Key Function Words in a Corpus of UK Election Manifestos

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Abstract

This article explores a corpus of all the UK election manifestos produced by the three main political parties in the period 1900–2010. It offers an alternative perspective on function words in corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, placing them at the centre rather than the periphery. Using a combination of *WordSmith Tools* and *Sketch Engine*, I identify four key function words and show how a consideration of their phraseological behaviour can – perhaps surprisingly – reveal aspects of party ideology, as well as pointing to generic change over time.

1   Introduction

For some years now, researchers within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been using corpus linguistics methods in their work. The development of corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (cf. Baker 2009) is reflected in the addition of a chapter on corpus linguistics (CL) in the second edition of the highly influential collection *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (edited by Wodak and Meyer 2010). In her chapter, Gerlinde Mautner claims that CL methods can be used in CDA projects to enrich research design and assist with the interpretation of results (2010: 125). She demonstrates this with a collocational profile of the adjective *unemployed* in a 60-million-word corpus of articles from *The Times* newspaper and reveals that the top-ten collocates with the highest t-scores are *an, are, people, who, and, term, long, million, for, workers*. In her discussion of this list she makes an interesting assertion, the implications of which are central to the present study. According to Mautner, function words such as *an*, *are*, *who*, *and* and *for* "are devoid of separate meaning" and "tend not to be as interesting to discourse analysts as to grammarians, and it is generally safe in a CDA setting to ignore them" (ibd.: 126). It is a slightly strange claim to make, especially when – on the very next page – Mautner herself presents concordance lines from *The Times* corpus in which *unemployed* is linked to other adjectives by *and*, resulting in binomials such as *unemployed and desperate* and *unemployed and homeless*. In performing this function, *and* is helping to construct a particular representation of unemployment in *The Times*, in which the state of worklessness is routinely associated with a range of other states carrying what Mautner calls a "negative semantic load" (ibd.: 127). Here, *and* might be "devoid of *separate* meaning" (ibd., my italics), but it is certainly implicated in the creation of meaning at the phraseological level. This raises questions about the other function word collocates of *unemployed* in Mautner's list. Does its co-occurrence with *for* indicate that people who cannot find work are positioned as the beneficiaries of something (as in "X *for* unemployed people"); does it reflect that the length of time a person has been out of work is particularly salient in the construction of the discourse of unemployment (as in "she has been unemployed *for* X months")? Does the presence of *who* in the list signal that noun phrases containing human social actors characterized as unemployed are frequently post-modified by relative clauses with *who*? The fact that such potentially interesting questions are provoked by a cursory

examination of function word collocates indicates that a decision to omit them from an analysis is potentially problematic.

In this article I offer an alternative perspective on these apparently "uninteresting" lexical items. I show how a focus on key function words can offer insights into the representation of ideology in a corpus of UK election propaganda: political meanings and values which might not have been accessible if – as Mautner recommends – only the apparently semantically "richer" lexical words had been considered. The fact that much CDA work is concerned with exploring aspects of discourse which are not immediately obvious to the casual reader (thus rendering their effects more powerful ideologically) means that function words must be worth considering in corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis.

In the following section I describe the manifesto corpus. Then in Section 3 I consider the nature of function words, arguing for their inclusion in corpus-assisted CDA and outlining the analytical methods used in this study. The remainder of the paper presents the findings of my analysis and conclusions.

2   The corpus: UK election manifestos 1900–2010

The corpus of texts under consideration consists of the manifestos produced by the three main political parties in the UK between 1900 and 2010: nearly six hundred and seventy thousand words of political propaganda, representing over a century of party policy at twenty-nine general elections.[1] During this period, the nature of election manifestos has changed in some important ways. Most obvious and striking is their increasing length. In the eleven elections between 1900 and 1935, the three parties between them produced approximately fifty thousand words of text in thirty-three manifestos. In the 2010 election alone, the word count for the three manifestos was just under seventy-seven thousand. Increasing length is associated with changing emphases. For example, in the period before the Second World War, the Conservative and Liberal[2] manifestos were presented in the form of electoral addresses by the party leaders, while the very earliest Labour manifestos were little more than collections of socialist slogans. Only in the 1920s did manifestos begin to be seen by the parties as a means of setting out a coherent political programme; and it was not until the election of 1945 that the manifestos of all three parties first began to resemble those we are now familiar with. Today, the stereotypical British election manifesto consists of an introduction (often in the form of a personal address by the party leader) followed by sub-sections outlining policies in the main domains of social life such as health, education and defence. If the manifesto is by the party challenging for power it will often contain a critique of the governing party's record. Technological advances mean that the later manifestos make more use of colour and visual imagery than the earlier ones.

Election manifestos play a central role in British politics. Their publication, which in modern times has often been accompanied with massive media publicity, provides a repository of "authoritative statement[s] of what the party plans to do in government". More generally,

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[1] The corpus was compiled from two sources. For manifestos from the period 1945-2010, I used the electronic versions at Richard Kimber's Political Science Resources website (www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man.htm). The earlier documents were scanned from Iain Dale's three volume collection of British election manifestos (Dale 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). The Conservative sub-corpus consists of 248, 356 words; Labour's is 235, 327 words and the Liberal sub-corpus is 184, 374 words.

[2] Throughout this article, *Liberal* and *Liberal Party* is used generically to refer to the third party of British mainstream politics. Between 1900 and 1979, this party fought every election as 'The Liberal Party', but in the 1980s it entered into an alliance with the Social Democratic Party (which had been formed in 1981) and contested the elections of 1983 and 1987 as the SDP-Liberal Alliance. In 1988 the Liberal Party and the SDP merged to form the Liberal Democrats. After the general election of 2010, the Liberal Democrats entered into a coalition government with the Conservatives.

manifestos can also "strike a popular mood", such as Labour's 1945 and 1964 manifestos which promised "social and economic reconstruction" and "modernisation of the economy" respectively (Kavanagh 2000: 7). Through their "textual emphases", manifestos often "set the tone and themes of campaign discussion" (Budge 1999: 2), and after the election they are used as a reference point by the party, its political opponents, and the media to confirm that election promises have been fulfilled, or to claim that they have been broken. No other single document regularly produced by a political party has this degree of power and influence, so it is no surprise that manifestos have attracted the attention of politically-oriented discourse analysts (see Pearce 2004; Charteris-Black 2006; Aman 2009; Edwards 2012; Chaney 2013).

