Australian Political Discourse: pronominal choice in campaign speeches

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Abstract

The intention behind language used by candidates during an election campaign is to persuade voters to vote for a particular political party. Fundamental to the political arena is construction of identity, group membership and ways of talking about self, others, and the polarizing categories of *us* and *them*. This paper will investigate the pragmatics of pronominal choice and the way in which politicians construct and convey their own identities and those of their parties and opponents within political speeches. Taking six speeches by John Howard and Mark Latham across the course of the 2004 federal election campaign I look at the ways in which pronominal choice indicates a shifting scope of reference to create pragmatic effects and serve political functions.

1. Introduction

The concepts of identity and identification are central to accomplishing the persuasive aspect of political discourse during an election campaign. Candidates present themselves as being able to identify with the needs, wants and interests of the electorate and try to convince voters it is in their interest to identify with particular candidates (Hahn 2003). In predominantly two-party nations such as Australia and the United Kingdom, major ideological differences between parties are lessening as both sides, left and right, move to a more centrist position (Giddens 1998). Left with little ideological distinction from which to choose, the personal characters of the candidates gain salience and it has been shown that some voters will make their electoral choices based on which candidates' personal traits and values most match their own (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004). The way politicians discursively represent their identities, by referring to themselves, to their opposition and to their audience can effectively be used as a persuasive means (Pearce 2001).

Politicians, when making speeches during an election campaign present positive aspects of themselves and negative aspects of their opponents. One way of doing this is by selectively using personal pronouns. The personal pronouns chosen can be used to refer to themselves and to others, and to evoke multiple identities of themselves and others, presented from a range of perspectives. The pronominal choices politicians make serve persuasive and strategic political functions. The traditional polarization in politics is that of *us* vs. *them* (*we/they*). *Us/we* is associated with positive elements and *them/they* with negative elements, examples of which may be seen in Table 1 below. The simple message of all election campaign speeches can be reduced to: *Vote for us and you'll get more good; vote for them and you'll get more bad* (cf. Hahn 2003).

Us	Them
we have repaid $73 billion of that	they were in deficit each time
we have embraced many reforms	they tried to stop us fixing it up
our efforts have yielded great results	surpluses that they could never generate
we broke the back of union power	they're very happy to help themselves
our taxes are lower…our wages are higher	they opposed our taxation reforms
	Source: Howard campaign launch speech

Table 1: *Us* Vs *Them*

This paper will discuss some other ways in which these and other personal pronouns are chosen by politicians in election campaign speeches to represent identities of themselves and others, indicate group memberships and present positive aspects of themselves and negative aspects of their opponents.

2. Political campaign speeches

Political campaign speeches as a discourse type typically have the following characteristics. Speeches are addressed to an overhearing audience; the direct audience might be members of the press, other politicians and perhaps a small section of the public but the main audience, the majority of the voting public will usually not be present at the time of utterance, they will hear/see/read elements of the speech at a later time (via the mass media). Speeches are delivered in a more formal speech style than ordinary conversation, although not necessarily. They may be authored by a person other than the speaker, such as a professional speech

writer, but this is not always so. They are often followed directly by another discourse type, that of the political press conference.

Political speeches usually include classical rhetorical devices such as figures of speech: simile, metaphor, the three-part statement and contrastive pairs (or antithesis). Politicians often refer to things in groups of three: *veni, vedi, vici*, ("I came, I saw, I conquered"– Julius Caesar); *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* ("One people, one country, one leader"– Nazi Germany) or the slogan of the French Revolution *liberté, égalité, fraternité* ("liberty, equality, fraternity"). Several studies (Blachut 2003; Cockcroft and Cockroft 2005) have shown for some reason humans across many cultures find the number three particularly aesthetically pleasing. Politicians may also pair together items that contrast, particularly when there is a contrast between 'us' and 'them' (usually the opposition party). Mark Latham employed this device with his slogan *I'm ready to lead. He's ready to leave*, a reference both to the age difference between himself and John Howard, and the fact that Howard was being circumspect on his plans for retirement. Contrastive pairs and three-part statements are called 'claptraps' by Atkinson (1984) as, based on his observations, he regards them as the devices most likely to draw applause during a political speech. The two can also be mixed as in Winston Churchill's *Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few*.

