (Y). Following Anscombre and Ducrot, *but* can be said to function here in the following way: (1) X counts as a possible argument p for a possible conclusion R, (2) Y is presented as an argument q against this conclusion, and, crucially, (3) q is presented as a more important argument for *not-R* than p is for R. Hence, B's utterance (p but q) can be seen as a defence of *not-R*. This happens when speaker B admits that an argument p advanced in support of R is true or acceptable, but does not justify R in the particular context, given that there is q.

In sum, through the *yes*-clause an arguer "accepts the propositional content of the argument, but rejects its argumentative potential" in the *but*-clause (Snoeck Henkemans, 1995, p. 287), and can thus uphold her standpoint in that situation. The fact that the argumentative potential of a proposition may be rejected brings to the fore what has so far been overlooked in the analyses of concessive constructions: that speakers can employ different types of argumentative criticism. According to one well-known typology of criticism (Johnson & Blair, 1994), an arguer can reject the *acceptability* of

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an opponent's argument (it's not true), its *sufficiency* to justify the standpoint (it's not enough), or its *relevance* for supporting the standpoint (it doesn't matter).

Furthermore, Snoeck Henkemans (1995) considers some variations of Anscombre and Ducrot's structure. Noticeably, after *but* an arguer can directly express the conclusion *not-R*, instead of an argument *q* against *R*:

> B: Yes, it's good, *but (still)* I don't think we should go there.

Another important variation regards the relative weights of *p* and *q* – instead of *q* counting as weightier a reason than *p,* the two may count more or else equally:

> B: Yes, it's good, *but* expensive, so I don't really know if to go there or not.

A second important clarification, from the perspective of argumentation theory, concerns what actually is conceded in the affirmative *yes*-clause; i.e., the relationship between A's X and B's X', in Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson's (2000) cardinal concessive scheme. While each X' involves some departure from X, the cases in which the differences between the two are significant further complicate the analysis: What are we to make of cases where a speaker concedes to a significantly different version of someone else's point? Is she conceding or is she not? Many conversation analysts take pains to avoid passing normative judgements regarding the quality of the conceded discourse (e.g. Antaki & Wetherell, 1999). Yet, when they speak of "Trojan Horse" concessions making "a caricature description of the other side's case" (1999, p. 17ff.), they just stop short of calling it a fallacy.

Recent work on interpretation in dialogical argumentation (Lewiński, 2011, 2012; Lewiński & Oswald, 2013) has examined the issue of re-presentation "of the other side's case", with the aim of differentiating between acceptable and "caricature" (fallacious, straw man) re-presentations. This task requires both a descriptive analysis of pragmatic and rhetorical mechanisms behind re-presentations of others' argumentation, and a normative study of the violations of conditions for a reasonable argumentative discussion. While this work acknowledges there are no "real" or "objective" interpretations (Lewiński, 2012), it argues that there is a contextually plausible space for interpreting disagreements and arguments.

Based on these insights, our specific goals in this paper are to examine:
(1) whether a certain sequential pattern (the cardinal *yes, but…*) is used for conveying a certain type of argumentative criticism; i.e., sufficiency, relevance, acceptability;
(2) whether different sequential patterns (*cardinal* and *proposition-concession-reprise*) are used for conveying different types of argumentative criticism;

(3) what the concessive constructions indicate concerning the dialogical uses and functions of argumentation (e.g. re-presentation of other's discourse, dissociation); (4) what these constructions accomplish for the arguers who exercise them.

Material and method

The research reported here is part of a larger study on communication of climate change. For it, (N = 22) interviews were conducted between September 2011 and February 2012 with experts and activists from environmental NGOs. All participants had good command of English – the language of the interviews. Coming from different countries (Portugal and Turkey) and backgrounds (natural and social sciences), but working in similar institutional settings (e.g. BirdLife Partners, World Wildlife Fund, Greenpeace), the interviewees were assumed to be actors in a global climate change discourse and governance regime.

