

'Men and Women of Australia': Political Rhetoric in Australian Political Science and Communication

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Abstract

In the last few decades interest in political language has risen in the Australian media, publishing and in popular culture. Political advisors and speechwriters are increasingly the subject of interest and the publication of a number of collections of ‘great’ Australian speeches and the memoirs of political professionals reflect this trend, as does the popularity of political television programs such as *The West Wing*, *Grass Roots* and *The Thick of It*. Given this, how are researchers in Australian political science and communication studying political and election campaign language? This paper will trace the small yet vibrant tradition of research into political language in Australia, examining the field in comparison to the vast body of work produced in the North American and European traditions. Contemporary research has largely focused on campaign tactics and strategies or taken an analytical approach to a single campaign. The paper asks what theoretical and methodological approaches have informed political science and communication analyses of Australian political language, highlights some of the practical obstacles facing researchers in the area, and proposes new directions for research. It argues that political language can be analysed not simply from the perspective of ‘electoral outcomes’ or professional spin, but from a position that questions what Australian political language might reveal political culture more broadly; about notions of identity, structures of power, ongoing social debates, contested priorities or shifting values.

Interest in political language has risen dramatically in the last few decades in the Australian media, publishing and in popular culture, following a similar trend in the United States and United Kingdom. This is driven, in part, by the common-sense notion that what politicians say *matters* — and not just which words they speak, but how and where they speak them, who they speak to and about, and who helps them shape that speech. This rising media and public interest in political language can be linked to the growing prevalence of ‘meta-coverage’ (Gitlin 1991) in political and election news, which popularises the behind-the-scenes strategies and personalities of political and election campaigns as the subject of media coverage and public interest. Here, political and election campaign coverage and analysis focuses on speechwriters, media advisors, image consultants, advertising executives, pollsters and campaign managers alongside political issues and candidates — on the message construction as well on the message.

In the US, this trend can be traced back to the high public profile of political speechwriters such as Theodore Sorensen (for John F Kennedy; 1965) and Peggy Noonan (for Ronald Reagan; 2003; 1990). More recently, it is exemplified by the ‘celebrity status’ of political professionals George Stephanopoulos and James Carville, whose central role in the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign was mythologised through intense media coverage and the cult documentary, *The War Room* (1993)¹. This popularisation of the daily workings of politics and professional ‘spin’ has also been cemented in popular culture, reflected in the popularity of US television dramas such as *The West Wing*, *Commander-in-Chief* and *Brothers and Sisters*, as well as British political comedies *Yes, Minister* and *Yes, Prime Minister*, *Absolute Power* and the BBC’s latest behind-the-scenes political satire, *The Thick of It*.

The growing interest in political language is also evident in Australia: these international television programs have aired locally (with varying degrees of success; and Australians are yet to see *The Thick of It*), and local productions such as the ABC’s *GrassRoots* and *The Games* have picked up on similar themes. The recent publication of five collections of Australian public and political speeches (Cathcart and Darian-Smith 2004; Kemp and Stanton 2004; Warhaft 2004; Ryan 1995; McAllister and Moore 1991) and the memoirs of Australian political speechwriters (Gurr 2006; Freudenberg 2005; Watson 2002) have both stimulated and responded to this trend. More recently, the ABC’s Radio National ran the *Unforgettable Speeches* series, where Australians voted Paul Keating’s 1992 ‘Redfern Address’ and Gough Whitlam’s 1975 impromptu ‘Dismissal’ comments in the top ten speeches of all time, along with speeches by Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln (ABC Radio 2007). However, despite the growing popularity of, and interest in, political rhetoric and campaign tactics, the concerns of political science and communication research in Australia do not correspond to those of the news and entertainment media, and popular culture more broadly.

¹ Both have gone on to publish political memoirs (Carville 2000; Carville and Matalin 1995; Stephanopoulos 1999) and make regular media appearances: Stephanopoulos is the ABC News Chief Washington Correspondent and hosts *This Week With George Stephanopoulos*, while Carville has co-hosted CNN’s *Crossfire* and appears regularly on *The Situation Room*.

Why Study Political Language?

Academic research in Australian politics has traditionally taken election campaigns as a central focus, analysing how political power is won and lost in Australia through the strategies and tactics used in campaigning, the policies developed, presented and introduced, the amount of money spent, and, ultimately, who won or lost at the polls. While these are vital areas of research, there is space within this range of approaches for Australian political science and communication to take a less instrumental or outcomes-focused perspective.

Although there is not a clearly defined local tradition of political language analysis, a small but vibrant strand of Australian work *has* taken political language as a primary concern. This paper will map this field in context of, and comparison to, both the vast body of research produced in the North American and European political communication traditions, and Australian political studies more broadly. It will ask what theoretical and methodological approaches have informed past analyses of Australian election campaign and political language, highlight the practical obstacles facing researchers in the area, and propose new directions for inquiry.