The main perlocutionary function of campaign speeches is to persuade, and hopefully they also inform. (c.f. Brewer and Lichtenstein 1982). All meanings intended by the speaker aim to fulfill a politically strategic function; words are carefully scripted and written for a purpose. Chilton and Schäffner's (1997) analysis of political discourse proposed four main types of strategic functions served by political discourse[1]. Chilton (2004) subsequently reduced the number of functions to three: coercion, legitimization and delegitimization, and representation and misrepresentation. This paper discusses ways in which pronouns are used to fulfil legitimizing strategic functions. Legitimizing discourse invests authority in the speaker; it includes discourse which promotes positive self-presentation. The counterpart, delegitimization promotes negative other-presentation.

In political discourse, identification is the new persuasion. As politics becomes more personality rather than ideologically-driven politicians construct and present a range identities in their discourses with the voting public (Wilson 1990; Pearce 2001; Caprara and Zimbardo 2004). The persuasive function of political speeches is aided by presentation of multiple individual and group identities which voters will want to identify with, and hence will want to support with their votes. It is in the politicians' interest to present themselves as multi-faceted in order to appeal to a diverse audience, and careful pronoun choice is one way of achieving this aim. Studies of political pronoun use have been conducted in a number of countries, looking at a range of languages and different discourse types including analysis of the us/them dichotomy (Wilson 1990), use of first person singular versus first person plural (de Fina 1995), comparison of pronoun use across speeches and interviews (more frequent uses of *I* in interviews) (Bolívar 1999); use of generic *you* and referential *you* in Taiwanese political debates (Kuo 2002), and an Australian study on the 'identity work' done by pronoun choice in political interviews (Bramley 2001).

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[1] These are: 1. Coercion 2. Resistance, opposition and protest 3. Legitimization and delegitimization 4. Dissimulation

3. This study

This study looks at the discourse of the two major party leaders during the 2004 Australian federal election campaign and presents examples from six speeches. These speeches were chosen for their significance in the campaign and for the fact that they all received maximum media coverage. The transcripts were all taken from party websites and the speeches are as follows:

- The official calling of the election at the end of August by the Prime Minister John Howard and the response from the then Leader of the Opposition, Mark Latham.
- The two campaign launches (Australian Labor Party and the Liberal/National Coalition) held in late September
- The addresses to the National Press Cub in Canberra in early October, the final week of the campaign.

In looking at the pronoun choices, the linguistic co-text was used to determine the referents of the pronouns used; and the persuasive and politically strategic function served by this pronominal choice. In the case of first person use the pronoun choice is looked at sequentially across the discourse to determine the different identities presented and the persuasive/strategic functions that is served by invoking multiple identities. I have also considered the broader social/political context to determine identity portrayed by the pronoun choice, when this is not apparent in the linguistic context.

4. Impersonal *you* and group membership

One of the functions of *you* is to serve as an 'indefinite' or 'impersonal' or 'generic' pronoun (Wales 1996). Indefinite *you* can be used in two ways; to refer to the speaker, as a replacement for *I,* and for the speaker to include themselves as a typical member of a category, in which instance it refers to *us.* Wilson (1990:57) claims that indefinite *you* can be used to discuss 'conventional wisdom, as opposed to actual experience'. Used in this way it can convey a generally admitted truth or common sense notions and values inviting empathy and agreement from the hearers (Pearce 2001). At the same time it can serve to distance the speaker from the actions being discussed by expressing them as part of a social order over which they have no control. Generic *you* can also be used to self-reference, where it can easily be replaced by *I* when talking about personal experience or habitual behaviour. Wales (1996:79) gives the following illustration:

> it always rather shook *me*, when *I* first got married in London, *you'd* be carrying away practically buckets of that every day…

The potential referents of impersonal *you* can be anyone and/or everyone. Siewierska (2004) suggests that *you*, when used impersonally, includes the speaker and addressee among the set of potential referents, however the examples below suggest that the generalized categories presented may not necessarily include the speaker. Hearers are invited to share the generalized worldviews expressed by the speaker, but the hearer can choose to include themselves as members of these category or not. For politicians, one advantage of presenting their propositions and beliefs as common sense is that it makes it more difficult to question what they are saying.