The interviews (mean duration = 75 minutes) consisted of three parts, and the analysis reported here focuses on the third part, in which short video-excerpts were presented – via a notebook computer – to the interviewees in order to instigate argumentative episodes and foster debate. The first video-excerpt[ii] features two "sceptic" scientists who contest the scientific consensus on the human causes of CC, criticising the peer-reviewing process of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The second video-excerpt[iii] features a climate activist who contests the utility of carbon offsetting – e.g. paying a small sum to "offset" one's carbon emissions when buying a plane ticket – arguing that such mechanisms targeting individual consumers should not be used as a solution "against the threat of climate crisis", because our efforts should concentrate on "more profound systemic changes in the way we organize our societies and economies".

Open-ended questions were asked after presenting each video-excerpt, starting always with "What do you think the person in the video is saying?". The assumption was that the "main argumentative opponents" of the interviewees were the persons featured in the video-excerpt (i.e., "sceptic" scientists, a climate activist). The interviewees were thus not directly involved in an interactive argumentative encounter, and could argue against opponents' points made in the video without having to manage on-the-spot argumentative reactions (rebuttals, counter-arguments) and other aspects of situated conversations (face-work, authority asymmetries, etc.). For these reasons, and

in view of the goals of the study, all the interviews were transcribed *without* using a detailed transcription system for spoken discourse (see O'Connell & Kowal, 2009).

In analysing the argumentative episodes, specific attention was paid to the indicators of confrontation and concessions. At a first step, we identified the concessive constructions in the corpus. Then, we distinguished between those constructions that (1) comply with the *cardinal concessive* scheme, (2) involve a *proposition-concession-reprise* structure and (3) cannot be classified into either of the above due to complex argumentative moves and concessions accomplished.

At a further step, we employed the methods of argumentation theory for examining *how* the sequencing of agreements and disagreements was accomplished. This involved paying attention to what precisely was conceded to and criticised (i.e., the content of "the standpoint", "the argument", or "the linking premise" connecting the argument to the standpoint[iv]). To do this, we reconstructed the arguments raised in the video-excerpts[v], and in the *yes, but...* sequences from our corpus, following the procedures described in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004).

We use the pragma-dialectical approach for three reasons. The first is grounded in our data and the design of the study. Unlike in most studies in conversation and discourse analysis, the interviewees were not primarily dealing with the complexities of ongoing interaction with their opponent(s). This paves the way for argumentation to be a central aspect in the tapestry of communicative functions (e.g. turn-taking, politeness). The second reason relates to the nature of the object of study, the *yes, but…* constructions. As mentioned, conversation analysts stress that these constructions work best when "being rational and fairminded is at a premium" (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999, p. 25). A methodical analysis of the (ideal) pragmatic conditions for "rational and fairminded" discussions lies at the very core of pragma-dialectics. The third reason pertains to the theoretical and analytic tools pragma-dialectics provides: Although focusing on the argumentative aspect of discourse, it does so using broader insights from conversation and discourse analysis (see esp. van Eemeren et al., 1993). It understands discourse as a "critical discussion" where disagreements are managed through reasons, and offers pragmatically rich tools for "reconstructing" natural discourse in terms of argumentative relations.

Using this argumentative approach, specific attention was then paid to the relations between the concession and the criticism advanced in each sequence. More than 10% of the identified sequences were reconstructed, compared and discussed by the first three authors, and the discrepancies (about the main difference of opinion, the role of the conceded argument in the opponent's claim, the role of the argument

criticised) were resolved, stabilising the analysis. Finally, we selected some of the shorter excerpts that illustrate the potential contribution of the methods of argumentation theory to the analysis of concessive constructions.

Analysis

We identified a total of N=139 concessive constructions in the corpus, organised, one way or another, in the *yes, but…* form. More than half of these complied with the *cardinal concessive* scheme, and about a quarter was embedded in a *proposition-concession-reprise* structure. In 133 cases the disagreement was marked by a *but* (other markers were *however*, *even if* and *although*). Agreement was marked in only 44 cases, mostly by *of course* (N=16), and *yes* (N=13), but also by *certainly*, *obviously*, *sure*, *ok*, *maybe*, *I agree* (utterances such as "We can understand that..." were not counted as markers). The analysis starts with the second episode, where the utility of carbon offsets is questioned.

Cardinal scheme 1: Sufficiency criticism
In the second episode, the climate activist featured in the video-excerpt (henceforth, the activist) contests the utility of carbon offsetting mechanisms by drawing a contrast between such consumer-based efforts and broader systemic changes argumentation (see Appendix 2 for our reconstruction of the activist's arguments). Our interviewees clearly oriented to various elements of his complex argumentation by skilfully picking up different points to concede and to refute.