Research is needed in Australian political science and communications that builds on, applies and challenges earlier work. Political language can be analysed not simply as an indicator of the professionalisation of politics or a tool of electoral manipulation or persuasion, but in a manner that asks what Australian political language might reveal about notions of identity, structures of power, ongoing social debates, and contested priorities or shifting values. Tracing the development of language-based studies of Australian politics, this paper will argue that detailed textual analysis, which engages with a broad range of ‘political’ and other theory, can be significant beyond studying political spin or electoral outcomes. Developing the discursive strand of political research in this way will help to illuminate something of Australian political culture more broadly: how political actors talk and think about identities, values and priorities in Australian society, and the contexts in which this talk occurs. It may provide an avenue to study the ways in which, through dynamic, contested and mediated dialogue with voters, they might invite their audience to think about themselves and others by linking into a diffuse and powerful network of social discourse and

representation. Political leaders, and other political actors, must negotiate their desire (and potential power) to ‘shape’ ideas in ways that both influence *and* reflect the diverse ideas and debates of the political and social community in which they work — making political language an interesting and significant place from which to analyse continuities and shifts in society more broadly.

This paper will argue that Australian political science and communication is well placed to look beyond the way political language works in its pragmatic or performative sense: announcing a new policy, answering an interview question, attacking the opposition’s weaknesses, soliciting voter support. Drawing on seminal work already being done in the area, it can also begin to study language as powerful beyond its immediate context. Discursive research offers a unique vantage point from which to view the structures and hierarchies of Australian society: to ask questions about identity and belonging, inclusion and exclusion, continuity and change. Election campaigns, and the wider political process, are not *only* about winning or losing power, but can be studied, through a focus on language, as a time when the wider debates, issues and concerns of a society come to a head, where the ongoing dialogue and contest between political actors and a range of other groups become visible. It is with this in mind that research can look beyond the pragmatic or instrumentalist aspects of political language to what Chantal Mouffe (2005, 25) calls the ‘affective dimension’ of politics and voting — to the ways politics is talked about, thought about and lived in society through constant negotiation, evaluation and definition. Here:

[I]n order to act politically, people need to be able to identify with a collective identity which provides an idea of themselves that they can valorise. Political discourse has to offer not only policies but also identities which can help people make sense of what they are experiencing as well as giving them hope for the future (Mouffe 2005, 25).

This paper is not proposing that Australian political science should be entirely re-oriented towards language analysis. Rather, it will follow on from political scientist Carol Johnson’s (2002, 1) argument that discursively-oriented studies are necessary contributions to a complex and diverse field of political science research in Australia; a ‘fruitful area of research that complements other approaches’:

Institutional research, psephological research, quantitative survey research (including analyses of values), comparative research and a host of other approaches are also extremely valuable tools in the armoury which political scientists bring to the study of our fascinating, if somewhat vexed, discipline (Johnson 2002, 1).

In this context, this paper will highlight the ways in which political communication perspectives might extend and develop the field by paying close attention to language, both in election campaigns and politics more broadly.

Definitions and Scope

Before moving on to map political and election campaign research, it is important to note that the terminology used is rarely theoretically neutral, and definitions of ‘political language’ are both numerous and contested. Theorists define political language according to its content, form, function or effects: for some, this is restricted to ‘polemic or argumentative language’ (Klaus in de Landtsheer 1998, 5); while for others it refers to political vocabulary or lexicon. De Landtsheer (1998, 5- 6) provides a useful definition of political language as ‘public communication on the subject of politics’, which must be studied in the context of ‘everyday language’, because *all* language can become ‘political’ depending on how it is used.

Even in the choice of terminology, much can be read about the perspectives of work in the field. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, the use of political ‘speech’, ‘communication’, ‘rhetoric’, ‘language’ or ‘discourse’ can be read as not only a semantic decision but also a theoretical one, situating new work within research traditions. While an awareness of their histories is important, contemporary research may benefit from being guided, rather than dictated or restricted, by their distinct (but often overlapping) theoretical origins. The need to use each term only in the context of its theoretical origin is unnecessarily limiting for Australian contemporary research, which often combines aspects from varying traditions when analysing political language. This paper will use political ‘language’ or ‘rhetoric’ to refer to the ongoing dialogue that takes place between political actors and political audiences or electorates, primarily through the media. In doing so, it will draw a distinction between ‘election campaign’ and ‘political’ language; differentiating broad political enquiry from the specific sub-genre of election studies.