In the following examples generic *you* is used by politicians to attack the opposition through including or excluding them from the generalizations presented; to legitimize political policy by presenting it as generalized truths or common sense; and to save face when confronted with potentially face-threatening questions in the press conferences immediately following their respective speeches.

1.1   Latham: ALP campaign launch
Par 5
1   I have a simple goal: to give Australia a government as good as the Australian people
2   themselves, to bring new drive and ideas to the leadership of the nation. Mr. Howard, too,
3   has a simple goal: he wants the electorate to help him beat Bob Hawke in the Guinness
4   Book of Records. That's the big difference in this campaign. Mr. Howard sees it as a lap of
5   honour. I see it as an honour to serve, to muster all my passion and commitment for the
6→   long-term service of the Australian people. I say: if **you** truly love this country, if **you** truly
7   respect its people, no-one could run to be Prime Minister with anything less than a full
8   commitment to the job. I couldn't do it. And I don't know how Mr. Howard can claim to believe
9   in Australia when he refuses to be honest and open with the Australian people themselves.

In example 1.1, in line 6 Latham uses *you* to describe a category, or categories of those people who *truly love this country*, and *truly respect its people*. This provides him with an indirect way of attacking Howard. By using *you*, rather than saying *he* or *Howard doesn't truly love this country or respect its people* Latham can include himself in the positive categories of those who love the country, and respect its people. The hearers can choose to include themselves as members of these categories or not and this sets up a potential group membership between the speaker and some or all of the hearers. Finally, the implication is that Howard is not a typical member of these categories and thereby does not love the country or respect its people.

1.2   Latham: ALP campaign launch
Par 9
1   Labor believes in Medicare. It's good public policy. But it also says something special about
2   who we are, about the things that make us uniquely Australian. It says that in our country, if
3→   **you** get sick then someone will care for **you**. It says that the Australian people look out for
4   each other. That we help our mates and those in need. No one gets left behind. No one gets
5   left without decent hospital care, without the availability of a bulk-billing doctor. That's what
6   makes it Medicare. And that's why Labor believes in it. It's universal. It's for the many, not
7→   just the few. The Liberals talk about a safety net. But **you** don't need a safety net unless
8→   **you've** turned the health system into a highwire act and families are in danger of falling off.

In example 1.2 in line 3 the reference is a neutral one, simply stating there is a category of people who may get sick and who will be cared for if they do. It can include anyone, or everyone *in our country*. A similar process to that in example 1.1 can be seen in lines 7 and 8. There is a category of people who have turned the health system into a highwire act, and who therefore need a safety net. The implication here is that *the Liberals* are members of this category and that Latham, the speaker, is not. By using *you*, instead of saying *they need a safety net because they have turned the health system into a highwire act* the audience can choose to include themselves as members of these categories or not. The hearers can choose to be in the category of those that don't need a safety net, as they are not the ones who have created the *hirewire act*, and hence by implication don't need Liberal policy. This is another indirect attack by Latham which delegitimizes the opponent.

1.3   Howard: Coalition campaign launch
Par 50
1   My friends, the initiatives I have outlined this morning underpin our commitment to a stronger
2   economic future for our nation. They have been made possible only because of the economic
3   success of the last eight-and-a-half years. Promises made in an election campaign mean
4→   nothing if **you** don't have a strong economy providing the wherewithal to make those promises
5→   affordable and achievable. Without a strong economy, **you** cannot sustain the automatic
6→   indexation of the aged pension. Without a strong economy, **you** cannot sustain a growing
7→   investment in health and education. Without a strong economy, **you** cannot sustain a growing
8→   investment in roads. Without a strong economy, **you** cannot afford to adequately defend the
9→   nation. Without a strong economy, **you** cannot deliver security and certainty to Australian
10   families so that they can live their lives in peace and plan carefully for their future.