3   Function words in corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis

Lexical words and function words are often defined in opposition to one another, with the former tending to occupy the conceptually positive pole of a binary opposition. Lexical words (i. e. nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are described by Biber et al. (1999: 55) as the "main carriers of meaning" in a text or speech act, in contrast to function words (i. e. determiners, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, adverbial particles, coordinators and subordinators), which are regarded as semantically empty. Lexical words can function as the head of a phrase, whereas function words generally cannot. Lexical words can be long and morphologically complex, unlike function words which are usually short and morphologically invariable. Lexical words often receive stress in speech while function words are generally unstressed; and they form a large and ever-expanding open-class, whereas there are a small and finite number of function words (closed-class). The only "positive" thing that function words seem to have going for them is that they are very common! (see Biber et al. 1999: 55; Stubbs 2001: 40–41). Such schematised accounts serve to present function words in a lesser light than lexical words. However, the neat theoretical division "between meaningful and meaningless words" implied in such accounts "is not supported by the empirical research findings that have emerged in recent decades from the field of corpus linguistics" (Groom 2010: 61). These findings have informed the development of a theory of language as "phraseology" (Sinclair 1991, 2004; Hunston and Francis 2000; Hoey 2005). At the heart of this approach is the notion that "the word is not the best starting-point for a description of meaning" because "meaning arises from words in particular combinations" (Sinclair 2004: 148) – that is, meanings are located in sequences of words and not in the individual words making up these sequences. And since function words are central to the phraseological sequences through which meaning is conveyed, they must be a valid object of interest in discourse analysis (whether traditional or corpus-assisted), the point of which is "to identify the conventional meanings and values expressed" in texts (Groom 2010: 61).

The academic journals most associated with CDA routinely publish articles which demonstrate the "research synergy" (Baker et al. 2008: 274) between CDA and CL. And despite Mautner's doubts about the usefulness of function words, not all corpus-assisted studies have ignored them entirely. Work of note includes Rayson 2008 (*would* and *our* in the 2001 Labour and Liberal Democrat election manifestos); O'Halloran 2010 (paragraph-initial *but* in a corpus of UK newspaper articles about immigration); Weninger 2010 (*to* and *and* in a corpus of US redevelopment discourse); Mulderrig 2012 (*we* in UK education policy discourse). McEnery's 2006 monograph on swearing also considers function words such as *will* and *and* in corpora associated with policing so-called "bad language" in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries in Britain. By adopting an inclusive approach in relation to function words, these studies illustrate their potential significance in critical studies, and my research represents a contribution to this expanding field.

In their range of approaches and emphases, these studies also illustrate the methodological eclecticism which has always been a feature of corpus-assisted approaches to discourse

features (Mautner 2010: 142). Here I adopt a similarly open and exploratory stance, the outline of which I sketch below. But first I explain how the function words at the heart of this study were selected for analysis. This paper adopts a well-established inductive procedure in CL by identifying those function words in the corpus that are statistical keywords. In this way, the objects of study "float to the surface as a result of statistical processing" (Scott/Tribble 2006: 108). Rather than being pre-selected the items emerge automatically from the analysis and provide a "point of entry" into a corpus (Baker 2010: 133). Table 1 is my entry point: it shows the top-twenty keywords in the corpus as a whole and in each sub-corpus, measured against the BNC sampler and ordered by strength of the log-likelihood score. These words have been derived using the KeyWords function of Scott's *WordSmith Tools 5.0* (measured against the BNC sampler). I use the log likelihood statistic because, according to Scott (2010: 168) it gives a better estimate of keyness than the chi-square test when, as in this case, a whole genre is being contrasted against a reference corpus.

The entire corpus	Conservative sub-corpus	Labour sub-corpus	Liberal sub-corpus
WILL (14,093.58)	**WILL (6,540.14)**	**WILL (7,872.05)**	**WILL (4,616.11)**
WE (9,340.86)	**WE (5,944.49)**	LABOUR	LIBERAL
OUR (6,770.62)	**OUR (4,539.29)**	**WE (3,911.10)**	**WE (2,276.10)**
GOVERNMENT	GOVERNMENT	**OUR (3,516.34)**	GOVERNMENT
LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	GOVERNMENT	LOCAL
BRITAIN	BRITAIN	NEW	**OUR (1,178.94)**
TO (2,650.06)	**TO (1,279.00)**	BRITAIN	BRITAIN
LOCAL	CONTINUE	PUBLIC	TAX
NEW	**SHALL (1,217.28)**	**TO (1,232.88)**	DEMOCRATS
PUBLIC	**OF (1,124.58)**	EDUCATION	EDUCATION
OF (1,975.81)	LOCAL	LOCAL	LIBERALS
AND (1,933.87)	NEW	**AND (1,154.38)**	REFORM
EDUCATION	PUBLIC	**FOR (960.56)**	**AND (774.42)**
TAX	SCHOOLS	INVESTMENT	HOUSING
FOR (1,595.10)	TAX	SCHOOLS	PUBLIC
SCHOOLS	LABOUR	LABOUR'S	**TO (729.03)**
POLICY	ENCOURAGE	SUPPORT	**OF (728.23)**
LIBERAL	POLICY	NHS	ENCOURAGE
SUPPORT	MORE	ENSURE	POLICY
PEOPLE	**THEIR (673.13)**	ECONOMIC	SUPPORT

Table 1: Top-twenty keywords in the manifesto corpus (function words in bold with log-likelihood scores)

My main tool for the interrogation of the corpus is *Sketch Engine*: a powerful corpus query system which uses the high-level query language known as CQL (Kilgarriff et al. 2004).[3]

4   Analysis

This article focuses on *will*, *we*, *our* and *to* because they are the four keyest function words in the corpus, and the only function words to occur amongst the top-twenty keywords of all three parties (see Table 1). The aim of the analysis is to examine the phraseologies in which these key function words occur, in order to assess their role in the construction of party ideology. I show that although superficially similar phraseological choices are often made by all three political parties (largely as a consequence of the generic constraints operating on the writers

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[3] *WordSmith* can be found at www.lexically.net/wordsmith/. *The Sketch Engine* site is at www.sketchengine.co.uk.

of the manifestos), a closer inspection of the patterns of co-occurrence[4] entered into by the key function words can reveal contrasting party political positions and orientations. In order to draw out the political significance of these phraseologies, I interpret them in relation to a "widespread" and "universally understood" distinction in political ideology: what Noël and Thérien (2008: 55) call the "left-right value divide". In western societies, for the last two hundred years, this divide has helped "citizens integrate into coherent patterns their attitudes and ideas about politics." On the left are people who are generally optimistic about human nature, who value social protection and equality, and have an inclusive and communal vision of society and culture which attracts them towards political policies designed to increase social justice and encourage international cooperation and understanding. People on the right, on the other hand, generally view society and culture as exclusive and nationalistic, have a high regard for the military, tend to value competition above cooperation and are usually meritocratic and individualistic in outlook, often voting for policies which they believe will result in increased opportunity within a de-regulated, low tax and fully marketized economy (cf. Noël/Thérien 2008: 24; McCandless 2010: 14–15). These core values "organize the way most people think about a host of social choices", ranging from attitudes towards homosexuality and abortion to the way children should be brought up (Noël/Thérien 2008: 55). In the UK party context and relative to each other, the Conservatives are on the right, Labour is on the left, and the Liberals have traditionally occupied a left-of-centre position.