While political science and communication perspectives overlap significantly, their emphases diverge as the former focuses on the *political* processes of governing and campaigning and the latter on its *communicative* aspects. For political communication theorists, election campaigns (and politics more broadly) are based primarily on ‘political talk’ deliberately selected to:

[I]mpress a large audience, evoke a sympathetic response from spectators, identify the candidate with the most cherished traditions, rules and folk heroes of his party and of [the nation], and convey a sense of relevance, meaning, timeliness and appropriateness to what the candidate is saying (Nimmo 1970, 27-8).

Political scientists, however, highlight that politics is about more than ‘just talk’: here, election campaigns can serve as a political test, asking voters to decide whether a certain candidate ‘has what it takes’ to hold office; or as a ritual confirmation of the legitimacy of a democratic government and elected representatives, inviting participation as an affirmation of the electoral process and measuring the ‘health’ of a democracy (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1997, 20). These latter perspectives have, to date, been the focus of the Australian field, and developing language-based work in political communication will balance and complement these. This paper will work from a political communication perspective, arguing for the need for research that studies elections, and politics more broadly, as a complex and negotiated dialogue between candidates and voters that takes place predominantly through the media.

It is important to note that while this paper differentiates between political and election campaign language, the dividing line is becoming increasingly blurred. Election campaigns have traditionally been viewed as easily distinguished from formal politics: divided into the *extended* and the *formal* campaign, the ‘frenetic period that is the most visible to voters as parties make formal policy speeches, ideas are pushed with vigour and leaders criss-cross the country’ (Bennett 1996, 105). However, the increasing amount of time and resources devoted to professional strategy between formal election periods, and the use of campaigning techniques in government and opposition as well as during formal campaigns², has led to a blurring of this distinction. For some researchers political and campaign language overlap to the degree that making a methodological distinction between them is artificial; here, politics has moved into the age of the *permanent* campaign, where incumbency

² For example, Labor Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd’s campaign-style “Education Revolution” television advertisements in the lead-up to the 2007 election campaign.

functions primarily to ‘sustain an elected official’s popularity’ (Blumenthal 1980, 7). Originally highlighted as a trend in North American politics, political scientist Sally Young (2004, 7; also van Onselen and Errington 2005) notes that in Australia, politicians and parties:

[N]o longer confine their electioneering solely to the formal campaign period which occurs, on average...every 2.3 years. Instead, modern campaigning practices have created the sense of a ‘permanent campaign’ where politicians begin preparing for their next campaign immediately after the last one is finished.

This shift opens up space for research that takes the interlinked, dynamic nature of contemporary politics into account. In this paper, ‘campaign language’ will refer to the *formal* campaign, while ‘political language’ will refer more broadly to communications between these periods. However, this distinction will be made with an awareness of the ways in which campaign language works within and helps to construct broader political discourses, drawing on social themes, issues and ideas that are debated, challenged and asserted in between formal campaign periods.

Studying Political Language: International Approaches

Across the cross-disciplinary and methodologically diverse history of research into political language, a number of significant trends can be identified. These can be variously divided into North American or European approaches; quantitative or qualitative methods; or further divided into studies concerned with how language achieves political ends, with the language itself, or with the ways in which audiences/voters receive and interpret political language. However despite the work of researchers across these areas and the growing interest in political language in the last few decades, the field remains fragmented, varying in its definitions, scope, and concerns³.

The Quantitative Tradition

The largest volume of work in election studies and political communication is produced in the North American field: here, quantitative approaches are particularly

³ See de Landtsheer (1998, 6-12) provides a detailed map of 12 common approaches to the international study of political language.

dominant and the focus has overwhelmingly been on election campaign language such as debates (Airne and Benoit 2005; Banwart and McKinney 2005; Benoit 2003; Hart and Jarvis 1997), speeches and political broadcasts (Hart and Childers 2005; Hart and Johnson 1999; Johnston 1991). Content analysis has been employed to allow wide-ranging study across large amounts of material, illuminating patterns, shifts and continuities in political language. However, the method has also been widely criticised for a tendency to assume the existence of discrete, quantifiable ‘meanings’ in a text; for being dictated pre-determined ideas about the study; and for analysing language use apart from the contexts in which it is produced and understood.

Partly in response to these concerns, and also in order to overcome the limitations of time and scale which make hand-coding a large number of texts an inefficient process, researchers (again, predominantly in the US) have developed computer-assisted quantitative analysis techniques. This software (such as VBPro, Wordsmith, SPSS Textsmart, Textpack, or Diction⁴) ostensibly ‘distances’ the researcher from the analysis; it is seen, here, as:

[M]ore objective and efficient in that it can content analyse a large mass of data quickly, comprehensively, and more precisely than individual members of a coding panel. In addition, the quantitative results provide hard evidence for interpretative appraisals...and for accurate comparisons across different speakers and circumstances (Kabanoff et al 2001, 89).