Excerpt 1 – Interview 2
Ethically what he's saying is true, but actually as when you consult, think about human psychology, I think that you need to push people, eeeh.. well, not need to but, certain mechanisms might be more effective in achieving the results, I would say...

The cardinal type of concession carried out here does not make explicit what is conceded to, except for merely endorsing an ethical point in generic terms, and thereby treating the view offered by the activist as a conventional one (Mouro & Castro, 2012):

| Yes | (X') | What he says is ethically true |
| But | (Y) | We actually need certain mechanisms to be more effective in achieving the results |

In such cases, in order to make explicit the difference of opinion and what is conceded to (X), the content of the *but*-clause (Y) becomes the primary source (Snoeck

Henkemans, 1995). The interviewee's position can be reconstructed as contrasting the *ethical* standing of carbon offsetting to the *effectiveness* of those "mechanisms":

	(1) (Carbon offsetting should be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis)	
Yes	1.1a Carbon offsetting may be (criticised as) unethical	p
But	1.1b Offsetting mechanisms may be more effective in achieving the results	q
	(1.1') (The need to achieve results is more important than ethical considerations)	

In order to understand how the concession works, it is important to identify what can be conceded to as "ethical" in the activist's argument. This can most plausibly be the argument that carbon offsetting *has been created to exploit the rising levels of climate consciousness*. However, and crucially, the interviewee does *not* make this concession explicit. What is regarded as "ethically true" can also be the argument that carbon offsetting *makes people think that they don't have to worry about the choices they make* (see Appendix 2). In other words, the concession is permitted to "float", giving the vagueness necessary for the continuation of an argumentative discourse (Moscovici, 1994, p. 169; see Eisenberg, 2007), and for directing the talk towards the argumentative interests of the interviewee (van Rees, 2006). This ambiguity makes the concession look like it is made to *all* "what he says", appropriating the activist's critical comments as commonplace and broadly acceptable.

In the *but*-clause, the interviewee then introduces the argument of effectiveness (1.1b, let us call it q). By dissociating between what is *ethical* and what the *actual* problematic circumstances require, the interviewee – having agreed that there are legitimate ethical concerns – argues that under the given circumstances that we need to achieve results, the concerns of effectiveness take precedence. Hence, the first example of cardinal concessions can be summarised as:

Concession 1
A: p; if p then R; so R
B: Yes p but q (where q is more important than p), and since if q then not-R; so not-R

The conclusion of the interviewee's argument (namely that *carbon offsetting should be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis*) is conveyed indirectly by means of the counter-argument about effectiveness, which is presented as an argument to be privileged under the concrete circumstances. This type of concessive *yes, but…* construction, which was the most common in our corpus, works in the way that Anscombre and Ducrot considered the prototypical argumentative function of *but* (Snoeck Henkemans, 1995): a concession (*yes*, p) is overridden by a counter-argument

(*but* q) that is presented as more important in the concrete situation. As a result, the arguer (our interviewee) indirectly contradicts the standpoint (R) of the opponent (the activist), by raising a *sufficiency* criticism. This criticism accepts *p* as a serious argument in general, but denies that it is sufficient to justify R under given specific circumstances. Hence, it does not expel the opponent's argument from the debate, or future instantiations of the debate (Castro & Batel, 2008).

Cardinal scheme 2: Relevance criticism

In the argumentative episode initiated by the "sceptic" scientists who contested the scientific consensus on the human causes of CC, a key strategy employed by the interviewees was to first admit the uncertainties, and then criticise the sceptics' fixation on certainty. This was carried out through concessions that are similar to the example above in their sequential structure, but different in the type of criticism raised through this structure.

Excerpt 2 – Interview 15

> …[in order] to be sure, that the change in greenhouse effect, the gases caused this effect, you must cause this effect and measure. You could not make trials with land, with earth. So you have the probability, not... you have... you are not sure 100%. (…) So, I could not as a scientist say, as a scientist, this is caused by that. As a scientist I could not, but as a politic, I must change the point of view. (…) If it is plausible that this action of the man caused an effect that are irreversible, this action could not, not must not, <u>could not</u> take place. The same for that, this is plausible, not sure, but it's plausible, that the gases… So, the politics must take action.

