Pronouns of politics:
the use of pronouns in the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in political interviews.

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DECLARATION

Except where otherwise acknowledged, this thesis is my own work.

Nicolette Bramley
List of figures

Figure 1  Embedded group membership (1)

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Abstract

Pronouns play a key role in the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’. They are not merely a way of expressing person, number and gender as is suggested by traditional grammarians nor do they only do referential and deictic work. Rather, they must be thought of in the context of interaction and in terms of the ‘identity work’ that they accomplish. In this thesis, it is argued that pronouns are used to construct favourable images of themselves, and ‘others’.

The context of this study is the Australian political media interview. In this study, the pronouns ‘I’ ‘you’ ‘we’ and ‘they’ are examined individually, then, as they occur in sequence. This investigation reveals that pronouns are used to construct politicians’ multiple ‘selves’ and ‘others’ and that as they occur in sequence, the changing ‘selves’ of politicians and different ‘others’ are created. The construction of these multiple ‘selves’ and ‘others’ is a version of reality that politicians construct discursively and is not an objective representation of facts.

This analysis of pronouns in political interviews also reveals striking and hitherto unresearched uses of pronouns, which can be used to show affiliation or create distance between people where it would not traditionally be expected. Politicians actively exploit the flexibility of pronominal reference to construct the different identities of themselves and ‘other’ and use them to create different alignments to, and boundaries between, their multiple ‘selves’ and ‘others’. Thus, pronouns are pivotal in the construction of reality – a reality that is created and understood in the discourse of the moment.
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