If, in its broadest sense, politics is the process of "organizing social power in communities" (Volpi 2006: 445), then political ideology is the framework of beliefs and values which underlie, arrange, and inform the organization of power. Therefore, overt statements of political ideology such as election manifestos will inevitably refer to the various groups of social actors involved in these power relations, in particular the political party producing the manifesto and the members of the public who are often represented as the potential beneficiaries of the proposed political actions of those parties. Consequently, many of the phraseological patterns which emerge relate to the representation of human beings as they act, or are acted upon.

In the sub-sections which follow I describe the phraseological behaviour of the target words by focusing on patterns of co-occurrence. As well as being of interest in themselves, these patterns are also "diagnostic", in the sense that they point to areas of potential interest which may repay closer attention using the more "traditional" techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis.

4.1   *Will*

The modal verb *will* is the keyest word in the corpus as a whole, and also heads the keyword lists for all three parties, occurring 16.67 times per thousand words in the corpus, compared with 2.62 per thousand words in the BNC sampler. The six-fold difference is explainable when we consider the function of manifestos. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes a manifesto as a written or spoken "public declaration...proclamation...explanation, or justification of policy issued by a head of state, government, or political party or candidate, or any other individual or body of individuals of public relevance, [such] as a school or movement in the Arts". It seems then, for a manifesto to be recognized as such, it must contain a declaration of the intentions of the individual or group producing the manifesto. This means that we might expect patterns involving intrinsic (or deontic) meanings of *will* to be common. According to Biber et al. (1999: 485), intrinsic meanings refer to "actions and

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[4] The term *co-occurrence* is used in this article to cover both *collocation* (the tendency for certain lexical words to occur in the vicinity of a target word/phrase) and *colligation* (the tendency for certain grammatical words/structural patterns to occur in the vicinity of a target word/phrase).

events that humans (or other agents) directly control: meanings relating to permission, obligation, or volition (or intention)." There are "two typical structural correlates of modal verbs with intrinsic meanings: (a) the subject of the verb phrase usually refers to a human being (as agent of the main verb), and (b) the main verb is usually a dynamic verb, describing an activity or event that can be controlled." (ibd.) How common are these "typical structural correlates" in the manifesto corpus in relation to *will*? We can get a sense of this by searching for all occurrences of *will* where it is preceded by a noun or pronoun. Table 2 clearly shows the relationship between *will* and corporate human agency in manifestos, with high frequencies of nouns referring to groups of political actors (in the form of the parties' names, or references to the government). But what is particularly striking here is the frequency of *we will*. In the sequence noun/pronoun + *will*, the pronoun *we* occurs 5,338 times: over fifty-six per cent of all occurrences (compared with 324 times for *government will*). The sequence *we will* is the most frequently occurring two-word cluster in the corpus, occurring nearly sixty times more frequently than it does in the BNC sampler (8.05 times per thousand words

Conservative			Labour			Liberal		
We will	1445	(5.82)	We will	1263	(5.37)	We will	1380	(7.48)
we will	497	(2.00)	we will	524	(2.23)	we will	229	(1.24)
Government will	97	(0.39)	Labour will	291	(1.24)	Democrats will	106	(0.57)
government will	67	(0.27)	Government will	82	(0.35)	It will	29	(0.16)
it will	58	(0.23)	It will	71	(0.30)	it will	25	(0.13)
It will	57	(0.23)	it will	59	(0.25)	they will	22	(0.12)
they will	43	(0.17)	government will	46	(0.19)	Liberals will	20	(0.11)
Conservatives will	32	(0.13)	they will	30	(0.13)	Alliance will	19	(0.10)
policy will	19	(0.07)	They will	24	(0.10)	government will	16	(0.09)
they will	18	(0.07)	Britain will	22	(0.09)	Government will	16	(0.09)

Table 2: Top-ten occurrences of noun/pronoun + will (raw frequencies and normed frequencies per 1000 words)

compared with 0.14 per thousand words). In most cases, *we* in *we will* is being used to refer exclusively to the party producing the manifesto (i. e. "we the Conservative Party"): in random samples of 100 occurrences of *we will* in each party manifesto, there were two instances of inclusivity in the Labour manifestos, one in the Liberal manifestos and none in the Conservative (I will consider issues of inclusivity and exclusivity in subsequent sections). The table also reveals the rhetorical prominence of this sequence in the corpus: nearly seventy-seven percent of occurrences are sentence-initial, sometimes in lengthy sequences of anaphora, as in ***We will*** *let families keep more of what they earn*. ***We will*** *support marriage*. ***We will*** *provide choice and high standards in schools* (Con. 2001).

I now turn to Biber et al.'s second structural correlate of *will*: "the main verb is usually a dynamic verb, describing an activity or event that can be controlled." Table 3 lists the top-

Conservative		Labour		Liberals	
We will continue	140	We will continue	87	We will encourage	66
We will introduce	63	We will ensure	47	We will introduce	54
We will ensure	56	We will work	41	We will ensure	49
We will give	54	We will give	34	We will give	46
We will encourage	41	we will continue	30	We will require	38
We will make	36	We will introduce	30	We will establish	36
we will continue	30	We will support	29	We will increase	33
it will be	27	We will encourage	27	We will make	32
We will work	27	we will work	26	We will work	31
We will take	27	We will establish	25	We will create	28
We will provide	24	we will introduce	24	We will set	27
We will support	22	we will ensure	24	We will promote	25
We will set	22	we will make	20	We will provide	22
We will maintain	22	We will provide	20	We will seek	20
We will increase	22	We will make	20		
we will introduce	21				
we will give	21				
We will improve	20				
We will abolish	20				