Let us first note that the cardinal concessive reconstructed below is recycled at the end of the excerpt as embedded in a proposition-concession-reprise structure:

Yes	X'	As a scientist, I cannot say that the anthropogenic gases caused the change in the greenhouse effect, you have a probability, you cannot be 100% sure
But	Y	As a political person, I must change the point of view; if this is plausible, politics must take action

In this *yes, but...* construction, the interviewee does not directly address the sceptics' controversial position regarding the lack of consensus among the IPCC scientists, but an inference from and a crucial assumption supporting it (see Appendix 1). Against what he discerns as the sceptics' claims, the interviewee argues in the following way:

	1 Politics must take action regarding the change in the greenhouse effect	not-R
Yes	1.1a Scientifically, it is not possible to be sure that the anthropogenic gases	p

But	cause the change in the greenhouse effect	
	1.1b It is plausible that human action causes an irreversible greenhouse effect	q
	1.1' If it is plausible that a human action causes an irreversible effect, politics must take action to not let that effect take place	if q, not-R

In the *yes*-clause, positioning himself as a scientist, the interviewee concedes that there is only a *probability* – and not certainty – regarding the human causes of CC. In the *but*-clause, taking the role of a political person, he raises criticism by drawing on the *plausibility* of the causal relation and its action implications. It is this move from probability to plausibility – and the accompanying shift from theoretical to practical reasoning – that makes this indirect disagreement compelling. This "identity shift" (Castro & Batel, 2008) makes it possible to rhetorically re-signify what is conceded to.

Through this concession, the interviewee not only demonstrates that he is as fastidious as the "sceptic" scientists, but also maintains that the particular case of CC does not lend itself to the approach of experimental verification. In the *but*-clause, we have a reformulation of the concession (1.1b) and an explicit linking premise (1.1'). The latter replaces the linking premise of the argument used by the "sceptic" scientist (that *scientific consensus is a necessary condition for taking action about CC*) and renders *irrelevant* the need for scientific consensus. In a way, the interviewee argues that what we need is a consideration of practical consequences, rather than a sweeping experimental demonstration or theoretical certainty. His concession can be represented as follows:

Concession 2
A: p; (if p then R); so R
B: Yes p but not-(if p then R); so not-R

It is worth noting that this concession is carried out by significantly re-interpreting the arguments conveyed in the video-excerpt. This is a major complication encountered in analysing the concessive constructions, to which we will return below.

Cardinal scheme 3: Acceptability criticism
Not in all analysed cases did the conceding argument involve an undivided acceptance of the argument presented by the opponent. In the excerpt below, the interviewee accepts only partly the opponent's argument.

Excerpt 3 – Interview 12
(…) in his opinion, what should happen would be systemic change, so we have to change the way our society is organized. And he thinks that personal action, individual actions contribute not that

much to- to... offset the problem. And I can agree with him that the fundamental changes have to be made on a very big scale, but I would not diminish the role or importance of individual responsibility and how individuals can themselves try to offset. (…) In the beginning of the video he says that the offsets are just, just an issue of peace of mind, that's not true. Because an offset can actually be an offset, even if it's just a percentage of the emission you are responsible for. If you put a tree in a place that didn't have any tree you are contributing a little bit, for a little bit of carbon to be captured in the next years.

In the first part of this excerpt, the interviewee recapitulates the two major points made by the activist: "what should happen would be systemic change" and "individual actions do not contribute much to offset the problem". In doing that, he re-presents the activist's argument as follows (the argumentation is marked by the letter *O* to indicate that this is a re-representation by the interviewee of his *Opponent*'s position):

(*O*1) (Carbon offsetting should not be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis)	R
*O*1.1a Systemic change is needed in response to the climate crisis	(p_1)
(*O*1.1b) (Individual actions are not what is needed in response to the climate crisis)	(p_2)
*O*1.1b.1 Individual actions do not contribute much to offset the problem	(p_3)

He then concedes to the first of these (*O*1.1a, p_1), and challenges the second (*O*1.1b, p_2), by constructing a *yes, but…* sequence of the cardinal type:

Yes	(X')	I can agree that fundamental changes have to be made on a very big scale
But	(Y)	I would not diminish the role or importance of individual responsibility and how individuals can themselves try to offset