In example 1.3 Howard uses the rhetorical device of repetition, *without a strong economy, you cannot sustain, deliver, afford*. He has already made reference to *a stronger economic future for our nation* in line 1, and the economic success of the past eight-and-a-half years. By using generic *you* here he sets up categories in which nobody can do any of the things listed without a strong economy. This is presented as common sense and legitimizes the coalition's policies and election promises. The hearers can choose to include themselves as members of these categories or not.

In example 1.4 Howard is asked directly how he will personally address the issue of generational change and the fact he is much older than Latham. He is unable to deny that he is twenty years older, so deflects this potentially face-threatening question by offering his opinion that people don't take much notice of age, and then changes the topic to a generalization saying: *it's your performance, your fitness*. These are categories he can place himself into, as he does in the sentence which follows.

1.4   Howard: announcing the election speech and subsequent press conference
JOURNALIST:
Mr Howard, where will you focus your campaign and how will you address that issue of generational change? Mr Latham's quite a bit younger than you.
HOWARD:
Par 28
1→   Oh, I don't think people take too much notice of age, it's **your** performance, **your** fitness. I don't
2   think I'm seen as somebody who's lacking energy and commitment or fitness. But, look, you
3   know, it's ability and performance, it's not a particular age that really matters and I don't think
4→   Australians worry about that. They're just worried about how good **you** are in the job and who…
     [lines omitted]

By not explicitly saying *it's my performance, my fitness* that people take notice of, he is able to speak generally, but make it a very personalized generalization. This has a dual affect of acting like a self-reference and generalization concurrently; it is a face-saving manoeuvre which presents him in a positive light. Bull (2003) in his typology of political equivocation, refers to this form of equivocation as one of the ways in which political interviewees attack the question. In this case Howard suggests that the question has failed to address the issues of importance, which are *performance* and *fitness*, and not *age*. In line 4 if Howard were to use first person *they're just worried about how good I am in the job*, it could be interpreted as meaning that people are worried about his job performance. By using *you* in this context he is able to present it as a generalized truth that Australians only worry about how anyone performs in their job.

In example 1.5 Latham is asked a potentially face-threatening question, whether he personally has any regrets. No politician wants to admit regretting any of their actions. So he avoids directly stating whether or not he has regrets, or would have done things differently by generalizing the situation to one where all politicians, including himself, benefit from

hindsight. He proposes other generalized categories suggesting that these are typical ways of behaving in a campaign e.g. *you haven't got*, *you get out there and advocate and put your policies in a straightforward way*. He positions himself and his party as members of these categories by saying in the next line that *we have done that*. He is able to thereby present his and the party's actions in a positive way.

1.5   Latham: Address to the National Press Club and subsequent press conference
JOURNALIST:
Mr. Latham…has there been anything that you've regretted during Labor's campaign at all?
LATHAM:
Par 71
1→   In hindsight there's always things in politics **you'd** do differently but that's the benefit of
2→   hindsight. In campaign strategy, understanding what the other side's doing, **you** haven't got a
3→   crystal ball, **you** just get out there and advocate and put **your** policies in a straightforward way.
4   So, I think we've done that in the substance of the campaign. We've done that well and it's not
5   a time for regrets, it's a time for looking forward and hoping we can be honoured with the
6   support of the Australian people on Saturday. [lines omitted]

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5. First person singular *I* and multiple selves

When the personal pronoun *I* is used, it refers not just to the speaker of the utterance, but also can refer to any of the speaker's interactional and social identities (Bramley 2001). Politicians' identities presented in the discourse can be private and public; the public identities are variously referred to as professional and institutional identities. The range of identities can be determined by looking at the linguistic context and/or drawing on our knowledge of the broader social/political context.

The following examples 2.1-2.3 are from Howard's speech announcing the election and subsequent press conference In example 2.1 the *I* refers to Howard's public discourse identity as PM. We know this from the broader social context; by tradition and law the office-holder of PM is the only person with the authority to visit the Governor General and call the election, naming the date.

