

17 The language of politics

17.2 The function of political language

Linguists are interested in the words and structures politicians use to create a certain view of the world. This world view will be directly linked to their purpose and audience and will affect the language they choose in order to achieve a set goal. Lexical and syntactical choices can affect the voters, persuading them to vote for certain policies or personalities. By analysing these, it is possible to identify occasions when politicians try to subvert or obscure issues, evade questions or arouse audience emotions.

As well as the actual words and structures used, however, linguists are also interested in the **PRAGMATICS** of political language. Pragmatics considers the meaning beyond what has actually been said and concentrates on the way meaning is constructed in different contexts. The focus here is therefore wider than just the lexis and syntax itself since the factors influencing a speaker or writer's choices are analysed.

Political language can be recognised in a variety of forms but in each case lexical and syntactical choices are directly linked to the audience, purpose and context of the discourse. Speeches are scripted as part of an election campaign or a fund-raising event; unscripted responses are made in reply to questions in the House of Commons or in a media interview; manifestos are circulated as part of information campaigns; motions are drafted for debate; a written record (Hansard) is made of everything that occurs in Parliament and so on.

Political language can be informative (**referential function**) or persuasive (**conative function**) and is often rhetorical. It is always useful to consider the **speaker** or **writer**, the **audience**, the **purpose** and the **context** of any example since each of these factors can change the nature of the language used.

17.3 Features of political language

There are many examples of political language in everyday life and it is possible to categorise some linguistic features that are common to most of these.

Manner

The **manner** is usually formal, and there tend to be **formulaic utterances** which add to the formality. In the House of Commons, for instance, phrases like *I beg to move...* and *the honourable Lady* are common.

Sometimes **informal language** is used and the change in tone is obvious. In March 1994, Dale Campbell-Savours, the MP for Workington, was asked to leave the House of Commons because he used the phrase *ripped off*.

It has been two months since it was exposed that a Conservative Back Bencher, The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr Duncan) made £50,000 on buying the council house next door to his house in Westminster. Cannot we have a debate on the whole question of the right to buy, especially as that hon. Gentleman still refuses to pay back to the ratepayers of Westminster the £50,000 that he ripped off them?

Business of the House, Hansard (3 March 1994)

The Speaker of the House asked the MP to withdraw the statement, saying 'I cannot accept those words.' He refused because he said that the phrase had been used before and had not then been questioned. Betty Boothroyd, the Speaker, replied:

17.1 The nature of political language

In 1946, George Orwell wrote 'Politics and the English language', an essay in which he discussed the nature of political language. He criticised politicians for failing to use a *fresh, vivid home-made turn of speech* and instead choosing *ready-made phrases*. Through a metaphor of mechanisation, he suggested that speakers had turned themselves into machines and were no longer aware of the importance of what they were saying. He believed that political language had become mechanical instead of reflecting individual speakers and that meaning was often concealed by the *lifeless, imitative style* which, in his view, was common. Fifty years later, it may seem that little has changed.

Political language is often accused of attempting to conceal the truth and euphemism is a common way of making a harsh reality more palatable. **EUPHEMISMS** are words or phrases that substitute mild or vague language to soften the harsh reality of an event – for example, *pushing up the daisies* or *passing away* for *dying*; *letting someone go* for *sacking*. In the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, there was talk of *ethnic cleansing* – the positive connotations of the verb *cleanse* conceal the bitter reality of killing people because of their ethnic origin. *Conflict* replaces *war*, and when bombing raids hit civilian rather than military targets it is described as *collateral damage*; no longer are the *dead* brought home, but the *body bags* are returned. All these examples conceal the horror of war: they make the whole issue less unpalatable. Government reports replace phrases like *health and inequality of the elderly* with *differential ageing among social sub-groups*. In an example like this, the focus changes – instead of being drawn to the key word *inequality*, readers are faced with far more objective terms like *differential* and *social sub-groups*. These kinds of changes make the political reality of the noun phrases less human and therefore make financial restrictions easier to impose.

Many people believe that language influences thought: therefore if language is manipulated, so are the very processes of thought. In other words, politicians can influence the way we think about the events happening around us, and the words they choose are a crucial part of that process.

Each politician has a particular way of seeing the world, a particular **IDEOLOGY**. The concept of ideology refers to a body of ideas or a belief system which is organised from a specific point of view – for instance, Conservative and Labour politicians think about society in different ways. Because they have different ideologies, they approach political issues from different angles and often find contrasting solutions to the same political problems. Through their use of language they encourage the voters to identify with their own particular ideology or world view.

I think that the hon. Gentleman has not heard that phrase in respect of one hon. Member. It may have been used in a corporate context, but not in that way ...

Because Campbell-Savours refused to rephrase *ripped off*, he had to leave the House. Hansard recorded the conclusion of the incident as follows:

The hon. Member, having used a grossly disorderly expression, was ordered by MADAM SPEAKER to withdraw the same, but he declined to comply with that direction; whereupon MADAM SPEAKER, pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Disorderly Conduct), ordered him to withdraw immediately from the House for the remainder of this day's Sitting, and he withdrew accordingly.

There are other occasions when informal language is used and the Press report on the unexpected tone. On 7 February 1995, the Prime Minister, John Major, called the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Blair, a *dimwit* after Blair had suggested that his leadership of the Conservative Party was weak. This colloquial use of language marked the conclusion of a noisy 'Prime Minister's Questions' during which Major had upset contention by asking the Labour leader a question. The choice of word caused interest because it did not reflect the tone normally associated with Parliament.

John Major's insult was followed on 8 February 1995 by two more linguistic offences: Nigel Griffiths, a Labour spokesman, called Charles Wardle, an Under-Secretary, a *nitwit*; and Tony Banks, Labour MP for Newham NW, told Steven Norris, the minister with responsibility for public transport:

We know you are the most proficient bullshitter that the Government has got ...

Betty Boothroyd intervened after this sequence of insults saying that some MPs seemed to think it was 'rather smart or clever to manipulate the English language in making references to other members.' She then made a statement drawing attention to the expected tenor of parliamentary language:

Good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary language.

I do hope that in future interventions, all members will bear that in mind and we shall make use of the richness of the English language to select elegant phrases that express their meaning without causing offence to others.

I have to tell this House that I know only too well from my postbag that some of the exchanges across the floor of this House do not enhance it in the eyes of our electorate.

Hansard (8 February 1995)

The public expect politicians to choose language that reflects the formal parliamentary context. When the manner is changed, inevitably some people complain because informal language is seen to be inappropriate in the formal and public field of politics.

Lexis

The **lexis** is usually **subject specific** and **abstract nouns** are quite common since discussions are often theoretical even though they may be directly linked to a proposed plan of action. Politicians aim to represent society as it really is, but as has already been seen, they can use language to adapt reality to suit their purposes. It is therefore useful to identify any use of **implication** or secondary meaning. This allows politicians to state the truth while using words that can be interpreted in more than one way. For example,

if someone were to say that a room was too warm, the intention could in fact be to imply that the fire should be turned off. In a social context, it might be considered more polite not to make the request more directly; in a political context, the implication might represent an attempt by a politician to evade a direct answer.

The **naming of politicians** is often significant: sometimes their **role title** is used rather than their **name**. This can be appropriate when their individual identity is irrelevant because the actions associated with the role would be the same whichever individual was involved. However, the use of the role title instead of an individual name can also be used to direct people away from a focus on the person. In redirecting the audience's attention, a politician can sometimes deflect personal responsibilities.

Tony Blair, the leader of the Labour Party, will take the party in a new direction

The leader of the Labour Party, Tony Blair, opposed the Government's standpoint. In the first example, the fact that the leader is now Tony Blair is important because *he* personally will affect the nature of the Labour Party; in the second, it would not matter which individual filled the role, since all Opposition leaders would do the same.

In December 1994, there was great concern about the veal calf trade. Much activity centred around the seaports from which the calves were sent to European farms where they would be kept in veal crates which have been banned in this country. When it was revealed that the Minister for Agriculture, William Waldegrave, exported his own calves to European farms, the newspapers exploited the apparent conflict of interest. As a Government minister, his main concern was to ensure that British animals were treated properly and that British farmers were not put at a disadvantage because their more humane methods of rearing the calves were more expensive. As an individual, however, newspaper coverage suggested that he was more interested in the sale of his animals than in their destination and welfare. In this case, the role and individual name of the politician were apparently at odds and the newspapers emphasised this, juxtaposing Waldegrave's official title role and his personal name.

Grammar

The **grammar** of political discourse varies, depending upon whether the utterances are spoken or written – inevitably, written statements tend to be more complex than speeches that have been written to be spoken or oral replies to questions. However, the use of **pronouns** is significant in that pronominal choices often reflect the ideology of individual politicians by conveying their personal negative and positive attitudes. The connotations of the pronouns selected are not always predictable, but politicians with the same world view will probably choose the same kinds of pronouns.