Table 3: *W(w)e will* + base form of lexical verb occurring 20+ times in each sub-corpus (raw frequency)

twenty most frequent sequences of *we will* + the base form of a lexical verb in the three sub-corpora. All of them convey the notion not only that it is possible for the subject ("we") to carry out the action of the main verb, but also that the subject is willing and intends to act. The list poses a number of intriguing questions. For example, what is to be made of differences in the relative frequencies of *we will continue*? It occurs 0.69 times per thousand words in the Conservative manifestos, 0.50 in Labour and just 0.04 times in the Liberal texts. Presumably, this reflects the political history of the period under consideration, with the lower frequency in the Liberal texts related to the fact that without political power, there are no policies enacted in the past to be continued into the present. (It might also be worth noting that *continue* is the eighth most key word for the Conservatives, suggesting that continuity is an important Conservative value.) The extent to which the Conservatives give prominence to this sequence can also be seen in the fact that 82.3 percent of its occurrences are sentence-initial, compared with 74.3 percent for Labour. These cross-party differences in *we will* + verb have potential ideological interest. Central to politics are ideas about the distribution of resources and powers among different social groups, which means it is always worthwhile considering what resources and powers are being distributed, who is receiving them and to what ends. An insight into this can be seen when we look at *we will give*. *Give* is an interesting verb to consider because "the act of giving has a relatively rich structure in so far as it involves (typically) three easily distinguishable entities: the GIVER, the RECIPIENT, and the THING being transferred" (Newman 1996: 33). Since here, in all cases the giver is *we* (the corporate entity of the party producing the manifesto), I will concentrate on the recipient and the thing being transferred.

Conservative	Labour	Liberals
to, the, and, of, power, a, their, for, more, in, local, priority, right, that, greater, on, will, courts, opportunity, patients, support, public, an, all, much, control, over, they, choose, responsibility, people, every, teachers, strong, help, so, new, services, back, choice, chance, councils, families, them, our, full	to, the, and, new, of, a, local, in people, Britain, rights, them, Europe, greater, more, right, powers, for, every, opportunity, be, which, on, leadership, authorities, their, all	the, to, and, for, local, more, of, in, over, authorities, greater, a, power, every, their, Councils, powers, support, people, responsibility, control, they, by, crime, an, increased, priority, police, with, consultation

Table 4: Collocates of *we will give* (in a span of ten to the right of the node at 3+ frequency)

Give is usually used ditransitively: that is, it is capable of taking both a direct and an indirect object, as in *I will give **them** [indirect object] **their tea** [direct object]*. A structure which is semantically equivalent to this involves the use of a prepositional object (in the form of a *to*-phrase), as in *I will give their tea **to them***. For the purposes of this analysis, these alternatives are conflated. Table 4 lists collocates of *we will give* occurring three times or more in a search horizon of ten places to the right of the node. This span potentially captures elements of both the direct and indirect object, as can be seen in the table, where collocates such as *people* are the semantic recipients, and collocates such as *right* are the thing(s) being transferred, as in *We will give **people** a new **right** of access to open country* (Lab. 1992). However, because I am interested in the transference of possession of various entities to human social actors I need to be aware that not all the collocates in Table 4 suggest (either singularly or collectively) human recipients, as exemplified in *We will give full support to **the EEC proposals*** (Con. 1979). Therefore, in the next stage of the analysis I exclude such non-relevant semantic patterns by focusing on a particular syntactic structure. A favoured pattern in the corpus with *we will give* is to have the direct object consisting of a head noun taking a *to*-clause, as in *We will give every patient **the power to choose any healthcare provider*** (Con. 2010). Since "the common head nouns taking *to*-clauses represent human goals, opportunities or actions" (Biber et al. 1999: 653), and since human goals, opportunities and actions are at the centre of politics, this is a potentially fruitful structure to consider. In section 4.4 I consider *to*-clauses in general, but for now I focus on the nouns occurring after *we will give* followed by a *to*-clause (see Table 5).

Conservative	Labour	Liberals
access, assistance, autonomy, backing, **chance** (3), **choice** (3), conditions, **control** (2), discretion, freedoms, **help** (2), information, **opportunity** (5), **power** (12), protection, **responsibility** (3) **right** (6) say, support, treatment, value	**freedom** (2), **freedoms** (2), **opportunity** (2), **powers** (4), responsibilities, **right** (2), **rights** (2)	information, **opportunities** (2), opportunity, **power** (5), **powers** (4), **resources** (2), **right** (2), support

Table 5: Nouns in *W(w)e will give* + noun+ *to*-clause

There are interesting party differences here, most obviously that the Conservatives favour this construction more than Labour and Liberals, employing a wider range of head nouns, and more of them. A sense of the political uses made of this structure by the Conservatives can be gathered from the concordance lines when we focus on two head noun lemmas used most often in the corpus in this structure: *RIGHT* and *POWER*.

The giving of a right or power implies that the political party pledging to do so perceives that that right or power is currently not enjoyed by the particular social actor(s) or institution(s)

presented as potential beneficiaries. It is therefore an implied critique of current conditions, and as such can reveal what a party deems to be a significant absence in a particular social domain. In relation to identified groups of social actors the Conservatives focus on the domains of health and education, and claim that *we will give*:

- teachers...greater **power** to set detentions, to exclude disruptive pupils and to use reasonable physical restraint where necessary (Con. 1997)

- doctors...the **right** to decide how they organise themselves (Con. 2001)

- patients and their doctors...the **power** to choose (Con. 2001)

- parents...the **right** to choose the school best suited to their child's needs (Con. 2005)

- patients and local GPs...the **right** to choose the hospital or care provider that is right for them (Con. 2005)

- all head teachers...the **power** to pay good teachers more (Con. 2010)

- every patient...the **power** to choose any healthcare provider that meets NHS standards (Con. 2010).

As is the case with *we believe that* in relation to *people*, the Conservatives' right-wing values and policies are reflected here: in particular, the notion of "choice" in public services, whether for the potential beneficiaries of these services (parents, patients) or providers (doctors, GPs). As a response to the economic crises of the 1970s, many governments around the world started to force state enterprises to function on a profit-making basis; some were privatized completely. During the 1980s and 1990s, "neoliberal ideological commitments led governments to push privatization and marketization even to sectors that remained natural monopolies or that were widely perceived by the public to be public services which should not be governed by market principles, such as education and health care" (Huber/Stephens 2005: 614–15). In the 1980s and 1990s it was the Conservatives who were particularly wedded to the idea that market forces might make the provision of public services more efficient, responsive, and flexible, although New Labour under Tony Blair was equally as enthusiastic in many respects.