Here, the interviewee concedes to the necessity of big scale (systemic) changes, but disagrees with his opponent's main position against the use of carbon offsetting as a mechanism to encounter the threat of climate crisis:

	(1) (Carbon offsetting should be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis)	not-R
Yes	1.1a Fundamental changes on a very big scale are necessary	p_1'
But	1.1b Individual offsetting actions are as necessary	p_2

Once again, a crucial complication in analysing this concessive construction is that the interviewee significantly re-interprets the activist's argument: The activist claims that carbon offsetting should not be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis since "*what really needs to happen*" are "*the bigger systemic changes*" (see Appendix 1). The interviewee first re-presents what the activist says: "*in his opinion, what should happen would be systemic change*". Then, he goes on to "*agree*

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with him that the fundamental changes have to be made on a very big scale" (note that for the activist, this is an argument that supports his standpoint, R). Yet, he finishes by contradicting the activist's standpoint: "*but I would not diminish the role or importance of... how individuals can themselves try to offset*".

The crucial discursive task lies here in negotiating the meaning of the phrase that a systemic change is "what really needs to happen" or "what should happen". The activist is clearly defending that "what really needs to happen" – systemic changes – should be our primary and *only* concern', and we should exclude distracting measures such as individual carbon offsets. Our interviewee takes this to instead signify an important, but *not only* concern – individual actions are then complementary with it. This shift of meaning from exclusivity to complementarity of "what needs to happen" makes possible both the concession (X') and the opposition (Y). Taking the argumentative aspect of the concession into account, the concession can be represented as follows:

Concession 3
A: p_1; p_2; (if p_1 & p_2 then R); so R
B: Yes p_1 but not-p_2; so not-R

This concession is quite typical of the concessions carried out in the second argumentative episode. In it, the interviewee concedes to one part of the activist's argumentation but rejects another part of it, making the argumentation as a whole unacceptable. While the *yes*-clause accepts some of the activist's arguments, the *but*-clause expresses an *acceptability* criticism to other arguments and thus justifies the disagreement with the opponent's standpoint on the basis of that criticism.

Such examination of argumentative relations gives us a good idea of the similarities and differences between the concessions analysed. The three are similar in their sequential organisation (they instantiate the cardinal concessive scheme) as well as in the fact that they all involve agreement with an argument (*yes*, p) but not with its conclusion (*but* not R). They are different, however, in the basis on which the disagreement is justified. In the first concession, interviewee 2 introduced a counter-consideration that is an example of *sufficiency criticisms: yes*, his argument is acceptable *but* not sufficient to justify the standpoint. In the second concession, interviewee 15 instead rejected the relevance of the conceded argument to the standpoint (not (if p then R)). This is an elaborate example of *relevance criticisms: yes*, they are right *but* it does not really matter here. In the third concession, by distinguishing between the acceptable and unacceptable parts of the opponent's

argument, interviewee 12 rejected the standpoint on the basis of the unacceptable argument (*yes*, p_1, *but* not-p_2). This is an example for *acceptability criticisms*, which can only be raised against a part of the encountered argument in the context of *yes, but…* constructions (the *yes*-clause indicates that argumentation *is* partly acceptable). The concessions are thus embedded in different types of criticism and their analysis demonstrates the importance of taking the content of arguments into account for understanding their functions (Johnson & Blair, 1994; Snoeck Henkemans, 1992).

Proposition-Concession-Reprise structure: Different argumentative relations?
Interviewee 12 in excerpt 3 above resorts to a further concession in the latter part of the excerpt, regarding the argument of the activist that carbon offsets are sold merely as "a peace of mind". He first directly rejects it: "That's not true" (not-R). His claim comes right after: "An offset can actually be an offset" (R). The concession carried out afterwards using an *even if* construction – similar to that of *yes, but…* in its sequencing – can be structurally analysed as follows:

	(Y)	An offset can actually be an offset (It's a relevant contribution)
Even if	(X')	It's just a percentage of the emissions you are responsible for
	(Y')	If you put an additional tree, you are contributing to the carbon to be captured in the next years

The concession in this example involves a *proposition-concession-reprise* structure (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999). While it structurally differs from the foregoing examples, a more careful look at the argumentative relations would clearly show that this concession is embedded in a *sufficiency* criticism, just like concession 1.