Thatcher and *her* followers have divided *our* society and widened inequality...
We want to build a society that is united.

Robin Cook MP, *Labour Party News* (January 1995)

Here Robin Cook clearly distances Margaret Thatcher and her supporters by using the third person singular pronoun *her*. It also robs the individual politicians of their identity since they are seen only as an extension of Thatcher herself. The use of the possessive determiner *our* and the first person plural *we*, however, unites the Labour Party politicians. This choice reinforces the underlying message since Cook implies that Thatcherism has *divided* society, while Labour policies will *unite* it.

The choice of pronouns in the next example illustrates a more subtle divide than that of Conservatives versus Labour.

The attack on Clause IV is a distraction and we must tell *our* leaders to get on with the job for which *they* were elected.

Tony Benn MP, *Labour Party News* (January 1995)

Although the first person plural *we* and the possessive determiner *our* unite the speaker with other Labour Party members who identify with his own viewpoint, Tony Benn and his supporters remain distanced from the leadership of the party. By using the third person plural *they*, he suggests that the leadership and those campaigning for change within the party have lost sight of Labour's real goals.

Linguists need to think about the formality or informality of the pronouns used; the personal involvement of the speaker or writer; and whether their status, class or sex makes any difference. Pronouns enable politicians to accept, deny or distance themselves from their responsibilities; to encourage their supporters; to distance the opposition, and to give a personal touch to their discourse.

The **framing of questions** is also important. In a democracy, the very nature of alternative parties, and therefore alternative ways of tackling issues, is central to the whole process of government. The right to ask questions, whether it be in Parliament or in the domain of the media, is an obvious way in which a real democracy can be created. Questions are rarely straightforward and use techniques to allow the speaker to clearly establish the context and to manipulate the addressee: sentences in declarative mood precede the question and convey the speaker's own attitudes; the adverb *so* is commonly used to suggest that the proposition following is a logical consequence and should be automatically accepted; and negative forms that are sometimes contracted like *don't* allow the questioner to lead by suggesting that the truth of the proposition is already taken for granted.

Should not she [Clare Short] pay tribute to the achievement of those women, who now have new opportunities? Does not it show that what the Government say is right?

Oliver Heald, Orders of the Day – debate on Sexual Discrimination, Hansard (10 March 1994)

Interrogative *wh-* words are often used to frame questions.

What about the case of the sale of arms to Iraq where it appears that the guidelines had been changed and MPs have been giving answers which suggest that the theory and practice is different from what is going on?

Minutes of Evidence, Treasury and Civil Service Sub-Committee (8 March 1994)

Questions demanding a *yes/no* reply are more common. These are less open and presuppose a particular answer to the question as more acceptable than any other possible ones. The use of these *yes/no* questions is an attempt to force politicians to accept or deny the allegations made.

Does the Prime Minister think it right that those who can afford to pay fuel bills in advance can avoid paying the new VAT charges on gas and electricity?

John Smith, leader of the Labour Party, Questions in the House, Hansard (22 March 1994)

When questions start with the **modal *will***, they imply that because of the added politeness associated with the verb any rejection of the request made will seem unnecessarily rude. By using it, politicians try to get the addressees to commit themselves to action.

Bearing in mind that it was the Prime Minister's predecessor, when she was Education Secretary nearly a quarter of a century ago, who first formulated that policy, *will* the Prime Minister tell us when he thinks that that promise [the provision of nursery education for all] might be delivered – this year, next year, sometime or never?

Paddy Ashdown, Questions in the House, Hansard (22 March 1994)

Metaphorical language

Metaphorical language is a significant part of the rhetoric used by politicians to persuade their audience, and the more original the image created, the more effectively the idea will be conveyed. **Metaphors** help explain complex arguments since one element is used to develop understanding of another element. Politicians use metaphor to prove a point, to provide light relief, and so on. The repetition or development of a single metaphor can be a powerful means of reinforcing a message.

The *tide* is *turning* in our favour and for the first time for years people are asking for socialist policies.

Tony Benn, *Labour Party News* (January 1995)

... I think any sensible market person understands this issue because any body who is buying or selling is negotiating over the price of something and is not going to lay out his bottom line in the first negotiation and much of Government activity is much more like negotiation, much more like *playing poker* than it is like *playing chess*. You do not *put all the cards up* all the time in the interests of the country.

William Waldegrave, Minutes of Evidence, Treasury and Civil Sub-Committee (8 March 1994)

Individual politicians have their own ways of speaking and writing and analysis should focus on the choices made in each case. Discussion of linguistic features should be linked closely to pragmatics because it is these wider factors that often dictate the lexical and syntactical choices made. By considering the distinctive linguistic and pragmatic features, it is then possible to come to conclusions not only about the individual in question but about political language in general.

17.4 Types of political language

Manifestos and campaign statements

Voting is central to our political system and therefore politicians are accustomed to producing statements that enable the electorate to make informed decisions at the ballot box. Candidates for general elections produce material presenting the views of their party, but also convey their own personal stance in order to give their campaign a distinctive identity. Such documentation will be read by people who oppose the viewpoint put forward, by those who support it, and by those who may be persuaded to agree with it. The main function is therefore **conative**. The **referential** function is subordinate, but it is often the information included in the statement which may persuade 'floating' voters to support the party in question. Most of the documentation will be written for campaign leaflets which will be delivered to the local constituents in their homes.

ACTIVITY 17.1

Read the following extracts from a manifesto written by a candidate for the Ecology Party (now known as the Green Party) and printed in the *Pontypridd Observer* in June 1983. Think about:

- 1 the intended audience, the purpose and the context (pragmatics);
- 2 the lexis;
- 3 the grammar;
- 4 the rhetorical features.

1 Ecology: The Green Alternative.

I am standing as the candidate for the Ecology Party in the Pontypridd Constituency because I believe that the major political parties do not face the real underlying problem which confronts us in industrial societies today: the obsession with economic growth.

This, I believe, is the key difference between ecology and the other parties, whose aim is to further growth at all costs. But it is these very costs which, if not recognised for what they are, can take us along the path of social disintegration and possible annihilation of all forms of life on this planet. I will examine these costs under three headings: (1) Environmental; (2) Personal and (3) Social.

20 Environmental costs.

The obsession with growth places enormous demands on the resources of the earth upon which we depend for our livelihood. No prudent business person would run a business by steadily depleting its capital; yet that is precisely what we are doing to feed the voracious appetite of industry.

Fossil fuels such as coal and oil took millions of years to form in the earth's crust; we are using them up within the space of a few hundred years. Much the same can be said about other essential minerals such as copper, tin and zinc. It is no good arguing, as many do, that it is just a population problem; the whole way of life in industrial societies must be called into question. For instance, the world's most materially rich country, the USA, has only about six per cent of the world's population, yet its present level of consumption is about 50-60 per cent of the world's total consumption of resources in any one year . . .

People in the Pontypridd Constituency should be well aware of the problems of pollution: indeed, the defilement of the countryside through

50 mining activities over many generations, the River Taff, quarrying and noise bear witness to the intensity of industrial activity in the area . . .

Personal costs.

The environmental issue is not going to be resolved until we begin to question the need for industrial expansion as a basis for living. Such questioning is difficult in a society in which its inhabitants are turned into passive consumers of industrial products. The profitability of industry depends upon high levels of production and consumption.

Needs must therefore be artificially created through advertising and other plays to lure consumers into a false belief that their needs are being met.

In such circumstances what are needs become associated in the minds of the public with the material products of industry i.e. we accept, virtually without question, that the standard of living is enhanced by increasing our consumption of goods and services. But does such material consumption necessarily enhance the quality of our lives?

Does not our dependence on drugs for health, on the replacement of home cooking by packaged foods, or on the TV for entertainment, to give only a few examples, tear at the very core of our human capacity to do things for ourselves within the context of meaningful human relationships? Is this not the very denial of the human spirit?

Social costs.

But are meaningful human relationships possible in an industrial society? A society which attaches so much importance to material growth encourages competition not co-operation, is subject to rapid technological change and is not, therefore, conducive to the development of integrated and stable community living in which caring and sharing are paramount and lasting human values.

Alwyn Jones

COMMENTARY

Since this was published in a local newspaper, the **intended audience** is clearly the constituents who will be taking part in the election. The **purpose** of the statement is therefore to persuade the voters to choose the Ecology Party candidate rather than other party representatives. The **context** is formal and the manifesto has been written to be read. The lexical and syntactical choices reflect this.