2.1   Howard: Self as PM
Par 1
1→   Good afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, **I** saw His Excellency, the Governor-General this
2→   morning and on **my** advice he has agreed to a dissolution of the House of Representatives with
3   a view to an election for the House of Representatives and half of the Senate to be held on
4   Saturday, the 9th of October. The Writs will issue on the 31st of August. Parliament will be both
5   prorogued and the House of Representatives dissolved respectively at 4.59 on Tuesday and
6   5.00pm Tuesday, the 31st of August. The rolls will close on the 7th of September and polling
7→   day, as **I** mentioned, will take place on the 9th of October.

In example 2.2 the *I* refers to Howard's identity as leader of the coalition government. He refers to *my Government* and as he is referring to a collective noun, like *my family* this can place him as a member of this group. However he then places himself outside group membership as he follows this with a series of possessives commencing with *I have a great team*, attributing ownership to himself. He goes on *I have…the finest Treasurer*, *I have in Alexander Downer an outstanding Foreign Minister* and elliptically in lines 6 to 8 *(I have) in Phillip Ruddock*, *in Tony Abbott*, *in Brendan Nelson*. The team, the ministers are all things which *I have*. He could say *we are a great team*, *we have*… but he doesn't. By using *I*, rather than *we*, he promotes himself as an individual politician with individual achievements, which is actually the opposite of what he is claiming to do.

2.2	**Howard: Self as party leader → Self as individual politician**
Par 6	
1	Managing an $800 billion economy is a challenging task. It requires focus, experience and
2→	steadiness. It requires an experienced team. The successes that **my** Government have had are
3→	not successes that **I** solely claim for myself. **I** have a great team. **I** have, in **my** view, the finest
4→	Treasurer this country has seen, Peter Costello. **I** have in Alexander Downer an outstanding
5→	Foreign Minister. In Phillip Ruddock, firstly a fine Immigration Minister and now a fine Attorney-
6→	General. In Tony Abbott, somebody who's brought reforming zeal to the healthcare portfolio. In
7	Brendan Nelson, who's brought great reforming zeal and negotiated through the Senate
8	against all predictions major, long-term, systemic changes to our higher education system.

In the following example 2.3 line 1 Howard's use of the plural contrasts strikingly; *We've made our mistakes like any government does*. The responsibility for the mistakes is shared around. In line 5 the individual politician talks of entering the campaign, he tells us he wants to keep his job. At line 7 he talks of *my fellow Australians*, placing himself as one of them and evokes the private domain of sincerity by saying *it means a great deal to me*. The identity then shifts to that of the party leader asking *them* (Australians) to vote for *us* (him and the Coalition) so that *we* may continue in the job.

2.3	**Howard: Self as individual politician →Self as individual in society →Self as party leader**
Par 10	
1	We've made our mistakes, like any Government does, but we have been a Government that
2	has led Australia forward, we've been a Government that has protected Australia, we've been a
3	Government that has made Australia more prosperous, and we've been a Government that
4	above everything else, has propounded and defended the interests of the Australian people,
5→	both here and abroad. **I** enter this election campaign with energy, commitment and enthusiasm.
6→	**I** want to go on serving the Australian people. **I** believe in them. **I** love the opportunity of serving
7→	**my** fellow Australians. It means a great deal to **me**, and **I** humbly ask them to give us the
8	opportunity, when the time comes, to get on with the job that we have been doing over the last
9	eight and a half years. We will not let them down.

The following examples 2.4 and 2.5 are from Latham's speech at the ALP campaign launch. In example 2.4 Latham moves from being a member of the fellowship of Australians, to explicitly stating his role as leader of *the Labor team I am honoured to lead*. He then shifts to the identity of an individual politician with *deep convictions for the country I love*, and who receives local support from his community.

2.4	**Latham: Self as individual in society → Self as party leader → Self as individual politician**
Par 32	
1→	**My** fellow Australians, Labor's plan for Australia's future draws its strength from four great
2→	sources: From the voice of the people themselves. From the hard work of the Labor team **I**
3→	am honoured to lead. From **my** pride in Labor's historic achievements for Australia. And from
4→	**my** deepest convictions about a better way ahead for the country **I** love. And those
5→	convictions, in turn, come from **my** community, the people who believe in **me** and my work,
6→	the people who have given **me** so much help, every step along the way.