So far in this discussion of *we will* I have shown how the *we* almost universally refers to the collective voice of the party producing the manifesto and that when we consider the main verb following *will*, and more extended sequences involving the direct object of the main verb, sites of potential ideological difference emerge. But is *we will* a stable feature of the genre of election manifesto over time? It does not seem to be. A clear increase over time in the occurrence of *we will* is evident in Figure 1. In the eleven elections between 1900 and 1935, this sequence does not occur at all; between 1945 and 1964, it is somewhat infrequent (0.43 occurrences per 1000 words); between 1966 and 2010 it occurs 8.37 times per 1000 words, but it should be noted that this is a period of volatility, with peaks of usage reached for all three parties in 1992 (Labour), 2001 (Liberal) and 2010 (Conservative). This frequency information points to the changing nature of manifestos over time. The move away from the manifesto being presented as the electoral address of the party leader meant that exclusive uses of *we* (representing the corporate voice of the party) become more frequent; furthermore it is only in the period after the Second World War that all three parties use the manifesto as a means of setting out detailed and developed programmes for government containing frequent statements about what the party will do, should it win the election. Both factors increase the likelihood of *we will* being deployed.[5]

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[5] The picture for *we will* is somewhat complicated by the presence of an alternative: *we shall*. In (written) British English, they are semantically equivalent, although *we shall* is perhaps "somewhat formal and old-fashioned"
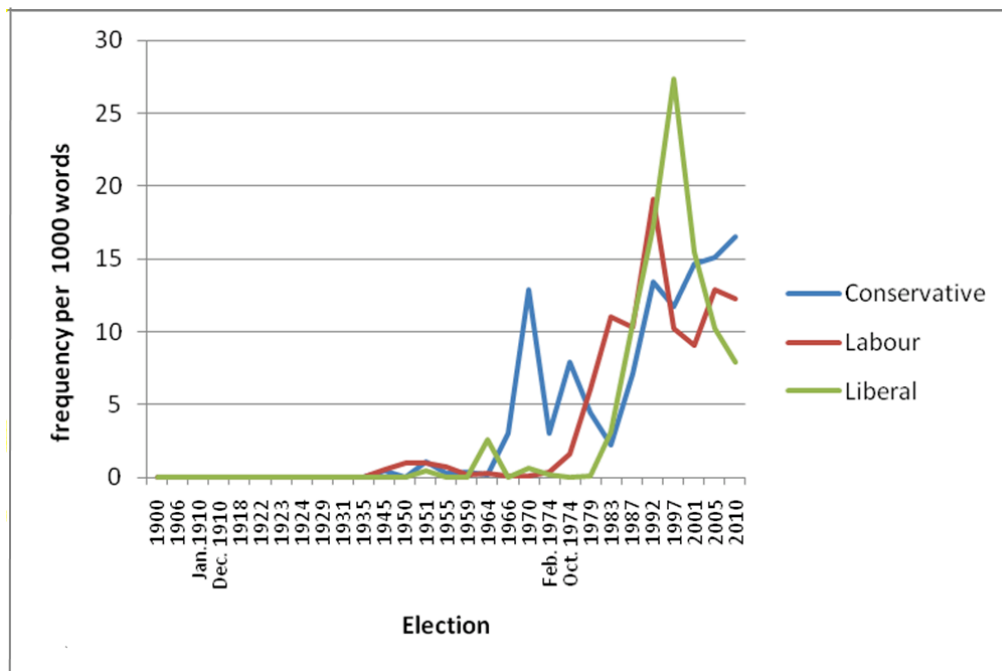
Figure 1: Occurrences of *we will* per 1000 words by election

4.2   *We*

Whereas *we will*, as we have seen, is associated with the 1960s onwards, *we* in general is more widely dispersed across the corpus. Figure 2 plots *we* over time.
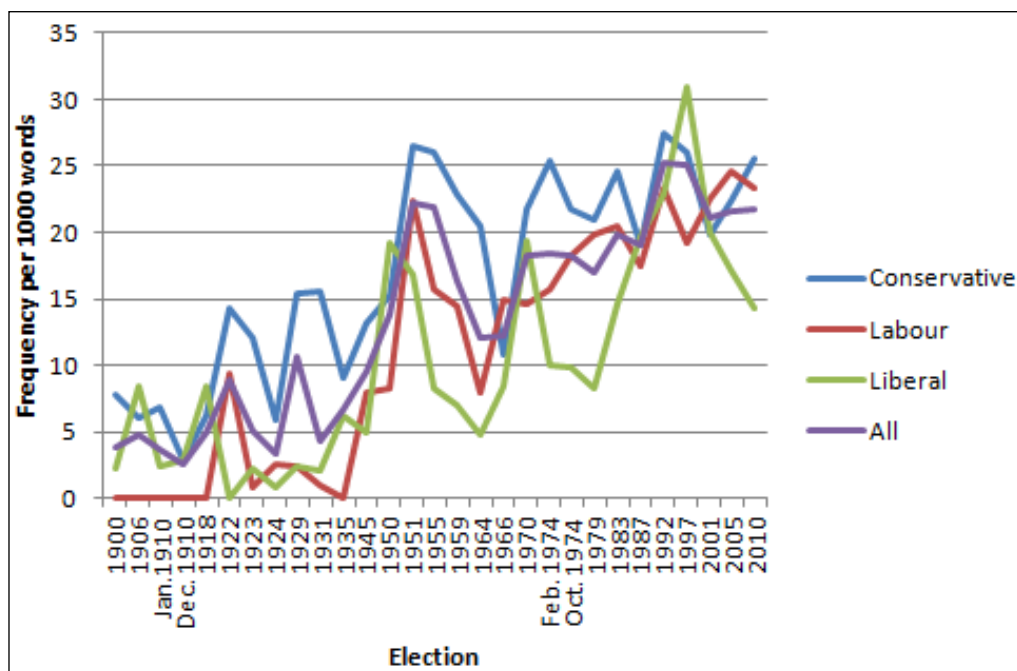

Figure 2: Occurrences of *we* per 1000 words by election

The general trend seems to be one of increasing use (the peak for all three parties occurs in the period 1992–2010), and this broadly coincides with Mulderrig's (2012: 706–708) findings in her corpus of UK education policy documents from the period 1972–2005, in which the

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(Biber/Conrad/Leech 2002: 182). However, it does not appear to be the case that the earlier manifestos are employing *we shall* as an alternative to *we will*, since *we shall* occurs only thirty-five times in the thirty-three manifestos produced between 1900 and 1935.

increasing frequency of *we* (together with the decline in third person forms such as *the government*) is interpreted as a discursive outcome of a new mode of government self-identification which began during the period of New Labour and which is related to a general trend in recent decades towards the personalisation and democratisation of public discourse (cf. Pearce 2005; Fairclough 1992). In her analysis, Mulderrig (2012: 709) examines the rhetorical potential of *we*, showing how its referential complexity can be manipulated for persuasive ends. This is particularly the case when it is used inclusively: that is, when the speaker/writer and the addressee/reader are bound together within a shared deictic frame of reference, so helping to establish solidarity and social bonding. Although there are some instances of *we* being used in this way in the manifesto corpus – as in ***We are a great nation, with a long and eventful history behind us*** (Con. 1974 February) – it is usually used by the party producing the manifesto to refer to itself exclusively: *Since **we** took office **we** have started on the long process of modernising obsolete procedures and institutions* (Lab. 1966). This exclusive *we* is more common in the corpus than the inclusive *we*. Ninety-seven percent of Liberal and ninety-six percent of Conservative uses were found to be exclusive; the figure was slightly lower for Labour at eighty-nine percent.[6] However, this does not mean that the potential of referential ambivalence has not been exploited in the corpus, as we shall see in relation to *our*.