Political language analysis programs have been employed to identify word frequencies and broader themes in political language (Hart and Johnson 1999; Hart and Childers 2005); and Kabanoff et al (2001) usefully demonstrate how computer-assisted content analysis can facilitate the exploration of major themes in Australian political speeches. However, to a large degree results continue to depend on ‘subjectively’ developed categories and units of analysis, and conclusions still require some level of creative interpretation by the researcher. Also, Kabanoff and colleagues do not undertake any discussion of the possible differences between the terms used in the program’s database of North American political texts and their examples of Australian political speech, and how this might influence research findings that rely

⁴ These programs can be applied to an analysis of political rhetoric with varying levels of suitability, depending on the data type for which they were designed (focus group responses, newspaper articles etc) and the relative ability of their dictionary and coding functions to be customised. DICTION is the exception, as North American political scientist Roderick P. Hart and colleagues designed it to compare texts against an in-built database of political language produced between 1948 and 1998.

on a comparison between word usage in their sample and this database of texts. Further, these programs require material to be entered in digital format — an expensive and inefficient process for Australian researchers working with hard-copy historical examples of political rhetoric.

Qualitative Approaches

While quantitative work remains the dominant paradigm, both in the United States and internationally, this dominance is beginning to shift. Where North American research *has* employed a more qualitative approach, it has overwhelmingly drawn on classic rhetorical studies as both a theoretical and methodological guide (see Denton Jr. 2005; Willyard and Ritter 2005; Ritter and Howell 2001). Other work takes a ‘myths’ or ‘symbols’ approach to analysing how political language draws on and helps to construct shared social stereotypes and assumptions (de Landtsheer and Feldman 2000; Merelman 1992), or looks at form and genre in political language (see Simons and Aghazarian 1986). These frameworks, often, lead to a methodology where research is strongly guided towards looking for certain types of linguistic formats or strategies; an approach which can lead to blindnesses towards less conventional techniques that do not easily fit into traditional categories for analysis.

In the UK a strong linguistic tradition of political language analysis takes a similar approach to studying the structure and semantics of political speeches and interviews (Harris et al 2006; Harris 2001; Bull 2003; 1998; Bull and Mayer 1993). Taking the broader perspective of socio-cultural studies or socio-linguistics, further research is concerned not only with political language, in and of itself, but with the way language can influence beliefs and ideas, its potential ‘power to change a world view’, and function as an ‘agent of cultural or racial domination’ (de Landtsheer 1998, 10).

In this same vein, UK researchers have also taken a discourse analytical approach, studying the rhetoric of nationalism in British elections (Billig et al 2006) and the political language of ‘New Labor’ (Fairclough 2000). This is typical of what is often identified as the ‘European tradition’; a less instrumentalist, outcomes-based approach to studying politics and elections where work in discourse and critical discourse analysis continues to gain prominence. Research in this strand has worked to create a

balance between linguistic and political concerns, aiming not to compromise ‘linguistic rigour for the sake of socio-political claims’, but equally not continuing to produce language-based research which fails to consider ‘why, in social and political terms, specific linguistic choices have been made’ (Wilson 2001, 411). This is evident in the European field where, for example, researchers have studied issues of race and national identity in political speeches (Wodak 2002); newspaper coverage of Turkish elections (Chistensen 2005); discourses of gender equality in Icelandic election campaigns (Thorvaldsdottir 2004); and the ways audiences understand political speech (van Dijk 2002).

While a broad range of theoretical and methodological approaches to studying political language could be included in this qualitative, discursively-oriented tradition, what the studies discussed above share is a common concern with placing political language in its social, cultural or historical context. These approaches can be usefully applied to analysing Australian political and election campaign rhetoric with notions of social power and structure firmly in mind.

Despite the continuing publication of international political and election campaign studies, there is space to extend academic attention to *language*, to complement previous research by looking beyond electoral outcomes at political rhetoric in its broader context. This kind of research has, to date, also been overlooked in the Australian political science and communication field — however, mapping the field will demonstrate how well placed local researchers are to work in this space, developing and extending existing perspectives.

Mapping Australian Political Science and Communication Research

As the concerns of political science and communication continue to develop and diversify, the power of political language beyond its (contested) role in influencing election outcomes is an increasingly valuable site of research. Moving beyond the instrumentalist concerns allows researchers to continue developing work that sees language as crucial both to the formal practice of politics and to the construction and

maintenance of broader social practices and structures; inviting a complex and varied approach to studying political language in Australia that complements more well-established areas of research.