In example 2.5 he signals a biographical, historical mini-narrative by saying *When I was young*. He then shifts into an identity of a private individual in society – a child, a community member, a family man, husband and father. Politicians present private aspects of themselves in order to convey sincerity, which being tied to speaker intentions, is in the private domain. This is done in order to enhance their credibility, which is part of the public domain, where the audience evaluates what is said (Fetzer 2002). Interestingly in lines 6 and 7 he refers to himself in the third person, *a better man*, *a man*, *he* – to describe his capabilities as a potential Prime Minister. He could not speak of himself in this way using the first person pronoun. At line 8 the reference shifts back to the first person and the present time to depict an individual evaluating himself as being *in the prime of my life* and then again becomes the campaigning politician *I have something to offer our country*.

2.5	**Latham: Self as individual in society (child, community member, family man, husband, father) → 3ʳᵈ person reference to Self as potential PM → Self as individual politician**
Par 33	
1→	When **I** was young, **my** mother taught **me** to believe in ambition and aspiration. She gave **me**
2	the best advice of all: study hard, work hard and live your life in the service of others. The
3→	community **I** grew up in taught **me** to believe in Australia and the possibilities of progress. A
4→	place called Green Valley gave **me** a passion, a belief in opportunity for all. And now in **my**
5→	life and in **my** home, Janine and the boys have taught **me** the power of caring, of our love
6→	and time together. They have made **me** a better man. A man strong enough to know that **he**
7	can lead this nation well. That <u>he</u> can unite our people, not divide them. That at 43 years of
8→	age - in the prime of **my** life - **I** have something to offer our country: the beliefs and values of
9	a good society.

In both the Howard and Latham examples, they present positive aspects of themselves as individual politicians, rather than just as party representatives. This is not to say that they don't use plural forms on many occasions as well; some examples of such usage are discussed in the section following. But in the campaign period, they are both after the same job (to be Prime Minister), and in a sense the whole campaign is similar to a job interview with each presenting their suitability for the job. This lends an egocentric aspect to their discourse.

6. Use of *we*: ambiguity of reference and group membership

The denotational or basic meaning of *we* is collective identity or group membership; 'you and I', 'I and another' (Wales 1996, Bramley 2001). Implicit in the use of *we* is the authority to speak on behalf of others. Politicians use *we* for a number of different purposes: to talk on behalf of their party; to deflect individual responsibility; to include or exclude hearers from group membership; and to invoke a general collective response or attitude to a matter. This makes *we* very useful for political purposes as interpretation of the discourse referents is dependant on the context of use and inferences drawn on the basis of knowledge shared between the speaker and hearer (Wales 1996).

One typical use of *we* found in these speeches is to co-implicate the general public by establishing the referent as *the nation* or *all Australians* (which Wales (1996) refers to as the 'patriotic *we*') when talking about a shared characteristic and then to continue using *we* in relation to specific political beliefs. It is left to the hearers to determine whether they share these commonalties or not; whether they are included or excluded in the scope of reference.

Example 3.1 is taken from Howard's speech at the Coalition campaign launch. In line 1 the noun phrase *Australia* is assigned human characteristics of standing *proud* and *tall*. This use of metonymy in this sense is quite commonly understood as referring to the people of the nation spoken of, as in *Australia loves a sporting hero*. The following *we* is an anaphoric reference to Australia, or Australians. This reference back to Australians holds across lines 2 and 3. In line 5 the referent becomes *I along with 20 million of my fellow Australians*, which can hold across line 6. At line 7 the reference becomes ambiguous, as a political event is mentioned. This is an action the Government made, not one made by all Australians. In paragraph 10, line 2, the *us* referent remains ambiguous between the Government and all Australians. Line 3 *we* is the Government and line 4 *our* is all Australians. In paragraph 11 line 1 *our* defence alliance is the Government, as is *our* national security as these are political policies. Lines 2 and 3 refer to all Australians but the second *we* in line 3 is the Government, as is *our* and *we* in line 4. In line 5 *our* region refers to all Australians. The uses of *we* in lines

7 and 9 refer to the Government while the remaining uses of *we* in lines 11 and 12 are ambiguous.