The interviewee agrees that *the contribution of an offset may be just a little bit of what you are responsible for*, and in reprise he disagrees with the activist's argument that *you cannot neutralize your emissions once they're out there*. In relation to this disagreement, the interviewee can be seen to argue that:

	1 An offset can actually offset (neutralize) your emissions	Not-R
Yes	1.1a Contribution of an offset may be just a percentage, a little bit of what you are responsible for	p
But	1.1b An offset is an additional effort of capturing carbon	q
	1.1' If there is additionality, a contribution is made	

In the conceding argument 1.1a, the interviewee may be seen to render his opponent's case (see Appendix 2) as follows:

| | 1 You cannot neutralize your emissions once they're out there. | R |

O1.1 The contribution of an offset is just a little bit, a percentage of what you are   p
responsible for

Through this rhetorical move, he transforms the activist's argument against neutralisation of one's emissions into something that he can concede to (1.1a) and criticise (1.1b). The latter involves a new consideration, namely the *additionality* of possible contributions, which is presented as more important than what was conceded. Hence, the interviewee's concession functions as follows:

Concession 4
A: p; if p then R; R
B: Yes p but q (where p is more important than q); so not-R

From the argumentative perspective, such a concession is similar to the concession made by interviewee 2, analysed above in excerpt 1. The interviewee accepts an argument (p) but not its conclusion (R) because he brings about a counter-argument (q) that is considered more important. The two are similar despite their different sequential structures.

Discussion

We set out with the aim to investigate the argumentative functions of *yes, but…* constructions used by participants in the controversial debates on CC. The scrutiny of the material revealed that much of the discursive business carried out by our interviewees belongs to the realm of managing disagreement. By resorting to *yes, but…* constructions, they presented themselves as reasonable agents that fulfil their "dialectical obligations" in an implicit *critical discussion* (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), (1) accepting what constitutes the possible common ground – the function of the *yes*-clause; (2) justifying on what basis the contradiction with the opponent is raised – the function of the *but*-clause.

These findings are not new. Antaki and Wetherell observe that such constructions can be particularly advantageous in environments where being rational and fairminded is important. Similarly, Lindström and Londen emphasize how *yes, but...* constructions indicate "an orientation to reflexivity, reciprocity and compromise" (2013, p. 349). However, rather than only mapping the sequences of agreement and disagreement, our analysis focuses on the argumentative relations in contexts that pave the way to "reflexivity, reciprocity and compromise", showing that:

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1) Similar sequential structures can involve different types of argumentative criticism: Concessions 1, 2 and 3 are all cases of the cardinal concessive scheme while conveying, respectively, the *sufficiency*, the *relevance*, and the *acceptability* criticisms.
2) Different sequential structures can fulfil the same argumentative function, conveying the same type of criticism: Concessions 1 and 4 differ in their sequential organisation, yet they both undermine the *sufficiency* of the opponent's argumentation.

We see these results as an important contribution to understanding the functions of discursive devices such as *yes, but…*, and more generally, the management of disagreement in terms of the underlying argumentative functions generating conversational sequences and conventional speech acts. This has been a recurrent question in a "normative pragmatic" approach to analysing argumentative discourse (Jacobs & Jackson, 1989; van Eemeren at al., 1993).

Naturally the sequencing of agreements and disagreements is a necessary step for analysing concessive constructions. Furthermore, as our analysis substantiated, the initial signal of agreement is a rhetorical move that allows the arguers to anchor their disagreements in matters of agreement, and render their viewpoints more agreeable (Billig, 1991). However, especially in public controversies such as the one over CC, the argumentative functions that govern these moves and structures are central to fully understanding disagreement management and negotiation of positions.

Apart from the results discussed above, our analysis helps better understanding two dialogical phenomena well examined in the argumentation literature, but not directly in connection with *yes, but…* constructions: (1) dissociation and (2) re-presentation of others' discourse.