The **lexis** is **subject specific** - often linked to the environmental concerns of the Ecology Party. Nouns like *pollution* (l. 48), *minerals* (l. 34) and *planet* (l. 16) are juxtaposed with *business* (l. 25), *consumption* (l. 44) and *advertising* (l. 65) to imply that other political parties have misplaced interests. Because the debate is theoretical, there are many **abstract nouns** like *production* (l. 63), *quality* (l. 76) and *obsession* (l. 8). Statistics are also used, however, to substantiate the argument put forward:

the USA has only about *six per cent* of the world's population, yet its present level of consumption is about *50-60 per cent* of the world's total consumption (ll. 40-4)

Abstract nouns like *disintegration* (ll. 14-15) and *annihilation* (l. 15) are emotive and suggest that immediate action is necessary - implicitly emphasising the importance of placing a vote in the coming election. The noun phrases also use emotive **modifiers** in order to persuade the voters of the ethical strength of the Ecology Party's moral position. Phrases like *enormous demands* (ll. 21-2) and *passive consumers* (l. 60) aim to encourage the reader to question the current governmental approaches. The **connotations** of nouns like *defilement* (l. 49) and *plays* (l. 66) and verbs like *lure* (l. 66) suggest that we as citizens are being tricked, and that the Ecology Party is offering a new kind of politics. To give the statement an appropriate local feel, **proper nouns** like *Pontypridd Constituency* (ll. 46-7) and the *River Taff* (l. 51) encourage voters to feel that the candidate has a knowledge of the area and its particular problems.

As a written text, the **sentence structure** is quite complicated. Sentences tend to be compound and complex rather than simple. Simple sentence:

(I) (will examine) (these costs) (under three headings. . .) (ll. 16-17)

Compound sentence:

(For instance), (the world's most materially rich country, the USA,) (has) (only

about six per cent of the world's population), (yet) (its present level of

consumption) (is) (about 50-60 per cent of the world's total consumption of

resources) (in any one year). (ll. 38-45)

Complex sentence:

(I) (am standing as) (the candidate for the Ecology Party) (in the Pontypridd

Constituency) (because I believe that the major political parties do not face the

real underlying problem which confronts us in industrial societies today).

(ll. 2-7)

The **passive voice** is chosen on several occasions without the agent: *the whole way of life must be called into question* (ll. 37-8); *Such questioning is difficult in a society in*

which its inhabitants are turned into passive consumers (II. 58-60); Needs must therefore be artificially created through advertising... needs are being met (II. 64-7). The second and third examples here suggest that we are being manipulated by nameless people in control. The fact that *by + agent* is omitted reinforces the sense that an inhuman government has created this supposedly destructive industrial society for their own ends. The use of the **progressive being met** (I. 67) emphasises the idea of an ongoing apparently inescapable cycle. The first example, however, implicitly suggests that there is an alternative for those who recognise the importance of the Ecology Party.

The many **interrogatives** highlight the alternative offered. The questions are often rhetorical – although no answers are supplied, it is implied that the Ecology Party can find solutions.

^P ^S ^C
(Is) (this) (not) (the very denial of the human spirit)? (II. 85-6)

This emphasis on **questioning** the lifestyle we take for granted is underlined by **repetition** of noun phrases like *without question* (II. 71-2) and *Such questioning* (I. 58) and verb phrases like *must be... called into question* (I. 38) and *to question* (I. 56).

The **pronouns** in the manifesto define both the individual standing as a representative of the Ecology Party and the party itself. The repetition of the first person singular pronoun *I* in the first two paragraphs draws attention to the individual standpoint being taken. The use of the verb *believe* (I. 9) reinforces a sense of personal commitment. The first person plural pronoun *we* is often selected by politicians to refer to their party, but here the reference is wider. Since the Ecology Party stands for environmental issues and believes conservation is the responsibility of us all, the use of *we* is representative of society as a whole. The referencing attempts to unite readers of all political persuasions, suggesting that the issues here are beyond party politics.

☐ The obsession with growth places enormous demands on the resources of the earth upon which we depend (II. 21-3)

☐ The environmental issue is not going to be resolved until we begin to question the need for industrial expansion as a basis for living. (II. 55-8)

The use of *we* implies that everybody is guilty of accepting a way of life that is destroying the planet, and that we can all do something about it by voting appropriately. By using *we* inclusively, the candidate identifies himself with the voters – however, although he is equally responsible for the kind of society we live in, he has now done something about changing it by standing for a party that has environmental concerns at its heart.

Many **rhetorical features** can be identified here, all of which add to the persuasive nature of the text. To make the abstract issue of the destruction of the planet concrete, the candidate chooses a **metaphor** which is typical of the business-orientated society he sees us living in:

☐ No prudent **business person** would run a **business** by steadily depleting its **capital** (II. 24-6)

The politically correct noun phrase *business person* (I. 24) replaces the traditional noun *businessman* and this is typical of the party's stance on equality. The metaphor explains the illogicality of our treatment of the earth through a **symbolic** figure who could be seen to represent self-interest. If such a person would not waste resources, surely, the manifesto suggests, we too are foolish not to look after our own best interests – the conservation of the earth's resources and the way to a more meaningful life.

Repetition of key words emphasises important issues: nouns like *consumption*

(I. 42) and *human* (I. 86); modifiers like *material* (I. 75) and *materially rich* (II. 39-40); and verbs like *believe* (I. 9) and *question* (I. 56). **Antithesis** is used to reinforce the underlying message – that the Ecology Party is offering an alternative to the other major parties. The juxtapositions of noun phrases like *drugs* and *health* (II. 78-9) and *home cooking* and *packaged foods* (II. 79-80) draw attention to the present reality and to a potentially better way of life. Equally, the last paragraph uses antithesis to draw the argument to a conclusion. By contrasting abstract nouns like *competition* and *co-operation* (II. 91-2), the prospective MP offers us a positive view of life to replace the negative view of society with which he started. The negative **connotations** of nouns like *annihilation* (I. 15) and *defilement* (I. 49) are exchanged for the positive connotations of the verbal nouns *caring* and *sharing* (I. 96). This means that the political message ends on a high note, offering us hope after the despair of the beginning.

The lexical, grammatical and rhetorical features of this written political statement make it a typical example of political language. The overall structure is clearly defined using subheadings to guide the reader through the key points of the argument. The prospective MP uses pathos, working on readers' emotions, to win their votes; the logical development of the argument and the use of facts to substantiate points made suggests the use of logos. Both these types of persuasion underpin the message: 'vote for me'.

ACTIVITY 17.2

Read the following statements made by two of the candidates for the Labour Leadership and Deputy Leadership contest. Use the questions that follow to identify any differences or similarities in the approaches of Margaret Beckett and John Prescott.

- 1 Jot down the audience, purpose and context for these written campaign statements.
- 2 Comment on the tone.
- 3 Identify any subject specific lexis. Is there anything that could be considered typical of the Labour Party?
- 4 Identify any abstract nouns and comment on their significance.
- 5 Comment on the use of proper nouns and on the ways in which people or parties are named.
- 6 Discuss the use of first person singular and plural pronouns and the possessive determiners *my* and *our* in each statement.
- 7 Find examples of a range of sentence types and comment on your findings.
- 8 Find examples of the following rhetorical techniques and comment on their effects:
 - a listing;
 - b repetition;
 - c marked theme.
- 9 Jot down any other interesting features of each written statement and try to decide which you consider to be more effective overall.

Margaret Beckett (MB)

- 1 Under John Smith's leadership we all recognised that we could play to his personal strengths.

Now we need the same resonance in our new leadership team. We need to show people that we are honest politicians. We need to tell the truth and to be seen to be telling the truth, even if it's hard. We must combine practical common sense and compassion.

- 5 I have proved that I can exercise leadership, take tough decisions, hold

10 the party together and run a team that draws on the talents of all shades of party opinion. This has been my record for over two years, during which I have been in charge of the party's election campaigns. In those years we have rebuilt our morale. More importantly, we have won elections — in the counties, the cities and most recently across the nation.

15 To achieve further success, we must continue to take on not only the Conservatives, but the Liberals as well. Ours is the politics of conviction, not of opportunism.

20 We must defeat the Tories' policies of despair. There is a better way. A better way to run our health service, our schools and our railways! We must rebuild our welfare state, based on full employment, but reflecting the family and work patterns of the next century.

We must show that we share the ambition of ordinary British families.

Our fate lies in our own hands. Those newspapers which attack John Major today will support him, however grudgingly, at the next election. We know our country needs a Labour Government. We alone can take that message to the people.

25 To succeed we must draw on the strengths of the broad church of the Labour movement. I believe I can unite the party, and that the party can unite the country.

John Prescott (JP)

1 I am standing for both leader and deputy leader to give you a real choice in this election. The principles at the heart of my campaign are those that John Smith had already set in train: full employment and social justice.

5 It is easy to say we believe in these goals. It is not so easy to achieve them. But I am prepared to put my ideas to the test, and campaign for them with passion and conviction.