3.1   Howard: Coalition campaign launch

Par 9
1→   Australia stands proud and tall around the world. **We** are respected for what **we** have achieved
2→   with **our** economy. **We** are seen as a nation prepared to take a stand on difficult international
3→   issues. **We** are a true and trusted and reliable friend. When I became Prime Minister in 1996, I
4   along with the other 20 million of my fellow Australians could not have imagined what lay ahead
5→   on the international scene. **We** were not to know that the world would change forever on the
6→   11th of September 2001. **We** could not foresee the terrible attack in Bali in 2002. **We** did not
7→   know that **we** would be called upon and proudly able to do, to liberate the people of East Timor,
8   and in many ways fulfil a debt that this nation, particularly the generation of World War II, owed
9   to the wonderful people of Timor.

Par 10
1   Terrorism has cast a dark cloud over the world, but it is a challenge that must be repulsed, and
2→   a challenge best repulsed by **us** being determined to live the lives of a free and democratic
3→   society. It will be a long fight and a difficult fight, and **we** must do it in cooperation with **our**
4→   friends all around the world, and most particularly here in **our** region. But whether popular or
5   not, I will never hesitate to do what is right and necessary, whatever is right and necessary, to
6   protect Australia and the Australian people against the threat of terrorism.

Par 11
1→   **Our** defence alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of **our** national security. I
2→   support the American alliance because it is in Australia's national interest to do so. **We** could
3→   never forget **our** history and **we** should understand the power realities of today. But **we** have
4→   demonstrated, despite what **our** critics predicted, that **we** have been able to build ever-closer
5→   ties with the United States and also grow closer to the nations of **our** region. Only a Coalition
6   Prime Minister could have been host to President Bush and President Hu Jintao on successive
7→   days as they addressed joint sittings of **our** National Parliament. The growth of **our** trade
8   relationship with China has been one of the great successes of the last eight-and-a-half years,
9→   and **we** have continued to build and strengthen **our** relations with other countries in the region
10   such as the traditional markets of Japan and Korea. It is never necessary in foreign or trade
11→   policy to choose between your history and your geography. **We** can remain faithful to **our**
12→   traditional allies and allegiances while building and strengthening **our** partnerships in the
13   region.

In example 3.2 line 1 Latham asks *what do we know?* The referent for *we* most likely refers to *the Australian people*. Latham then uses the rhetorical device of repetition to move through a series of propositions prefaced with *we know*. The *we* in line 2 might include Howard, in that he knows he's going but isn't saying. The next two uses in lines 2 and 4 would seem to exclude the Liberals. In line 5 *we know Labor has a plan for the future,* refers to the speaker, the Labor party and unknown others. In lines 7 and 8 *our schools, our young people, our…environment* the *we* shifts back to refer to all Australians. In the next paragraph in line 2 the reference shifts back to refer unambiguously to the Labor party – *we put forward our plans.*

3.2   Latham: Address to the National Press club

Par 41
1→   So at the end of this campaign, this long journey for the Australian people, what do **we** know?
2→   **We** know that Mr. Howard won't serve the three years of the next parliament. **We** know that
3   over the past six weeks the Liberals have engaged in the biggest financial give-away in the
4→   history of the Commonwealth. **We** know that they're the ones in danger of pushing the budget
5→   into deficit and driving up interest rates. In this campaign, **we** know that Labor has a plan for
6   the nation's future: A plan to save Medicare and extend it into Medicare Gold. A plan for fair
7→   funding in **our** schools and universities **our** young people can afford. A plan to ease the
8→   squeeze on Middle Australia. And a plan to protect **our** natural environment.

Par 42
1   Now these policies haven't always been popular. They've had their critics, in this room and
2→   beyond. But **we** put forward **our** plans - not because it was the easy way to campaign - but
3   because it was right for Australia. And that's the difference. Labor has a plan for the future. Mr.
4   Howard has a plan for retirement: an end-of-career clearance sale - everything goes, including
5   him, all out the door.