Dissociation is an argumentative technique of separating concepts into two contrasting elements, one of which is considered more valuable (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 190)[vi]. This is achieved by relying on stock "philosophical pairs", the paradigmatic one being the "appearance vs. reality" pair: *Yes*, in a certain insignificant, apparent aspect *X* is the case, *but* in reality it is *Y* (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 415-436). Since one element of the concept can be rejected, while the other is asserted, dissociation serves as a device for resolving incompatibility. So understood, dissociation was frequently used by our interviewees. As was exemplified in the first and second excerpts, they employed the following pairs: ideal vs. actual, ethical vs. effective, ethical vs. psychological, scientific vs. political, and theoretical vs. practical.

Such dissociations, in our view, signal that the speaker is restricted in denying a given assertion straightforwardly. This may be related to the nature of the current

consensus on the need for CC action. The consensus hinges upon a still fragile common ground of "beliefs, assumptions, and values that are presumed to be shared" (van Rees, 2009, p. 114), having not yet stabilized as fully shared around the globe, or hegemonic (Uzelgun & Castro, in press). In such debates maintained by many controversial claims, a speaker striving to establish a new position may resort to dissociation "to evade or pre-empt an accusation of inconsistency" (van Rees, 2009, p. 113).

We mentioned in a number of places above, that a critical complication in analysing concessive structures is the relationship – more precisely the difference – between what is originally said by one speaker (X) and what is then conceded to by another (X'). When discussing "Trojan Horse" concessions as "caricature descriptions" Antaki and Wetherell similarly bring up this concern:

> Note that we don't mean that there is a 'real', objectively different and truer description. (…) When we say caricature, we mean to signal not a contrast with the 'truth' but rather that the description is hearably marked in a certain direction; what is at issue (for analysts) is not the reality of what is described but the interests the description serves. (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999, p. 18).

In short, when there is a significant, hearable difference between X and X', we cannot but admit there is a problem that a detailed analysis cannot overlook, whether we call it a "caricature description", a "Trojan Horse" or the "straw man fallacy"[vii]. The cases we reported (Excerpts 2 and 3) were more subtle – we cannot easily depict these as culpably straw-manning the activist. Yet, there surely was some kind of *strategic manoeuvring* between what might be rhetorically advantageous to the arguers in the given situation and what is reasonably acceptable by the rules of a dialectical discussion (van Eemeren, 2010). Crucially, rather than relying on extreme case formulations – a characteristic of caricature concessions (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999) and most straw man fallacies (Lewiński, 2011) – the concessions we analysed relied on non-extreme case formulations, and did not "cheapen" the case of the opponent. They were many times used for transforming the opponent's case into something that is generally reasonably acceptable – simultaneously demonstrating that the arguer is not only *aware* but *considerate* of those views – but not agreeable under the particular circumstances. In any case, the subtle relations between what is originally stated and what is then conceded open a fascinating area of investigation. The same can be said about *yes, but…* constructions as linguistic vehicles for dissociation. The topic also warrants a stand-alone investigation that can benefit from recent in-depth studies of dissociation

within the pragma-dialectical framework by van Rees (2006, 2009) – a task for the future.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that paying systematic attention not only to the sequencing of agreements and disagreements, but also to the relations between them, is helpful for a more complete account of *yes, but…* constructions. Our analysis suggests that further research into how people manage their disagreements in contexts of fragile consensus and controversy may benefit from examining what precisely is conceded in the *yes*-clause, on the types of criticism raised in the *but*-clause, and on the argumentative manoeuvres achieved through these constructions.

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[i] This literature shows how the *yes*-clause can be expressed by a variety of markers (e.g. *of course, I agree, obviously, naturally, you know*), as can the *but*-clause (e.g. *nevertheless, however, whereas, still,*

[ii] Please see the video-excerpt, starting from 1'30" to 3'30" (duration: 2m00s), at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk9Ev91jjQ8, and Appendix 1.

[iii] Please see the video-excerpt, starting from the beginning to 02'20" (duration 2m20s), at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk9Ev91jjQ8, and Appendix 2.

[iv] Our vocabulary follows the pragma-dialectical theory (van Eemeren, 2010). This does not exclude the use of different terminology – for instance, Toulmin's (1958) "claim", "data" and "warrant".

[v] The reconstructions can be obtained from the authors.

[vi] Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson (2000, p. 388ff.) use instead the term *semantic partitioning*.

[vii] Antaki and Wetherell (1999, p. 21) do use the term *tu quoque* – a well-known argumentative fallacy – when discussing the "sting in the tail" concessions.