We cannot take the millions off the dole overnight, but we can make a start right away with an emergency jobs recovery programme in housing, manufacturing, transport, schools and hospitals. Then we can build sustainable employment through investment, through training and through partnership between public and private, employee and employer.

10 Britain needs full employment to go hand in hand with a welfare state that provides security and dignity for all our people. And we need social justice to bind us all together in a contented community and a safe environment, free from misery, pollution and crime.

We must create quality jobs, with effective employment protection, real job security and lifetime training opportunities. These must be underpinned by rights to union recognition and a statutory minimum wage.

15 Women and men should be treated equally, and paid equally for jobs of equal worth. Discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, age or disability is unacceptable.

Nothing is more important than winning the next General Election. If we fail again, we cannot create jobs for the jobless, homes for the homeless or provide care for the sick and the elderly.

25 But to win power, Labour must give Britain a real choice, combining straight-talking with practical policies that will work. That is why I ask for your support in this election.

COMMENTARY

In response to the questions raised above, you may have picked up on some of the following points.

PURPOSE

The **purpose** here is very specific: a new leader and deputy leader had to be elected after the sudden death of John Smith in May 1994. This context made the **tone** of the election campaign very restrained since MPs did not want to appear to be insensitive. The campaign statements are addressed to Labour Party members who are entitled to vote in the leadership election. The candidates therefore need to appeal to ordinary people as well as their fellow politicians and union members. Because their statements have to convince both laymen and experts, they must achieve a balance between technical arguments and issues of concern to the general public.

STONE

The **tone** is inevitably formal, particularly because of the sad circumstances surrounding the need for election. However, John Prescott uses direct address, drawing his audience in by using the second person pronoun *you*. This makes his statement seem more personal and the manner slightly less formal.

SUBJECT SPECIFIC NOUNS

There are many **subject specific nouns** which are commonly associated with politics in both statements: Margaret Beckett talks of *politicians* (1.4), *Government* (1.24) and *party* (1.8); John Prescott refers to *policies* (1.26), *election* (1.2) and *campaign* (1.2). There are also many nouns that can be more specifically associated with Labour Party policy: the *welfare state* (1.19, MB, and 12, JP) is mentioned by both candidates, as is *employment* (1.19, MB; 3, JP). Prescott is known to be a supporter of the trades unions and his statement clearly addresses issues which are traditionally associated with Labour in noun phrases like:

$\begin{matrix} \text{m} & \text{h} \\ \text{N} & \text{N} \\ \text{union} & \text{statutory} \\ \text{recognition} & \text{minimum} \\ \text{(1.18)} & \text{wage} \\ \text{Adj} & \text{Adj} \\ \text{N} & \text{N} \end{matrix}$

He also uses the adverb *equally* (1.19) and the adjective *equal* (1.20), emphasising Labour's interest in equality for everyone. Beckett raises the concept of the *health service* (1.18), which is also a central part of Labour Party policy.

These examples of political language clearly mark out the field, but also relate it specifically to the Labour Party rather than any other political party.

ABSTRACT NOUNS

There are numerous examples of **abstract nouns** which could be selected here. They are used so extensively because these statements are meant to convey the philosophical as well as practical standpoint of the candidates. Once again, many of them are typical of Labour Party ethics. Nouns like *misery* (1.15, JP) and *despair* (1.17, MB) represent the Labour Party view that the Conservative Government has misplaced values. Instead, the Labour politicians suggest that they offer the *truth* (1.4, MB). The **negative connotations** of abstract nouns like *pollution* and *crime* (1.15, JP) are replaced with the positive connotations of *security* and *dignity* (1.13, JP) and *common sense* and *compassion* (1.6, MB).

PROPER NOUNS

The **proper nouns** used in each campaign statement are similar. John Smith is

mentioned in the first paragraph of each text. This not only sets the context but also allows the candidates to commend what he had already achieved as an individual leader of the Labour Party. Both also mention the country as a whole: *ordinary British families* (l. 21, MB) and *Britain* (l. 25, JP). In doing so, they move beyond the individual who will lead the Party and beyond the Party itself to the electorate who are made to feel a part of the whole process of government. Beckett refers to the *Conservatives* and *Liberals* (l. 15) and by using the plural noun, she makes each party seem like a faceless institution. She later uses the abbreviation *Tories* (l. 17), which in this context has negative connotations.

PRONOUNS

Both candidates use the singular and plural first person pronouns but in different ways. Margaret Beckett begins using *we* (l. 1) to refer to the Labour Party as a whole, seeing herself as just one part of the overall structure. This immediately sets the tone of her statement since she seems to be most interested in the Party and its future – her own campaign seems only to be important in the sense that she believes she will be able to lead an effective team. She uses the first person singular *I* and the possessive determiner *my* in the third paragraph when she draws attention to her own personal qualities:

I / have proved that *I* can exercise leadership. . . This has been *my* record. . . during which *I* have been in charge of the party's election campaigns. (ll. 7–10)

The pronouns *we* (l. 3) and *ours* (l. 15) and the possessive determiner *our* (l. 3) all create a sense of unity. Beckett seems to stress the importance of the Party rather than an individual, replacing what has been described as 'personality politics' with issues and policies. In the final paragraph, however, she reminds the reader of the individual whom she believes can effectively carry out the role of co-ordination for the Labour Party by using the first person singular pronoun again:

I / believe that *I* can unite the party . . . (l. 27)

John Prescott's use of pronoun referencing creates a slightly different effect. He too uses *we* in an inclusive way, referring to both the Party and himself, but he opens his statement with the first person singular pronoun *I* and the possessive determiner *my* (ll. 1–2). This immediately draws more attention to him and his aims. Since he also uses the direct address, the approach here is far more personal, perhaps appealing more to the ordinary voter or union member. In paragraph four, his use of the pronouns *we* and *us* (ll. 12–14) widens the field of reference – he now includes everyone in Britain. The shifting meaning of these pronouns enables him to move beyond the Labour Party itself to the voters, including them directly in his appeal. Such an appeal is implicit in Beckett's statement, but Prescott seems to electrify more explicitly. This is emphasised in his final sentence where he once more uses the first person singular pronoun and a possessive determiner:

That is why *I* ask for *your* support in this election. (ll. 26–7)

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Because these are written statements of intent, the sentence structure is mostly quite complicated. Interestingly, although it would seem that John Prescott's text appeals more directly to the ordinary reader in the referencing, Margaret Beckett's sentence structure is far less complicated. While Prescott uses few simple sentences, Beckett uses many, often with a marked theme:

(Now) (we) (need) (the same resonance) (in our new leadership). (l. 3, MB)

(In those years) (we) (have rebuilt) (our morale). (l. 11, MB)

(Our fate) (lies) (in our own hands). (l. 22, MB)

(Discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, age or disability) (is) (unacceptable.) (ll. 20–1, JP)

Both candidates use a range of compound and compound-complex sentences. These kinds of sentences enable them to link significant issues together in the mind of the reader.

(Women and men) (should be treated) (equally) (and) (paid) (equally) (for jobs of equal worth). (ll. 19–20, JP)

(We) (need) (to tell the truth) (and) (to be seen to be telling the truth) (even if it's hard) (ll. 4–5, MB)

The complex and compound-complex sentences reflect the nature of the writing – political language, focusing on both philosophical and practical issues, which is intended to persuade readers to act in a certain way.

(Under John Smith's leadership) (we all) (recognised) (that we could play to his personal strengths). (ll. 1–2, MB)

(If we fail again), (we) (cannot create) (jobs for the jobless), (homes for the homeless)

(or) (provide) (care for the sick and the elderly). (ll. 22–4, JP)

RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

The texts use a range of rhetorical techniques to underpin their message. Both Prescott and Beckett use listing to emphasise things that they think are important. Examples like the listing of the abstract nouns *gender*, *race*, *age or disability* (l. 20, JP) and the listing of clauses *I can exercise leadership*, *take tough decisions*, *hold the party together and run a team* . . . (ll. 7–8, MB) provide the reader with evidence supporting the argument being put forward.

Repetition is used by both candidates. Both politicians repeat modal verbs: Beckett's repetition of *must* (l. 14) emphasises her view of the obligation the Labour Party has to carry out its promises; Prescott also implies the necessity of doing certain things with his repetition of *must* (l. 16), while using *can* (l. 7) and the negative form *cannot* (l. 23) to develop a sense of the key things the Labour Party needs to tackle. Other examples of repetition reflect the central issues of the candidates: nouns like *employment* (ll. 19, MB; 16, JP) and *welfare state* (ll. 19, MB; 12, JP). Beckett's use of the comparative noun phrase *a better way* (l. 17) emphasises her apparent belief that the leadership election is about more than just a new leader. The use of the comparative adjective suggests that it is about making sure that at the next general election Britain elects a Labour rather than a Conservative government. The choice of leader is merely a part of this overall aim.