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7. Use of *they*

Studies of political pronoun use have illustrated that *they* can be used for distancing the speaker from the thing spoken of (Wilson 1990). It can be used to show ideological differences, as discussed earlier in the use of *us* and *them*. It can also be used to lessen the speaker's responsibility for actions or events. While still acting as a distancing strategy, *they* can be also be used for positive self-presentation, as in the following example.

Example 4.   Howard: calling the election speech and subsequent press conference
JOURNALIST:
Mr Howard, where will you focus your campaign and how will you address that issue of generational change? Mr Latham's quite a bit younger than you.
Par 28
PRIME MINISTER:
1   Oh, I don't think people take too much notice of age, it's your performance, your fitness. I don't
2   think I'm seen as somebody who's lacking energy and commitment or fitness. But, look, you
3   know, it's ability and performance, it's not a particular age that really matters and I don't think
4→   Australians worry about that. **They're** just worried about how good you are in the job and who…
5→   **they'll** look at us and say 'can I trust Howard or Latham to keep my interests rates low'. **They**
6   don't say, 'can I trust somebody who's x age against somebody y age to keep my interests
7→   rates low'. **They** look at our relative abilities. **They** say, 'which of the two of them is more likely
8   to keep the Budget in surplus so we've got more to spend on health and education; which
9   of the two of them is more likely to protect our living standards'. They're the questions
10→   **they're** going to ask. **They're** not going to say, 'can he still run a marathon' or can he do this or
11   he do that. I mean, I think I've demonstrated a certain capacity for long distance running or
12   walking perhaps. I don't think there's much doubt about that. But, look, I don't seek to bring
13   these matters into it. I mean, you asked me the question, I don't think the Australian voters are
14→   fussed by age differences. **They're** fussed by who **they** think **they** can trust with these important
15   things that affect **their** lives. I mean, the things that affect **their** lives that **they're** worried about
16→   and **they're** going to ask **themselves**, 'well which of these two blokes is more likely to keep my
17   mortgage affordable' and that's a very pertinent question, that's far more important than the
18   age difference between Mr Latham and myself.

Howard in this example is in Goffman's (1981) terms the <u>animator</u> – the person uttering the words. Through his use of *I don't think Australians worry about that*, he offers his opinion. *They* in line 4 is an anaphoric reference to *Australians*. From lines 5-10 and again in 16 he appears to quote what Australians will say and ask. By doing this he appears to make them the <u>authors</u> of the sentiments expressed, and the <u>principal</u> – those whose views are being represented, although it is actually his world view he is presenting. The reported speech is a figment of his imagination; there is no *they*. He distances himself from making these claims about himself explicitly by attributing them to *Australians* and what *they* will say; and does so by seemingly quoting the voice of Australians. This serves a legitimizing function for his own views as it seems to come from a third person source, as being other people's opinions. This is also a form of equivocation, as he avoids answering the question asked, about how he will deal with the matter. The seven occurrences of *they* in lines 4-10 of this extract refer back to the nationality noun *Australians* which refers to an unspecific, nonsingular entity. At line 13 the referent becomes more specifically *Australian voters*, for the following eight uses of *they* (*their, themselves*).

8. Summary

Politicians' messages are aimed at audiences holding diverse political views and personal opinions. Politicians use pronouns to refer to categories and group memberships in which they can choose to place themselves or not. The choice is always based on presenting themselves in a positive light. The hearers can choose to be a part of these categories, or not. Ambiguity of reference of *we* serves political purposes, particularly when the referent is *all Australians*. Ambiguous and vague reference can be denied or negated at a later date. Politicians strategically include and/or exclude their political opposition from group memberships in order to present them negatively. They deflect potentially face-threatening questions by using impersonal use and generalized categories. Shifting identity through pronoun choice and using pronouns with ambiguous referents enables politicians to appeal to diverse audiences which helps broaden their ability to persuade the audience to their point of view. It is a scattergun effect – shoot broadly enough and you'll hit something.

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