Syntactically, the subject pronoun *we* typically precedes a verb phrase. Table 6 lists the twenty most frequent sequences of *we* followed immediately by a modal, primary or lexical verb. Setting aside the most common sequence (*we + will*) which I considered separately in 4.1, the results point to intriguing contrasts in frequency. For example, *we have* occurs 3.17 times per thousand words in the Conservative sub-corpus and 1.87 in the Labour sub-corpus, but only 0.58 times in the Liberal texts. The difference between Conservative and Labour on the one hand and Liberal on the other is possibly an artefact of the political history of the UK. Most instances of *we have* in the corpus (67.1 percent) occur in the perfective structure *we + have* + past participle, as in ***We have regulated** demand through selective measures* (Lab. 1966). The perfect aspect usually indicates that a past situation has some effect on, or relevance for, the present (Huddleston/Pullum 2005: 49); in this example, the implication is that the regulation started in the past and is still continuing. A political party is more likely to claim that it has done something in the past if it has been in power at some point, particularly if it is still in power. It is Conservative and Labour who have had the greatest share of power over the last century or so, most obviously in the period after the Second World War. Between the elections of 1945 and 2010, Conservative Prime Ministers led governments for approximately thirty-five years and Labour for thirty. The possible effect of incumbency on perfect aspect use can be seen when relative frequencies of *we have* in "incumbent" and "opposition" manifestos are compared. For example, since 1950 the Conservatives have been in power at ten elections, and in those manifestos *we have* occurs 4.32 times per thousand words compared with 0.91 times in the seven manifestos produced when they were not in power. Contrasts in the relative frequencies of *we would* might also have a similar origin. In the Liberal manifestos *we would* is nearly sixteen times and eight times more frequent per 1000 words than it is in the Labour and Conservative manifestos respectively. The overuse of *would* by the Liberal Democrats in the 2001 manifesto has also been observed by Rayson (2008: 535), and was interpreted as a consequence of the Liberal Democrats not expecting to win the 2001 general election, and therefore favouring more tentative expressions of future intentions.

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[6] In random samples of a hundred instances of *we* from each sub-corpus.

Conservative			Labour			Liberal		
We will	1445	(5.82)	We will	1263	(5.37)	We will	1380	(7.48)
we will	497	(2.00)	we will	524	(2.23)	we will	229	(1.24)
We have	421	(1.69)	We shall	264	(1.12)	we have	78	(0.42)
we have	363	(1.46)	We have	247	(1.05)	We believe	77	(0.42)
We shall	344	(1.38)	We are	199	(0.85)	We would	73	(0.39)
We are	218	(0.88)	we have	186	(0.79)	we are	68	(0.37)
we shall	196	(0.79)	we shall	153	(0.65)	We are	58	(0.31)
we are	167	(0.67)	we are	128	(0.54)	We must	48	(0.26)
we can	124	(0.50)	we must	53	(0.23)	we would	43	(0.23)
We believe	105	(0.42)	we can	51	(0.22)	we can	43	(0.23)
we must	73	(0.29)	We believe	47	(0.20)	we must	39	(0.21)
We must	71	(0.28)	We want	44	(0.19)	We want	34	(0.18)
We want	68	(0.27)	we need	42	(0.18)	we believe	33	(0.18)
We intend	48	(0.19)	We must	40	(0.17)	we want	29	(0.16)
we need	36	(0.14)	we want	34	(0.14)	We can	29	(0.16)
we want	35	(0.14)	we believe	33	(0.14)	We have	28	(0.15)
we believe	34	(0.14)	We support	31	(0.13)	We need	19	(0.10)
We need	34	(0.14)	We need	31	(0.13)	We aim	19	(0.10)
We can	34	(0.14)	we do	21	(0.09)	we shall	18	(0.10)
We intend	29	(0.12)	We reject	19	(0.08)	We support	18	(0.10)

Table 6: Top-twenty occurrences of *W(w)e* + modal verb, primary verb or lexical verb (raw frequencies and normed frequencies per 1000 words)

We might also consider the wider context of the full lexical verbs collocating with *we*. The most frequent lexical verb for all three parties in this position is the stative mental verb *believe*. An examination of what a political party explicitly states as a belief is potentially revelatory of that party's ideology. *Believe* is often followed by a complement *that*-clause containing the content of the beliefs, as in "we believe that all men are created equal". The most frequently occurring noun collocate of *we believe that* for all parties is *people*. What do the parties believe in relation to people? For the Conservatives what *we believe* is associated with core right wing notions of freedom of choice and individual responsibility (Figure 3); but in relation to *we believe that*, such sentiments are not expressed by Labour.

We believe that	young **people** should be free to choose between college, work-based training and sixth form studies. (1992)
We believe that	**people** should choose how their money is spent. (2005)
We believe that	if **people** are given more responsibility, they will behave more responsibly. (2010)
We believe that	the more responsibility you give **people**, the more responsibly they behave. (2010)

Figure 3: Examples from concordance lines showing *we believe that* with *people* in the subsequent subordinate clause (Conservative manifestos)

we believe that	all **people** are entitled to be treated as equals. (1970)
We believe that	working **people** must have clear and definite rights to a say in running their firms – and to an influence in economic planning. (1983)
We believe that	elderly **people**, both today's pensioners as well as those who will benefit in future from Labour's pension scheme, should share as of right in our future prosperity. (1983)
We believe that	**people** have the right to a healthy environment. (2010)

Figure 4: Examples from concordance lines showing *we believe that* with *people* in the subsequent subordinate clause (Labour manifestos)

We believe that	**people** are at their best as members of communities, where they care about each other and for those less fortunate than themselves. (1992)
But we believe that	**people** can realise their potential best not as isolated individuals, but as members of thriving and responsible communities. (1992)
We believe that	**people** in those parts of the UK, rather than the government in London, should take the decisions on issues that affect them directly. (2005)
And we believe that	care would improve if local **people** had more control over how their health services were run. (2010)

Figure 5: Examples from concordance lines showing *we believe that* with *people* in the subsequent subordinate clause (Liberal manifestos)

Instead, the language of rights and entitlements (in the context of social care and equality) is used (Figure 4). The Liberals convey a sense of community, localism and individual liberty (Figure 5). For each party we see how the same sequence (*we believe that*), combined with a high frequency collocate (*people*), is associated with different ideological positions. Analogous contrasts emerge throughout this study, illustrating the potential advantages of using key function words as a point of entry for the analysis.