Marked themes are used to draw attention to an element of the sentence which is not the subject. Beckett begins her statement with the adverbial *Under John Smith's leadership* (1.1) which reminds the reader of the reason for the election and pays tribute to Smith's achievements. The second paragraph then uses another marked theme – the adverb *now* (1.3) marks a change in timescale and prepares the reader for the argument which will try to convince them that Beckett is the most appropriate leader at this point. Two non-finite clauses, *To achieve further success* (1.14) and *To succeed* (1.26), also function as marked themes. They emphasise the importance of the Labour Party's success as a whole rather than just suggesting that Beckett's personal success is significant. Prescott's sentence structure usually follows the traditional pattern, with the subject coming first. He does, however, use the adverb *Then* (1.9) to mark a transition period of immediate action before the long-term goals of the Labour Party can be achieved.

COMPARISON

Both written statements are interesting for different reasons and will have appealed to different voters for different reasons. While John Prescott seems to speak directly to the reader in a personal way, Margaret Beckett uses more simple sentences which make easier reading. Her use of marked themes also draws attention to key elements of her argument. Their respective use of pronouns also means that they present themselves for the role in very different ways. While both emphasise the role of the Labour Party overall through their use of the inclusive first person pronoun *we*, Beckett seems to offer herself as a 'team' leader. She waits until the third paragraph to use the first person pronoun and her use of the modal verb *could* (1.1) demonstrates that the Party has already shown that it is able to work **together** to achieve things. The suggestion that she would be the one to lead is implicit until she uses the perfect form of the verb phrase to convey concrete achievement in *have proved* (1.7). In opening his statement with the first person pronoun, Prescott's intention seems more explicit – his approach seems to suggest more directly that he personally is the candidate to choose.

Beckett makes more of the political divide between the major parties by juxtaposing the politics of *opportunism* and *policies of despair* (11.16–17) with the *politics of conviction* (1.15). This refocuses the reader's immediate interest in the Labour Party leadership contest by considering the ultimate aim of the party as a whole – displacing the Conservative Government. The abstract nouns lead away from the importance of one individual leader to the Labour Party itself.

This basic difference in approach is reinforced in the final paragraphs of each candidate. Prescott concludes with a marked theme similar to Beckett's: the adverbial clause of purpose, *But to win power* (1.25). The compound verbal noun *straight-talking* (1.26) and the modifier *practical* (1.26) could be seen as implicit references to Prescott himself since these are both attributes that are commonly associated with him. They then lead to the emphatic final sentence which takes the form of an indirect question:

S P C A
 (That) (is) (why I ask for your support) (in this election). (11.26–7)
 SCI-NCI

Indirect questions are noun clauses – that is, subordinate clauses that fill the position of noun phrases. A noun clause can be introduced by a *wh-* word and the following elements of the clause will have the same basic structure as a main clause. Its function here is to allow Prescott to reintroduce the first person singular pronoun, stressing the personal appeal behind the campaign statement. Beckett's emphasis is slightly different since she seems to continue to refer to *the party* (1.8) and *the Labour Government* (1.24) as more significant than herself. Her use of the metaphor *the broad church* (1.26)

reinforces the importance of the 'team' approach since it suggests that a wide range of talents and views can be drawn upon. She begins her final sentence with the first person pronoun *I* (1.27), but its use with the verb *believe* makes her appeal seem more tentative. The modal verb *can* implies her potential as a leader, but the repetition of the noun *party* and the verb *unite* seem to underline her role as a team figurehead. The structure of the compound sentence itself reflects the subtlety of Beckett's approach:

S P O
 (I) (believe) (I can unite the party) (and) (that the party can unite the country).
 SCI-NCI COM SCI-NCI
 (11.26–7)

Both Margaret Beckett and John Prescott employ typical features of political language here. Although there are many differences in their approaches, the end result is effective in each case. The most important thing to recognise is that the individual focus in each will attract different voters.

Pre-scripted speeches

Any speech which has been prepared ahead of delivery has been consciously planned – the politician is involved in the selection of lexical, syntactical and metaphorical features and in the overall organisation. Like a campaign statement, choices are made in advance to achieve the maximum possible effect on the audience. It is likely, however, that a politician will attempt to use some techniques that reflect formal spoken language. The first person pronoun is often used more frequently and spontaneity markers like *I know* or *you know* may be chosen to make the manner seem less formal than it actually is. The overall effect will inevitably depend upon the audience and context, but in analysis of a scripted speech it is important to first identify the features of 'speeches written to be read' and then to consider any features that seem to resemble spoken language.

ACTIVITY 17.3

The following speeches were both written to be read aloud in a formal context. The first was delivered by the Prime Minister, John Major, to the European Policy Forum in London on 27 July 1994; the second was a conference speech by the President of Plaid Cymru, Dafydd Wigley, on 28 November 1994. In both cases, the speeches contain many examples of formal written language, but there are also features which can be linked to formal spoken language. Only the introduction is printed in each case, and these do not include examples of all the features that can be adopted by politicians to make their speeches seem more spontaneous than written statements.

Read through the two examples and list:

- 1 lexical, syntactical and rhetorical features;
- 2 techniques used to make the speech seem like spoken language.

John Major (JM)

THE ROLE AND LIMITS OF THE STATE

- 1 The party I lead has always been a party of change and reform. But we're a conservative party. Our instincts are for stability. We are wary of schemes to uproot what is familiar. So in discussing the role and limits of the state I am not going to unveil some new constitutional blueprint. I don't think this country needs politicians throwing the British constitution up in the air to see how the broken pieces fall.

10 Today, we are opening up the map of how Britain is governed. It's a big agenda, dwarfing any changes we've seen since the modern pattern of government was established. Times change; needs change. But change must come against a stable background.

15 So you will find me wary of change in the basis of our constitutional settlement — the Union between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; wary of new voting systems. You will find me opposed to those who think that national identity must be suppressed in the interests of political progress. I strongly reject that view. The nation state is the greatest fixed point in our political firmament. You cannot suppress the individualism of an island race. We are content to build on consensus and co-operation, unwilling to accept centralism and direction.

20 In my first speeches as Prime Minister I placed wider personal ownership and higher quality in public service at the heart of our objectives for the 1990s. In 1991, I called for a revolution in ownership. I said then:

25 'I want to give individuals greater control over their own lives. For every family, the right to have and to hold their own private corner of life; their own home, their own savings, their own security for the future. Building the self-respect that comes from ownership, and showing the responsibility that follows from self-respect: that is our programme for 1990s. I will put it in a single phrase; the power to choose — and the right to own.'

30 Conservatives have always stood for ownership. As well as ownership of property we need ownership of the important decisions in our own life. Which school for our children? What skill training for ourselves? What pension provision for our retirement? These are decisions for individual adults. To deliver these choices, I believed we needed a second revolution — in the way public services are delivered.

35 As a councillor in Lambeth 25 years ago, I saw the alienation between bureaucracy and people, and I didn't like what I saw. So in 1991, with the Citizen's Charter, I launched a long-term programme to make services much more responsive to the people who use them.

40 In the past four years much has been achieved in making government more accountable and in raising the quality of service. We are pursuing change not for the sake of change, but for the sake of people. And today, as a result, when people want to learn something about reinventing government, they come to Britain to do so.

Dafydd Wigley (DW)

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

1 This year has been an historic one in the political field. Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa; Israel and the Palestinians have made peace; and the new chapter has opened in the history of Ireland. Here we see a new period of radical politics opening — as happens about once each generation. We saw it before in the sixties — a period of new politics. That was when Gwynfor Evans was first elected to Parliament and we saw the significant growth of Plaid Cymru and the SNP. It was a period of hope. The argument for a Parliament of Wales was high on the political agenda then, as in many previous radical periods of history. In each one, however, the objective of a Parliament was not achieved and as we face a new radical period, let us ensure that we learn the lessons from the past and this time succeed to establish those constitutional changes that are so essential for the well-

being of our country.

15 During the past year we have seen success coming to Plaid Cymru's efforts in the European context. There is no doubt that it was Plaid Cymru's work that secured three seats for Wales on the European Committee of the Regions, and subsequently a place for Councillor Eurig Wyn on the Cabinet principle of a European National Forum for Wales. We succeeded in getting a fifth seat for Wales in the European Parliament, to get Interreg Funds for Gwynedd and Dyfed for the first time and to open the possibility of electrifying our rail connections.

20 The year was also one of electoral success for Plaid Cymru. We won local elections and by now as a Party we have more seats on local authorities in Wales than either the Tories or the Liberals. And in the elections to the European Parliament in June, we were confirmed as the second Party on the all-Wales level, with over 17% of the vote — the highest proportion ever.