In the Australian field, literature focusing specifically on political or election campaign language remains rare. Taking a step back, it is a valuable starting point to see what the concerns of broader academic work have been. A survey of election campaign literature (Appendix 1), as an example, helps to illuminate where Australian politics researchers have focused their attention by providing an indication of key references in the Australian field. Drawn from academic, political-professional and media sources, some of this work focuses directly on election campaigns, while others take a broader scope and refer to campaigns only in passing; mapping the field in this way helps to highlight the strengths and preoccupations of previous work and makes spaces for new research visible. Dividing the field is divided into a number of (overlapping) categories⁵, it becomes clear that despite the relatively small size of the field Australian election campaign literature has covered a wide range of areas; both taking cues from the North American and European traditions and developing its own priorities and concerns. The key research outlined (Appendix 1) covers campaign tactics and strategies; profiles some of the great personalities on Australian political history, and illuminates aspects of the day-to-day workings of federal politics.

There are, however, a number of gaps that become clear when mapping this small, but thriving, section of Australian political science: for example, comparative studies that look across more than one election or place Australian campaigns into a broader historical or international context are noticeably rare. More importantly, in the context of this paper, is the absence of a prominent local tradition of close linguistic, rhetorical or discursive analysis of election campaign language to complement wider research — many of these key election studies texts mention language as a secondary concern or only in passing. Kabanoff et al (2001, 87) argue that Australian scholars have ‘shown little formal interest’ in studying political language:

⁵ These categories, developed by the author, are: *election specific studies*, *academic studies*, *behind-the-scenes*, *political memoir*, *political-historical portraits* and *collections of speeches*.

Of course, party leaders' speeches and clever one-liners have always been the subject of analysis and speculation in the media, especially at election time. However, these journalistic critiques of political rhetoric remain circumstantial and intuitive, and, understandably, are not conducted within any disciplined tradition of textual analysis.

This is not to say, however, that there has been *no* academic research in this area in Australia — and looking beyond the electoral studies sub-section of the field demonstrates this. Working in disciplines from political science and communication to media studies, linguistics, cultural studies or history (to name but a few), attention has been paid to both campaign and broader political language. The value of these language-based studies is in their ability to complement and challenge other strands of research into Australian politics, applying and extending historical and theoretical work by paying close attention to language in the context of groundbreaking previous scholarship.

Within the quantitative survey tradition, Prime Minister Robert Menzies' first televised policy address was the subject of a detailed panel study (Hughes and Western 1966); while Kabanoff et al (2001) undertake a computer-assisted content analysis of party conference speeches; David Brereton and James Walter (1978) use content analysis to study leadership style in parliamentary question time; and McAllister and Moore (1991) have completed a more traditional content analysis of election policy speeches. These quantitative analyses of Australian political rhetoric provide important insights, and can also be extended to a broader scope or combined with qualitative approaches to analyse political language for its role both in reflecting and helping to construct and maintain broader structures and discourses in Australian society.

Johnson (2002, 2) argues that although discursive analysis in Australian political science has often taken second place to more 'pragmatic' research methods it has a long history, which recognises that 'politics is about power in the broadest sense from government to everyday life'. Research, here, has drawn on the traditions of rhetorical and linguistic analysis outlined above, as well as media/communications, historical, or cultural studies perspectives (to name but a few) in order to analyse election campaign and political language — without necessarily being self-declared as 'discourse analysis'. This small but increasingly dynamic area, which has tended to take a more fluid and porous approach than traditional discourse analysis, is sparing in its use of

linguistic terminology (see Fairclough 1995, 3) and provides an invaluable guide for future research into political and campaign rhetoric in Australia.

Work which has contributed to the development of an Australian field of political language research and has looked at election campaigns, includes Paul Corcoran's development of a framework for the analysis of political language and rhetoric (1979) and application of those ideas to election victory and concession speeches (1998); and Paul Gillen's (1989) analysis of policy launch speeches from 1949 – 1983.

Moving beyond electoral studies, James Walter (1980), in his 'political biography' of Whitlam, uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative textual analysis to analyse Whitlam's political orientations, world-view, and cognitive style; and Graham Little (1985; 1988) takes a 'psychosocial' approach to studying political leadership, drawing on political language to analyse different types of leadership and the construction by, and relationship of, these leaders to their followers. More recently, John Kane (2001) relies on an analysis of rhetoric and symbolism when exploring the place — and strategic mobilisation — of 'moral capital' in formal politics; John Uhr (2002; 2001) examines the role of prime ministerial rhetoric in establishing political institutions (such as the 'institution of leadership' or 'citizenship'); and James Curran (2006) conducts an in-depth study of how prime ministerial speeches have worked to construct ideas of 'the nation'.

Judith Brett's (1992) groundbreaking study into Menzies' 'forgotten people' has been instrumental in developing this area of research in Australia; she illuminates, by combining political and cultural history with close, intuitive language analysis, both characteristics of Menzies himself (the man and the politician) and of the political constituency he relied on and worked to construct. Brett has also examined Liberal Party history and the 'moral middle class' through political language such as speeches and policy statements (2003, ix); drawn on Prime Minister John Howard's use of language in an examination of the Liberal Party's 'relaxed and comfortable Australia' (2005); and, more recently, examined the words and the politics of 'ordinary' Australians (with Moran 2006). Within the discursive tradition, Carol Johnson's powerful studies of social structures and identity formation in Australian politics, and Australian society more broadly, combine political science and broader theoretical perspectives to analyse Labor history and traditions (1989); to trace shifts and

changes in Australia from Keating to Howard (2000); to place anti-elitist narratives in an international perspective (2004); and to illuminate conservative discourses on class, race and sexuality (2005).