4.3   *Our*

After *will* and *we*, the third most key function word is *our*. Again, its statistical significance is a consequence of the functions performed by a manifesto. On the one hand, the voice of a manifesto has a corporate dimension, in the sense that it speaks for a political party, setting forth its policies and ideology. At the same time, the manifesto attempts to speak for the country and its people (*Britain* and *people* are both among the top-twenty corpus keywords), suggesting that its particular view of the world is the common-sense one. This means that what is determined by *our* – just as what is referred to by *we* – is sometimes exclusive, sometimes inclusive, and sometimes ambiguous. But unlike *we*, inclusive uses of *our*

outnumber exclusive uses.[7] Figure 6 reveals that over time use of *our* is quite volatile (particularly between 1900 and 1974), with a general tendency in the post-Second World War period for the Conservative and Labour party to use it more than the Liberals. However, this takes into account only the distribution of the form. In order to gain an insight into meaning, what is determined by *our* needs to be considered.
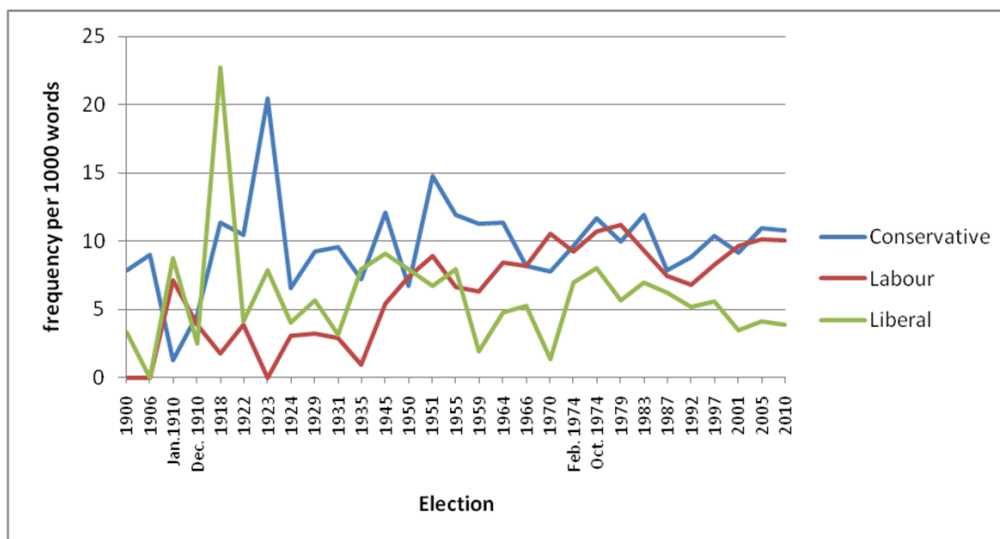

Figure 6: Occurrences of *our* per 1000 words by election

Table 7 shows the most frequent sequences consisting of *our* + any word. Some uses of *our* are clearly exclusive. For example, the lists contain a set of determiner + noun sequences

Conservative	Labour	Liberals
national (58), country (55), policy (55), aim (51), own (43), policies (42), economic (33), people (32), new (31), programme (29), plans (28), proposals (25), record (24), first (23), armed (21), economy (21), heritage (17), nation (17), tax (17), allies (16), commitment (16), society (16), cities (15), foreign (15), inner (15), public (15), security (15), energy (14), history (14), opponents (14)	country (73), aim (56), national (45), society (42), people (37), new (33), economy (32), commitment (31), plans (28), first (24), policy (24), economic (23), own (23), proposals (23), ten (23), public (20), armed (18), policies (18), industrial (17), programme (17), children (16), ambition (15), schools (15), democracy (12), third (12), towns (12), environment (11), goal (11), vision (11), aid/future/main (10)	aim (30), policies (28), country (23), own (23), proposals (22), priorities (21), society (21), commitment (18), new (15), first (13), national (13), plans (13), economic (12), economy (10), goal (10), policy (10), people (9), political (9), history (8), long (8), present (8), public (8), system (8), environment (7), European (7), exports (7), industrial (7), tax (7), cities (6), defence/immediate/priority/problems/programme (6)

Table 7: Top thirty *our* + any word sequences in each sub-corpus

with overlapping senses related to the intentions of the political party behind the manifesto: *our aim, our policy, our plans, our proposals, our policies, our programme*. An examination of these gives an insight into possible changes in the nature of the election manifesto over the course of the twentieth century. For example, *our policy* is quite evenly distributed, occurring at least once in 44.8 percent of the manifestos between 1906 and 2010, but *our policies* does not make its first appearance until 1950. The earliest appearance of *our programme* is 1922. *Our aim* and *our proposals* appear first in 1935; and *our plans* in 1945. What these dispersions seem to be reflecting is the shift in emphasis of the genre which I identified in

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[7] In random samples of a hundred instances of *our* from each sub-corpus.

relation to *we* and *we will*: over time the manifesto becomes a document which sets out a developed and coherent political programme. It is also interesting to note changes in the rhetorical presentation of policy items. Before 1979, no party uses the phrase *our commitment*, but it has been used in every election since then. We might also note the appearance of *our ambition* and *our vision* in the Labour list, which occur only from 1992 onwards. *Commitment*, *ambition* and *vision* suggest a discourse of modern management, of the sort found in texts like the so-called 'mission statements' of large organisations. Such phraseological patterns point to a rhetorical shift in the presentation of the nature of the relationship between a party and the electorate, and also a party and its own policies.