25 In Clwyd we won 25,000 brand new votes — a large proportion of them from amongst the non-Welsh-speaking population of the county. On the basis of the European Election, Plaid Cymru would have won not only the Conwy seat from the Tories, but also the new constituency — Clwyd West, and thereby releasing Rod Richards to return to his television duties!

30 In contemplating this very successful record, I want to get one point over to you with all the force I can muster. Political success this year has not been a fluke — it has been the result of very hard work and careful organisation by a team of dedicated workers. We need to break through in other areas — particularly in the industrial valleys — and we have more new blood, willing to give up well-paid jobs, to work full-time for Plaid Cymru, as did Karl Davies last year. But we will not be able to make these essential appointments unless we have the finance to support them . . .

COMMENTARY

There are numerous features here that are typical of political language. Some of the main examples are included in the table below.

LEXIS

Examples

Comment

politics (1. 4, DW), Parliament (1. 6, DW), party (1. 1, JM), government (1. 9, JM)

This subject specific language is typical of all kinds of political discourse. It marks no specific political ideology, but is used by all politicians.

Gwynfor Evans (1. 6, DW), Clwyd (1. 28, DW)

The use of these proper nouns identifies the regional interests of a Welsh national party.

Tories (1. 18, DW), Conservatives (1. 28, JM)

The use of the abbreviated name of the Conservative Party by Dafydd Wigley reflects his lack of sympathy with the party, while John Major's use of the full name is a mark of respect.

Union (l. 12, JM)

Major makes this a **proper noun** with the use of a capital letter in the written script – he probably used stress to mark its importance in the oral presentation. It reflects Conservative policy to maintain a unified Britain despite calls for devolution.

GRAMMAR

Pronouns

Examples

The party / lead... (l. 1, JM)

Major foregrounds the Conservative Party, referring to himself in a **post-modifying relative clause**, i.e. 'the party that I lead'.

In my first speeches as Prime Minister / placed... (l. 19, JM)

The use of the **possessive determiner** and the **first person singular pronoun** give this section of the speech a very clear personal tone. Major balances his use of *I* with his use of *we* to give a sense that he has an individual role as Prime Minister as well as being a team member.

But we're a conservative party. Our instincts are for stability. We are wary... (ll. 1–2, JM)

The emphasis here is on unity. Having established that he, as an individual, is responsible for leading the party, he develops a sense of the Party's strength through his repetition of the **first person plural pronoun** and the **possessive determiner**.

So you will find me wary of change... (l. 11, JM)

Throughout, Major addresses his audience **directly**, thus creating a more personal relationship with them.

We saw it before... (l. 5, DW)

The predominant pronoun form used in this speech is the **first person plural**. This creates a feeling of unity which is commonly found in party conference speeches. The speaker is addressing an audience of like-minded people and therefore wants to arouse their emotions and to make them feel included.

I want to get one point over to you with all the force / can... (ll. 33–4, DW)

The use of the **first person singular pronoun** allows the President to draw attention to this point after the previous repetition of *we*. The repetition of *I* and

the use of **direct address** (second person pronoun) makes the point seem like a personal view of the President. It is thus given emphasis and the audience are made aware of the importance of committed hard work for the cause.

Verbs

Examples

much has been achieved... (l. 38, JM)

The **passive** form of the verb is used to imply a general sense of responsibility.

The Labour Party and Tories alike were forced to accept... (l. 18, DW)

The **passive voice** reinforces the sense that the two major political parties had no choice. It makes the supposedly dominant parties seem helpless in the face of an increasingly popular and powerful Plaid Cymru.

we were confirmed as the second Party on the all-Wales level... (ll. 26–7, DW)

No **agent** is included here and it suggests that the recognition of Plaid Cymru's success was universal – it could not be denied by anyone.

General

Examples

Which school...? What skill... (ll. 29–30, JM)

Wh- questions are listed to show how the Conservatives' target of personal choice will affect everyday life. Such questions are open rather than closed and the framing therefore reinforces the idea of choice.

let us ensure... (l. 11, DW)

The use of the **imperative** encourages the audience to identify with the President and aims to persuade them to believe as he does.

On the basis of the European Election, Plaid Cymru would have won not only... (ll. 29–30, DW)

The use of the **modal verb** here implies a **hypothetical** situation and encourages the audience to envisage a political future in which the Welsh national party could influence British politics as a whole.

Sentence structure

Sentence structure is very varied in each speech, as would be expected since such variety guarantees that the audience will be kept interested. However, John Major's speech contains far more simple sentences than Dafydd Wigley's and this adds to the rhetorical effect.

(This year) (has been) (an historic one) (in the political field). (l. 1, DW)

(Conservatives) (have) (always) (stood for) (ownership). (l. 28, JM)

John Major's use of numerous simple sentences makes his speech seem emphatic; it adds a sense of certainty to his statements:

(Times) (change); (needs) (change). (But) (change) (must come) (against a stable background). (ll. 9-10, JM)

Both speakers also use compound and compound-complex sentences in which elements from the first main clause are omitted in the second. This allows the speakers to link ideas together for their audiences. Many of the sentence structures are compound-complex because they combine co-ordination and subordination. This reflects both the formality of the contexts and the reflective nature of the content of each speech.

(As a councillor in Lambeth) (25 years ago), (I) (saw) (the alienation between bureaucracy and people) (and) (I) (didn't like) (what I saw). (ll. 34-5, JM)

(That was when Gwynfor Evans) (was) (first) (elected) (to Parliament) (and) (we) (saw) (the significant growth of Plaid Cymru and the SNP). (ll. 5-7, DW)

Complex sentences place a greater demand upon the listener because they need to remember the key elements and are unable to look back as a reader can.

(So in 1991), (with the Citizen's Charter) (I) (launched) (a long-term programme) (to make services much more responsive to the people who use them) (ll. 35-7, JM).

(We) (need) (to break through) (in other areas) - (particularly) (in the industrial valleys) - (and) (we) (have) (more new blood, willing to give up well-paid jobs), (to work full-time for Plaid Cymru), (as did Karl Davies) (last year). (ll. 36-9, DW)

Both these examples provide a lot of information for the listener and try to prove the worth of the ideological standpoint of the speaker. They use logos to persuade the

audience that they too should believe in the party that does such things. Complex sentences like these were appropriate because the context was formal. In each case, the purpose was to convey an ideological standpoint and to encourage the listeners to agree. It is also important that the audience will have had knowledge of and an interest in the issues to be discussed.

RHETORIC

Examples

Comment

We are content to build on *consensus* and *co-operation*, unwilling to accept *centralism* and *direction*... (ll. 17-18, JM)

These examples of **listing** enable the speaker in each case to emphasise a point. John Major juxtaposes a positive and a negative in order to stress the Conservative view of the best way to govern Britain as a whole.

Nelson Mandela was elected...; Israel and the Palestinians have made peace; and the new chapter has opened... (ll. 1-3, DW)

Wigley lists a sequence of international examples showing how 1994 has been a politically important year. By starting from this point, he is able to link Plaid Cymru's achievements to events that everyone will have known about. This adds status to Plaid Cymru's own success in 1994.

During the past year... (l. 14, DW)
Today, we are opening... (l. 7, JM)

There are many **marked themes**. Often these are used to mark out a specific time, drawing a distinction between past and present. This shows how far each party has come in terms of its achievements or success.

As well as ownership of property... (ll. 28-9, JM)
In contemplating this very successful record... (l. 33, DW)

Other **marked themes** highlight key points to be considered alongside the one being made at the time. Major wishes to remind the audience of his earlier speech and to move on to another linked point. Wigley wants to stress that success has to be worked for.

succeed (l. 11), success (l. 23), successful (l. 33, DW)
ownership (ll. 19-20), change (l. 9, JM)

Each speaker has a central theme or themes and **repetition** of a word or linked words enables him to emphasise this.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Inevitably when a speech is delivered before an audience, the listener has the benefit of intonation patterns, stress patterns and other such prosodic features to help them understand what is being said. Unless actually transcribed for linguistic analysis, a written record of a speech does not mark these variations. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify certain features in the written language that are included in order to make the speech seem more like the spoken than the written word.

Examples

I want... (1. 33, DW)
I called for... (1. 21, JM)

You will find me... (1. 13, JM)
... get one point over to you...
(1. 33-4, DW)

we're (1. 1), don't (1. 4), it's (1. 7, JM)

So you will find me... (1. 11, JM)
a fluke (1. 35, DW)

But change... (1. 9), And today...
(1. 40, JM)
And in the elections... (1. 25), But we
will not... (1. 39, DW)

... particularly in the industrial valleys...
(1. 36-7, DW)
... the Union between England,
Scotland... (1. 12, JM)

Comment

Use of the **first person singular pronoun** is more frequent in spoken language and gives a speech a more personal feel.