This research has contributed to a developing field of inquiry into Australian politics where cross-disciplinary theoretical concerns are combined with more traditional political communication interests. Here, the dynamic relationship between the political actors and the media provides opportunity for further exploration, as do historical- or international-comparative studies which trace the history and development of political rhetoric or study it in comparison with political language and actors from other countries. Research is needed, then, that takes up and extends the concerns of these seminal language-oriented studies of Australian politics, which have been invaluable in highlighting the ways in which political language is *powerful* and can be analysed to ask larger questions: how is language used to draw Australians together or drive a political ‘wedge’ between them; to create a sense of national occasion or ceremony; to mark an important event? How does it work to appeal to certain demographics or ‘target audiences’; or to persuade electors to vote for one party or another? What can it reveal about the personalities of Australian politicians or the characteristics of Australian society: its structures of power, enduring myths, values and priorities?

Space for research that continues to ask these broader questions opens up as studies of political language move beyond the preoccupation with election campaigns, or even with traditional political actors (such as politicians, governments, political parties), and take into account the communications of the non-traditional political actors who play a central role in civil society. Australian political research is well-placed to integrate an interest in the language of these non-traditional political actors: lobby groups, unions, protest or activists groups, non-government organisations, citizen’s groups, ‘bloggers’ and citizen journalists. These groups use language in powerful, ‘political’ ways to communicate and to persuade, and increasingly harness online and digital media to both complement and bypass traditional press and broadcast media — attention to this language genre also remains under-explored both in Australian and international political science and communication research.

This shift in emphasis also opens up space to extend what source material analyses of political language might take in. Following on from the common-sense idea that ‘speech’ is the most important or powerful political communication genre, studies have traditionally focused on verbal speech such as campaign, party conference, policy or parliamentary speeches. In the age of media politics, understandings of what counts as ‘political language’ have been extended to include the mediatised aspects of more traditional genres, such as broadcast political interviews (on television, and news and talkback radio); press conferences; doorstep interviews; and televised election debates. However the preoccupation with direct and mediatised ‘speech’ is also diversifying, and other communication genres such as government and election campaign advertising; direct mail; press releases; policy documents; media coverage; political websites and blogs; and other online genres are now accepted as part of the discursive fabric of contemporary politics. As this perspective becomes more prominent, Australian political science and communication is able to challenge and extend existing notions of what ‘counts’ as political language or rhetoric.

In this context, research is able to examine the relationship between this wide range of political texts and the social world, offering insights into how this language functions in and through media representation. Here, political language can be analysed not only as a ‘genre’ in its own right, but also for the ways that it is conceived, written, performed and disseminated through a dynamic, active media to an increasingly fragmented Australian audience; for the ways it responds to and helps to ‘construct’ publics and public opinion; and for the increasingly central role of political professionals and media advisors in the political process. Discursive analyses offer one such approach to the analysis of texts in context that can move across a range of genres and formats, helping to avoid both narrow studies which focus *only* on the text and broader analyses which can tend towards generalisation (Macdonald 2003, 2). However in order to undertake the kind of complex, nuanced and contextual analysis proposed above, a number of practical considerations must also be taken into account.

Studying Political Language: Practical Challenges

Any attempt at a comprehensive, wide-ranging analysis of Australian political rhetoric has, in the past, been challenged by a number of practical hurdles in terms of format, access and availability. However, technological changes and a growing interest in the area has meant that these traditional obstacles are beginning to shift, both opening up new possibilities and presenting new challenges.

The primary hurdle for researchers attempting wide-ranging or comparative work on Australian political language is that of access: sound and visual recordings, transcripts, governmental and personal records, and other archival materials are scattered in various libraries around the country. At present, there is no central, comprehensive database of political, governmental or election campaign material available for research, and although this is beginning to be remedied (by ‘unofficial’ websites such as *Australian Politics* as well as the National Library’s ‘PANDORA’ web archiving project) these resources remain incomplete.