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Appendix 1

Video-excerpt 1: "*UN and Global Warming*" (Excerpt from a documentary by Michael Durkin, entitled "The Great Global Warming Swindle") (UK, 2007).

Please see the video-excerpt, starting from 1'30" to 3'30" (duration: 2m00s), at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk9Ev91jjQ8

	R
(*A*1) (We should not take action to mitigate global warming)	
A1.1 There is no consensus among scientists on the global warming issue	(p_1)
(*A*1.1') (Scientific consensus is a necessary condition for taking action about global warming)	
A1.1 IPCC assessment reports cannot establish a consensus among scientists on the global warming issue	(p_2)
A1.1.1 The IPCC second and third assessment reports do not refer to the truly scientific literature.. the literature by specialists in those fields	(p_3)
A1.1.1.1 There was a very disturbing corruption of the peer review process in these reports	(p_4)
A1.1.1.1.1 The reports approved by contributing scientists were changed in response to comments from governments, individual scientists, and non-governmental organizations	(p_5)
A1.1.1.1.2 The IPCC officials have censored the comments of scientists in several key sections	(p_6)
A1.1.1.1.2.1a Statements like "there is no clear evidence for attributing the observed climate changes to man-made causes (i.e. the increase in GHGs)" were deleted	(p_7)
A1.1.1.1.2.1b After deleting some statements, the IPCC said there was no dishonesty or bias, and that uncertainties about the cause of global warming had been included	(p_8)
A1.1.2 There are a number of scientists who don't agree with this polemic, some of which resigned from IPCC but their names are still kept on the IPCC author list	(p_9)
A1.2 I am one scientist and there are many that simply think that is not true that humans are causing a catastrophic change to the climate system	(p_{10})

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Appendix 2

Video-excerpt 2: "*Carbon Offsets - A Peace Of Mind? (Kevin Smith)*"

Please see the video-excerpt, starting from the beginning to 02'20" (duration 2m20s), at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk9Ev91jjQ8

(*A*1) (Carbon offsetting should not be used as a mechanism against the threat of climate crisis)	R
*A*1.1 Carbon offsets are fictitious commodities (i.e. they do not deliver what they promise – they do not lead to the satisfaction of the goal)	(p_1)
*A*1.1.1 You cannot neutralize your emissions once they're out there	(p_2)
*A*1.1.2 Carbon offsetting places all of the responsibility on individual consumers	(p_3)
(*A*1.1.2') (without there being a more profound systemic change, individual choices cannot offer an adequate solution to the threat of climate change)	$(p_{4;}$ if $p_3, p_1)$
*A*1.1.2'.1a Individual choices / personal lifestyles have a role to play in how we respond to climate change	(p_5)
*A*1.1.2'.1b our choices as individuals are still very limited within the system that organizes our societies and economies	(p_6)
(*A*1.1.2'.1b') (if our choices as individuals are very limited within the system that organizes our societies and economies then without there being a more profound systemic change, individual choices cannot offer an adequate solution to the threat of climate change)	(if $p_6, p_4)$
*A*1.2 Carbon offsetting is a dangerous mechanism (i.e., it has serious negative consequences)	(p_7)
*A*1.2.1a It has been created to exploit the rising levels of climate consciousness	(p_8)
*A*1.2.1b It makes people think that they don't have to worry about the choices they make	(p_9)
*A*1.2.1c It places all of the responsibility on individual consumers	(p_{10})
*A*1.2.1d The more emphasis we put on individuals, the more we're moving away from what really needs to happen	(p_{11})
*A*1.2.1d.1 What really needs to happen is people to come together in communities, to create political pressure for the bigger systemic changes.	(p_{12})
*A*1.2.1d.1.1 people coming together in communities, to create political pressure will lead to bigger systemic changes	(p_{13})
*A*1.2.1d.1.1' Bigger systemic change (in the growth based model, reigning at the corporate self-interest) is what needs to happen in response to the threat of climate crisis	$(p_{14;}$ if $p_{13}, p_{12})$
*A*1.2.1d.1.1'.1a Individual choices / personal lifestyles have a role to play in how we respond to climate change	(p_{15})
*A*1.2.1d.1.1'.1b our choices as individuals are still very limited within the system that organizes our societies and economies	(p_{16})

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