The direct address of the **second person pronoun** is personal because it makes the audience feel that they are being individually involved by the speaker.

Contractions are commonly associated with the spoken word and are seen to be quite informal.

Some words or phrases may seem quite **conversational** compared with the formality of the context.

Conjunctions used in the **initial position** are associated with informal spoken language. Their use in a formal context creates a more relaxed manner.

Parenthesis is used to add extra information. It gives the sentence in which it is included a looser structure, which is again reminiscent of conversation.

Both of the texts reproduced here are extracts from written copies of speeches composed to be spoken. In fact, their style remains very similar to that of the manifestos and campaign statements in the previous section. The main differences lie in features which can be linked to informal spoken language. Because of the formal context and informed audience in each case, however, these informal features are less dominant than those associated with the more formal register of the written word.

The Houses of Parliament

Although pre-scripted speeches and debates are a central part of Parliament, many of the exchanges are not scripted. Everything which is spoken is recorded in Hansard and this provides language students with interesting examples of political language in use.

Much of the language is **formulaic** and traditional patterns are used time and time again. This can be seen in the framing of a **motion for debate**. Hansard records the motion on 10 March 1994 from Clare Short MP which was to introduce a debate on sex discrimination:

1 I beg to move,

That this House, in the week of International Women's Day, notes that women in Britain face discrimination in all aspects of their lives; deplores the Government's failure to fully implement European equality legislation or the recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission; and calls on the Government to introduce legislation to simplify, strengthen and extend the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts.

5

The formulaic *I beg to move* (1. 1) is the traditional opening to a debate. The verb phrase *beg to move* allows the speaker to provide a number of objects in the form of a noun clause introduced by *that* which is often omitted after the first clause:

^S (I) ^P (beg to move) ^O (that this House...notes...); ^O (deplores...); ^O (and) ^{conj} (calls...)
SCI-NCI SCI-NCI SCI-NCI (11. 1-5)

Abstract nouns like *legislation* (1. 6) and *Acts* (1. 7) mark this as political language and **subject specific proper nouns** like *International Women's Day* (1. 2) and *Equal Opportunities Commission* (1. 5) define the content.

A later intervention by the Secretary of State for Employment, David Hunt MP, after thirty-eight minutes of debate, replaces Clare Short's motion with the following version:

1 I beg to move, to leave out from 'House' to the end of the Question, and to add thereof:

'notes, in the week of International Women's Day, that women in Britain now enjoy exceptionally wide and increasing opportunities underpinned by comprehensive and effective legislation; and calls on the Government to continue to pursue the policies which have made this possible.'

This motion provides a complete contradiction in terms of ideology, but the basic structure remains exactly the same. Interestingly, the opposing stance of Labour and Conservative politicians can be seen in the clause structure: while Clare Short, Labour MP, uses a **marked theme**, the adverbial *In the week of International Women's Day* (1. 2, CS), the Secretary of State draws less attention to the particular week by placing the prepositional phrase after the verb (1. 3, DH). Equally, the **modifiers** chosen by David Hunt obviously praise the Government's action:

^m (exceptionally wide) and increasing opportunities (1. 4, DH)
Adv V N

^m comprehensive and effective legislation (1. 5, DH)
Adj Adj N

This is in direct contrast to the **connotations** of verbs like *deplores* (1. 3, CS) and nouns like *failure* (1. 4, CS) in the first motion.

These examples of political language are pre-scripted and they follow a very precise pattern. They bear little resemblance to spoken language because of their formulaic structure. The speech turns are not equal because the speaker introducing the motion dominates, allowing interventions when considered appropriate. The verb phrase *to give way* is used to mark the points in the debate when the speaker allows another politician to make a statement or ask a question. The speech following the introductory motion is scripted, but interventions from the floor are unlikely to have been prepared. Although they are still formal because of the nature of the context in which they take place, sometimes interventions can be introduced by phrases that seem rather informal. Phrases like *just one second* or clauses like *you know* are described as **SPONTANEITY MARKERS** because they reflect the unscripted nature of the language.

One of the most important features of parliamentary language is the **framing of questions**. The first question asked in the House of Commons was in 1721, and since then questioning has become a central part of parliamentary procedure. Each week there are now two timetabled sessions in which questions are addressed to the Prime Minister. Because of the nature of these sessions, questions are structured in a particular

way. They are doing more than just requesting information – often they are used to make statements, and can equally criticise or praise the speakers to whom they are addressed. Politicians will usually only have one chance to ask a question, so questions are carefully constructed for maximum effect.

Questions are rarely straightforward: they must include appropriate facts; establish the nature of the question; address a minister's knowledge about a view on the issue in question; and provide a conclusion linked to the speaker's own viewpoint. Such complexity forces the politician being questioned to provide a more detailed answer. If ministers give a straightforward answer to a complicated question, they may find that they have committed themselves to a sequence of propositions with which they do not actually agree.

All the exchanges take place orally, but they are recorded exactly in Hansard. However, because the questions are often pre-scripted, their structure is closer to written rather than spoken language. Responses are not prepared, but because of the complexity of the questions addressed and the necessity of a detailed reply, the answers also resemble written language. Although parliamentary questions closely resemble formal written speeches in both structure and style, some features can reflect spoken discourse.

ACTIVITY 17.4

Questions and answers will usually convey a certain ideology and will follow party lines. MPs of the party in government will ask questions that enable ministers to respond in a positive way, showing their knowledge of a subject, the strength of Government policy and so on. Opposition MPs, however, will try to test ministers, revealing any weakness in their approaches or gaps in their knowledge, and so forth.

Read the two exchanges below, which took place in March 1994 when the Conservative Party was in government and the Labour Party was in opposition. Giles Brandreth spoke as a Conservative backbencher. John Smith as the Leader of the Labour Party. Comment on:

- 1 the attitude towards the Prime Minister in each case;
- 2 the structure of the questions;
- 3 any features that are typical of political language.

Extract 1

- 1 **Mr Brandreth:** Will my right hon. Friend consider adding to his list of engagements a visit to the uniquely beautiful city of Chester, where he will find inward investment at record levels, and unemployment 6 per cent lower than a year ago and 26 per cent lower than six years ago? Does he agree that, in terms of inward investment to the European Community, the United Kingdom in general, and the city of Chester in particular, are now leading the way?

The Prime Minister: I am certainly pleased to hear of the particular inward investment to Chester. There has been a dramatic amount of inward investment into every part of the United Kingdom over the last few years – Wales and Scotland have certainly received a great degree of inward investment. That is very largely connected with the fact that we have a very flexible economy and a very effective business tax system, we do not have too many social on-costs, and investment here is welcome.

Extract 2

- 1 **Mr John Smith:** Does the Prime Minister think it right that those who can afford to pay fuel bills in advance can avoid paying the new VAT charges on gas and electricity?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, it has long been the case that customers for a wide range of services can pay for them in advance. [Interruption.] There is nothing unusual about that. It has happened before every Budget that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can remember since he entered the House.

- 5 **Mr John Smith:** The Prime Minister does not even begin to understand the problem here. Does he not understand that it is deeply unfair that those who are better off can avoid a tax obligation which millions of others have to shoulder because they do not have the money to exploit the loophole that the Government have permitted?

The Prime Minister: It is not a loophole, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman says; it is a position that has applied for very many years. As far as people who are less well off are concerned, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, we have provided help for them worth £2.5 billion over three years – more to pensioners, more to disabled people and more to single parents. The right hon. and learned Gentleman did not mention that all those people will get the money before the bills arrive. That is a prepayment that the right hon. and learned Gentleman forgot to mention.

- 15 **Mr John Smith:** Does the Prime Minister not understand that in those replies he has revealed the Tory attitude to tax in a nutshell – loopholes for the better off, and everyone else has to pay in full?

The Prime Minister: What has been revealed is that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is up to his old tricks, yet again, telling other people how to spend their own money. It boils down to the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is a meddler in everything – in private sector pay, in company decisions and in how people pay their own bills. What he does not mention is the fact that electricity companies, for example, have announced next year's prices and all of them have frozen the price or cut it. When did that ever happen under Labour Administrations?

Oral Answers, Prime Minister's Question Time, Hansard (22 March 1994)

COMMENTARY

Giles Brandreth's question is aimed to show how Conservative economic policies are working: levels of investment are up and unemployment is down. It offers John Major an opportunity to comment generally on the party's success. **Noun phrases** like

^m a (very flexible) economy (IL 12–13) ^m a (very effective) business tax system (l. 13)
_{det. Adv. Adj. N N N N}

are used to promote the present state of economic affairs in a positive light. The question requires a *yes/no* answer, but since it is not addressed merely to acquire information, a more detailed reply is offered.