Taking prime ministerial papers as an example demonstrates these difficulties: while the most extensive collections of Australian prime ministerial papers are held in the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and National Library of Australia (NLA)⁶, material is also housed in five Prime Ministerial Libraries (PMLs) around the country. The scattered nature of these archives means that specific records can be difficult to locate, while in other cases they simply do not exist — while some politicians (such as Billy Hughes and Earle Page) left extensive records, others (Scullin, Chifley, Fadden) kept very little. The *Archives Act 1983* further complicates access, as it only makes records which are more than 30 years old publicly available. This limits researchers’ ability to access election campaign material from the elections in the immediate past, creating a gap between older election campaigns, where materials are

⁶ The NLA collected the records of many early prime ministers as well as those of Robert Menzies until 1983, when the *Archives Act 1983* specifically commissioned the NAA (which had been collecting prime ministerial records since the 1960s) to seek, obtain and manage the archival records of the Commonwealth, including records of ‘significant people’ who had been associated with a Commonwealth institution (Shapley 2005). Under the *Act*, those records already held in the NLA are to remain there, making any chance of all collections of prime ministerial papers being brought together unlikely.

available in archives and prime ministerial libraries, and the most recent campaigns where material is accessible online.

Funding levels further restrict the ease of access to, and relatively comprehensive nature of, archival collections. The existing prime ministerial libraries have been modelled on the US presidential library system, however the US libraries are built using private funds thanks to a culture of political interest and private donation that is almost unimaginable in Australia. For example, US \$165 million was spent establishing the Clinton Presidential Library and US National Archives spends around US \$42 million year to maintain other presidential libraries (Shapley 2005). In contrast, the Australian 2000-01 federal budget allocated \$1.6 million to the NAA to create a central 'virtual archive' mapping prime ministerial papers rather than attempting to take them into central custody. The resulting Prime Minister's Papers Project maintains the *Australia's Prime Ministers* website, which has made searching for prime ministerial records more manageable. However despite these online research maps and the NAA's ongoing digitisation program having some impact, online access remains an unwieldy and relatively inefficient process.

Another challenge for Australian researchers lies in accessing material from politicians other than prime ministers, such as opposition leaders or other senior ministers. In general prime ministerial papers are easier to locate and obtain than those of other politicians; due, in part, to the bureaucratic and administrative resources afforded the position of prime minister, as well as the greater historical and cultural significance the position holds. This remains true even for those who later held the position of prime minister, and the bias runs through to more recent elections: while John Howard's speeches and media appearances from the 2004 election, for example, are comprehensively archived and easily accessible on the Prime Minister's website, Opposition Leader Mark Latham's records from the same election are significantly more difficult to locate.

As technology develops, and the 'professionalisation' of politics and election campaigns continues, this is starting to shift. For contemporary politics and future elections, the online availability of political sources and the growing prevalence of political party e-mailing lists — where press releases, interview, press conference and speech transcripts, and policy documents are sent in digital formats to media (and

others who request inclusion) — mean that researchers can obtain, collate and store political and election campaign material with comparatively little effort. The availability of digital formats also makes applying language-analysis software to Australian political language more feasible.

Relying on these transcripts, however, raises a further question of accuracy: how closely do transcripts or records match the ‘actual’ event — and is this an important consideration? Transcripts provided by the party or office of a politician, of a radio interview for example, will occasionally omit embarrassing gaffes, mistakes, particularly challenging questions from journalists and other deviations from the ‘message’. This is not a new problem: researchers analysing past campaigns must rely on archival speech notes, or newspaper transcripts of speeches, unless audio or video is available, and these are plagued by the same accuracy issue; while published collections of political speeches are often ‘edited’ for brevity.

However, the move towards an interest in less traditional political actors, such as NGOs, lobby groups or unions, means that in some cases the historical, governmental and privacy issues that hamper obtaining prime ministerial records no longer apply — and as interest in political language and speeches grows, it reasonable to expect that resource availability, access conditions and funding levels might begin to improve.

Conclusion

While language-based analysis has by no means been a dominant force in Australian political science, this paper has argued that a dynamic and vibrant field of political communication research has developed, in the context of broader international research. This developing area, which takes the analysis of political and election campaign rhetoric as a central (rather than secondary or implicit) concern, must continue to draw on, respond to, challenge and apply other approaches in Australian politics. Employing a broad, integrated cross-disciplinary approach to studying political language will allow discursive research in the Australian field to complement and extend previous work. It will open up space for new questions to be asked, look beyond traditional political actors and election campaigns to find new material to be studied, and study political language in depth and in context. Here, language analysis is significant not just in examining words and rhetorical strategies in isolation, or to

explain why one party won an election and the other did not. Rather, it can contribute by working with an awareness of the complex and dynamic role that political language plays in debates about the nature of Australian society, and can highlight its role in broader issues and debates, both responding to and helping to construct national concerns, identities and priorities.