By using the **modal verb** *Will* (l. 1), the speaker suggests that he expects his request

to be fulfilled. This immediately marks the question as one that will be acceptable to the Prime Minister. The request to visit Chester, however, is never answered since it is really only an excuse for introducing the second question which enables John Major to discuss investment and economic policy for the whole country.

John Smith's questions, on the other hand, are clearly more demanding. They constitute an attack on Conservative policy rather than offering an opportunity to show it in a positive light. The questions are not as simple as they would appear – although they apparently demand only a *yes/no* answer, to give a simple reply would compromise the Prime Minister. If his response to Smith's first question was 'yes', Major would be favouring people who have more money at the expense of people who are less well off. If he were to answer 'no', then he would be contradicting Conservative Party policy.

In each case, Major evades a direct answer by avoiding the key words in the question. The first asks him to question whether the Government's decision to allow the gas and electricity companies to collect payment *in advance* without the new VAT charges is *right* (1.1). By using the clause

^{dimms} (it) ^P (has) ^A (long) ^P (been) ^C (the case) ^S (that customers...) (ll. 4-5)

Major is able to sidestep the central part of the question and therefore avoids making a moral judgement. In the second question the key word is the adjective *unfair* (1.10), but Major focuses on the idea of *loophole* (1.14); while in the third, Smith's focus on the Conservative *attitude to tax* (1.23) is replaced by an attack on Labour Party policy in his sequence of prepositional phrases which function as adverbials: *in private sector pay, in company decisions...* (ll. 28-9).

John Smith's use of the negative linked to the verb *understand* (1.9) suggests that the Prime Minister is in some way failing to recognise the obvious. The formal nature of the exchange means that a contraction is inappropriate, but equally by using the full form of *Does he not...* (1.10) emphasis is placed upon the negative.

The formality of the context is reflected in the **traditional titles** used to address people. A politician who is also a Privy Counsellor will be referred to using the phrase *my right hon. Friend*, while one who is a barrister will be called *the learned Gentleman* (1.7), and so on.

Subject specific lexis like the nouns *Administrations* (1.32), *tax* (1.11) and *VAT* (1.2) indicate that this is a political field, but the **connotations** of certain words suggest something about the political persuasion of the speaker. Smith's use of the noun *loophole* (1.14) reflects his belief that the Conservative Party has given **some** people a means to **avoid** taxation. This belief of a division between rich and poor is developed through verbs like *exploit* (1.12), with its connotations of gain at the expense of someone else, and the infinitive to *shoulder* (ll. 11-12), suggesting that a burden is being borne – but not by all. In choosing the verb *permitted* (1.13), Smith implies that the Government is responsible for the division between rich and poor. They have accepted that it is legal for customers to make pre-payments for gas and electricity which will be exempt from the new VAT charges and are therefore enabling those with more money to avoid taxation. Major describes Smith as a *meddler* (1.28), implying that he is interfering unnecessarily in other people's business. Such lexis clearly marks out the ideological stance of the two party leaders.

The register here is primarily influenced by the written word, but there are examples of **colloquial language** which would probably not have appeared in pre-scripted speeches. Clichés like *it boils down to...* (1.27) and *up to his old tricks...* (1.26) are more commonly associated with spoken language. Their presence here reminds the

reader that this is a written version of an oral exchange. Smith's metaphor of *the nutshell* (1.23) can be described as a **dead metaphor**: it is no longer a vivid use of language to convey an abstract meaning concisely; instead, it is a well-worn cliché which has lost its originality. In a pre-scripted speech, it is likely that a speaker would have used a more original metaphor since the writer would have had time to consider and select the most powerful language to influence the audience.

Grammatically, the structure of the speech utterances here resembles written language more closely than spoken language because of its complexity. **Sentence structures** are rarely simple and usually complex.

^S (The Prime Minister) ^P (does) ^A (not) ^P (even) ^O (begin) ^{lex} (to understand the problem here).

^P (Does) ^S (he) ^{neg} (not) ^{lex} (understand) ^O (that it is deeply unfair that those who are better off

can avoid a tax obligation which millions of others have to shoulder because they do

not have the money to exploit the loophole that the Government have permitted?)

(ll. 9-13, JS)

^S (What has been revealed) ^P (is) ^C (that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is up to

his old tricks yet again, telling other people how to spend their own money.)

(ll. 25-7, JM)

Such complexity is not usually associated with spoken language. The sentence structure here is complex because each speaker wishes to provide a lot of qualifying information and this makes both the questions and the answers complicated.

The **pronoun referencing** is typical of political language. John Major uses the first person singular when asked to visit Chester. Despite the fact that this request is addressed to him in the role of Prime Minister, he responds personally and this makes his pleasure at the high levels of investment seem sincere. When he later uses the first person plural, however, he is able to stress the caring nature of the Government as a whole.

17.5 What to look for in the language of politics

The following checklist can be used to identify key features in examples of political language. There will not be examples of all the features listed in every text or transcription, but the list can be used as a guide. The points made are general so discussion of specific examples will need to be adapted to take account of the specific context, audience and purpose in the given discourse.

The following are helpful questions to ask.

Register

- 1 What is the **mode**? – spoken or written? written to be read? written to be spoken? spontaneous spoken answers?

- 2 What is the **manner** – the relationship between the participants: formal or informal? the same or different ideology? supporters or opposers?
- 3 What is the **field**? – the subject matter will reflect the political variety.

Levis

- 1 Are there any examples of **subject specific vocabulary**? – general? typical of a certain ideological stance?
- 2 Are there any **abstract nouns** reflecting beliefs or political policy?
- 3 How are the participants **named**? – use of titles? use of forenames or surnames? focus on the role or the individual? the relationship between speaker, topic and audience?
- 4 Is there anything significant about the **connotations** of words? – positive? negative?

Grammar

- 1 Are there any **pronouns** creating a sense of **distance**? – dividing the speaker and audience by using *those*? dehumanising the reference and making it seem faceless and threatening by using *it* and *they*? conveying a sense of opposition by using *they*? creating a very formal tone often associated with high social class by using *one* as a first person or second person personal reference? distancing the speaker from an action or conveying a sense of authority by using *one*?
- 2 Are there any **pronouns** bringing the speaker and audience **together**? – giving an individual tone and suggesting a sincere attitude by repeating or 'blocking' the *I*, particularly with mental process verbs (*think, feel or believe*)? establishing a rapport with the audience by using the *I*? linking issues and policies to a particular person by using *his, hers and theirs*, thus placing an emphasis on people rather than policies? focusing on the institution as well as the individual by using *we*, thus including the speaker and suggesting support for actions or policies? drawing the audience in by using *you*?
- 3 Are there any **pronouns** conveying degrees of **responsibility**? – marking the speaker as the instigator of an action or process by using *I*? showing an acceptance of responsibility by using *I*? making the degree of responsibility less clear by using *we*? allowing speakers to subtly alter their personal responsibility for certain acts by using *we* exclusively rather than inclusively? placing responsibility at a distance, explicitly excluding the speaker by using *they*?
- 4 How are the questions **framed**? – **negatives** allowing questioners to lead an addressee to a particular answer by suggesting that their propositions are undeniable? **modal verbs** like *will*, suggesting that any rejection will seem unacceptably rude? structures aiming to make the addressees commit themselves to action? closed **yes/no questions** attempting to force the addressee to accept or deny any proposition directly? **wh- words** requiring a more focused answer? **embedded statements** within the question, enabling the speaker to establish a context or viewpoint?
- 5 Are there any examples of the **passive voice**? – refocusing the audience's attention on certain elements? concealing the person(s) responsible for an action by omitting *by + agent*?
- 6 Is the **sentence structure** varied? – simple sentences making direct and emphatic statements? compound sentences balancing arguments? complex sentences exploring abstract concepts?

Metaphorical and rhetorical language

- 1 Are there any **metaphors**? – establishing a direct link between abstract theories and concrete examples? helping the listener to understand? extended metaphors emphasising a particular message?
- 2 What is the **focus** or **theme** of key sentences? – reordering of sentences to bring key elements to the attention of the audience?
- 3 Are there any examples of **repeated words, phrases or clauses**? – emphasising important concepts? helping to establish a core topic or attitude?

Summary

The **function** of political language is to make people believe in a certain world view; to persuade them to a certain course of action.

To a large extent, **tradition** plays an important role in defining the nature of political language: in the Houses of Parliament, certain formulaic utterances add to the formality of the field; in speeches, traditional rhetorical techniques are used to manipulate audience response.

Semantically, written and spoken words often have **underlying meaning(s)**: answers to direct questions are often non-committal, even evasive; by using **implications**, politicians can avoid direct answers and statements of belief and make an implicit point, quite different from what is apparently being said.