Appendix 1: Key Australian Election Campaign Literature (Books)

Genre	Author	Year	Central Focus
<i>Election-Specific Studies</i>	Crabb	2005	Labor's time in Opposition, focus on 2004 election
	Simms and Warhurst	2005	The 2004 election and the economy
	Marr and Wilkinson	2002	Border politics and asylum seekers in the 2001 election
	Simms and Warhurst	2002	John Howard's 2001 election victory
	Solomon	2002	'Race' and Howard's 2001 election victory
	Simms	2001	The 1901 'forgotten' election
	Simms and Warhurst	2000	John Howard's 1998 election victory
	Kingston	1999	Pauline Hanson and the 1998 election
	Bean et al	1997	The 'politics of retribution' in the 1996 election
	Williams	1997	John Howard's 1996 election victory
	Bean, McAllister & Warhurst	1990	The role of 'green politics' in the 1990 election
	Thornton-Smith	1987	The 1917 'great war' election
	Haupt	1983	Bob Hawke's 1983 election victory
	McGregor	1983	Bob Hawke's 1983 election victory
	Penniman	1983	Australian federal elections in 1980 and 1983
	Summers	1983	Bob Hawke's 1983 election victory
	Penniman	1979	The 1977 federal election
	Penniman	1977	The 1975 federal election
	Mayer	1973	Labor's road to power; the 1972 'It's Time' election
	Hughes & Western	1966	Panel-study of Menzies' 1963 televised policy speech
<i>Academic Studies</i>	Curran	2006	Prime Ministerial rhetoric in shaping national identity
	Maddox	2005	The rise of the religious right in Australian politics
	Baird	2004	Media treatment of female politicians
	Sawer and Hindess	2004	Anti-elitism and the 'new class' in Australian politics
	Young	2004	Political advertising in Australia
	Brett	2003	The Liberal Party – history and values, and the 'middle class'
	Griffen-Foley	2003	Relationship between politics and the media
	Maddox	2001	Religion in Australian politics
	Johnson	2000	Shifts in Australian society from Keating to Howard
	Simms	1996	The changing nature and role of parties in Australian politics
	Jaensch	1995	Looks at electoral laws, rules and processes in Australia
	Ward	1995	Sections on political advertising; impact of TV on politics
	Jaensch	1994	The Australian Liberal Party, covers important elections
	Johnson	1989	Labor Party – traditions, values, leaders
	Tiffen	1989	News, power and politics in Australia
	Simms	1982	The Liberal Party's history and role in Australian politics
<i>Behind-the-Scenes</i>	Freudenberg	2005	Author's time as a Labor Party speechwriter
	Stockwell	2005	'How-to' guide to election tactics and strategies
	Rogers	2004	Natasha Stott-Despoja and the Democrats
	Watson	2002	Paul Keating's time as Prime Minister
	Balson	2000	Pauline Hanson and One Nation
	Mills	1993	Inside Bob Hawke's time as Prime Minister
	Ellis	1983	Journal from the 1983 election
	Freudenberg	1977	Gough Whitlam's time in politics

<i>Political Memoir</i>	Latham	2005	Time in federal politics and as Opposition Leader
	Hawke	1994	Time in federal politics and as Prime Minister
	Whitlam	1983	Time as Prime Minister and 'The Dismissal'
	Menzies	1967	Time in federal Politics
<i>Political-Historical Portrait</i>	Lagan	2005	Mark Latham, Opposition Leader
	Day	2001	Ben Chifley, PM
	Reynolds	2000	Edmund Barton, PM
	White	2000	Joseph Lyons, PM
	Day	1999	John Curtin, PM
	Serle	1998	John Curtin, PM
	Martin	1998	Sir Robert Menzies, PM
	Bunting	1988	Sir Robert Menzies, PM
	Carew	1988	Paul Keating, PM
	Ayres	1987	Malcolm Fraser, PM
	D'Alpuget	1983	Robert Hawke, PM
	Hasluck	1980	Sir Robert Menzies, PM
	Walter	1980	Gough Whitlam, PM – a 'political' biography
	Hurst	1979	Robert Hawke, PM
	Oakes	1973	Gough Whitlam, PM
	Edwards	1965	Stanley Bruce, PM
	Crisp	1961	Ben Chifley, PM
<i>Collections of Speeches</i>	Cathcart and Darian-Smith	2004	Significant speeches in Australian history
	Kemp and Stanton	2004	Australian parliamentary speeches
	Warhaft	2004	The speeches that 'made' Australia
	Ryan	1995	Collected speeches of Paul Keating, PM
	McAllister and Moore	1991	Policy launch speeches
	Cook	1984	Robert Hawke, PM
	Thompson and Butel	1983	Collection of quote from Robert Hawke, PM
	Robinson	1966	The 'wit' of Sir Robert Menzies
	Startgardt	1952	Speeches and writings of Ben Chifley, PM

Note: Examples in the table have been limited to book-length studies and do not include journal articles, book chapters and other short pieces. The first category focuses directly on election campaigns; the others focus on federal politics or politicians and mention or cover campaigns in some way.

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