Some aspects of the frequency and ranking of items in Table 7 suggest party differences in emphasis in relation to inclusive uses of *our*. These include the presence of *our environment* in the Labour and Liberal lists and its absence from the Conservative list; the fact that *our children*, *our schools* and *our democracy* occur only in the Labour list, while *our heritage*, *our allies*, and *our security* appear only in the Conservative list, and the absence of *our history* in the Labour list. These variations in frequency are possibly indexical of positions on a left-right political continuum, with left of centre parties tending to conceptualize the environment as shared by all, seeing children as the responsibility of the whole community rather than parents alone, and claiming/possessing democracy. On the other hand, right of center parties – in relation to what is "ours" inclusively – display nostalgia and a concern with military alliances and security. But it is also revealing of political ideology to consider the *similarities* between these lists. In order to demonstrate this, I will focus on the sequences *our country* and *our people*. How are these items being used politically across the three sub-corpora? We can check this by looking at two syntactic forms with similar semantic roles: the noun in the sequence noun + *of our country/people* and the noun preceded by the genitive noun phrases *our country's/people's* (see Table 8).

In relation to *of our country/our country's*, Conservatives favour nouns associated with defence (*security*, *stability*, *defence*, *safety*). Both Labour and Conservative refer to the *prosperity* of *our country*, but it is only the Conservatives who evoke its *standing*, *reputation*, *word*, *character* and *backbone*. The characteristics conveyed in these nouns are often applied to human beings: *standing*, *word* and *backbone* are bodily in the sense that their basic meanings are associated with human posture, speech and anatomy, while in contemporary English, *character* and *reputation* are also mainly qualities applied to human beings. Here we see the deployment of the conceptual metaphor "a state is a person" (Lakoff 1993: 243). Such modes of thought are common in everyday life, as well as in the domain of politics (cf. Wendt 2004: 289), but to conceive of a nation as a person inevitably emphasizes unity, coherence, shared values, and so on (since the human body is usually experienced as an indivisible whole), rather than diversity, complexity and nuance. The metaphor of the state as a person, from Hobbes's *Leviathan* onwards, perhaps fits more comfortably with a right-wing world view than it does with a left-wing one. It is also interesting to note the particular aspects of personhood which the Conservatives apply to *our country*. *Standing* and *reputation* are external valuations of worth; while *word* is also outward facing (people "give" their word to others). *Backbone* is a rather old-fashioned term implying strength, but also fortitude; it also has a "moral" dimension. This sort of language conveys tradition, honour, stoicism – values which perhaps tend to find particular favour with people at the conservative end of the political spectrum.

	Conservative	Labour	Liberals
noun + *of our country*	security (2), **part** (2), **future** (2), unity, standing, stability, reputation, recovery, interest, **defence**, character, cause, backbone	women (3), parts (2), shores, renewal, **prosperity**, potential, people, **part**, interests, ideal, **defence**, Minister	problems (2), **future** (2), rejuvenation, equipment
our country's + **noun**	**prosperity** (2), word, past, affairs, safety	faith, economy, capacity	under-performance, strengths, situation, **future**
noun + *of our people*	needs (2), forbearance (2), welfare, unemployment, talents, spirit, section, protector, prosperity, **proportion**, independence, housekeeping, **employment**, efforts, determination, conditions, **character**, assent	majority (2), values, thousands, commonsense, rights, obliteration, minds, millions, lives, exertions, environment, enthusiasm	well-being, **proportion**, energies, **employment**, character
our people's + **noun**	security		

Table 8: Nouns preceding of our country/people and following our country's/people's

As we might expect in a future-oriented genre such as a manifesto, all three parties look ahead, referring to *our country's future* and *potential*; but only the Conservatives refer to *our country's past*. Furthermore, only the Liberals convey an element of critique (*our country's problems*, *our country's under-performance*) – a strategy which makes sense for a party that had enjoyed, until 2010, only a very limited share of power since the 1930s.

In respect of *our people*, many of the collocations are broadly positive: the Conservatives have "forbearance", "talents", "spirit", "determination" and "character"; the Liberals also evoke the "character" of "our people", while for Labour "our people" have "values", "commonsense" and "enthusiasm". As with *our country*, the Conservative choices here – in particular *forbearance* and *spirit* – have a slightly archaic quality, suggesting a more elevated rhetorical style, of the kind evident in relation to "our country".

4.4   *To*

The key function words I have considered so far owe their saliency to the generic conventions of the manifesto: a document written as the collective voice of a political party (*we*),

demonstrating its shared values with the electorate (*our*), while committing itself to action (*will*). The final function word in my analysis is also implicated in creating the generic "flavor" of a UK election manifesto. If we look at the most frequently occurring clusters

Conservative		Labour		Liberals	
to be	348	to be	245	to be	246
to make	212	to ensure	183	to make	148
to help	148	to make	163	to ensure	129
to give	148	to help	135	to provide	87
to ensure	137	to provide	100	to give	70
to take	132	to work	99	to improve	63
to provide	121	to improve	94	to take	62
to improve	109	to give	93	to reduce	62
to do	102	to promote	91	to help	59
to encourage	97	to achieve	83	to pay	58
to see	94	to take	80	to work	57
to protect	87	to do	78	to do	55
to bring	87	to develop	77	to encourage	49
to work	80	to meet	76	to build	49
to increase	70	to reduce	68	to bring	49
to reduce	69	to create	66	to increase	48
to keep	60	to protect	64	to protect	47
to build	60	to bring	64	to create	45
to support	59	to tackle	63	to see	44
to pay	58	to get	61	to have	38

Table 9: *To* + verb (top-twenty in each sub-corpus)

with four or five words, including one or more of *we*, *will* and *our* we see that they often contain *to*: "we will continue **to**"; "we shall continue **to**"; "will be able **to**"; "we are committed **to**"; "we are determined **to**"; "our aim is **to**"; "we will seek **to**"; "we will work **to**". In these examples, *to* is a marker introducing infinitive clauses and it is this function which I focus on here, rather than its use as a preposition. The infinitive clause is a non-finite subordinate clause with a variety of roles. Table 9 shows the top-twenty sequences consisting of *to* followed by the base form of a verb. Thirteen *to* + verb structures occur in all three parties' lists: *to* + *be, bring, do, ensure, give, help, improve, make, protect, provide, reduce, take, work*. There are positive meanings associated with most of these words; meanings which are more or less explicit (*help, improve, protect*) or present as a consequence of a positive semantic prosody (*ensure, provide*). But once the contexts of these sequences are considered, do political differences emerge? In order to attempt an answer I am going to focus on *to help*. *Helping* is a core political concept; indeed, all political actors in a democracy want to represent themselves as helping. But different political parties often have contrasting attitudes towards who gets helped and for what reasons. In general English, where *to help* occurs, the beneficiaries of assistance are often represented in a noun phrase following the verb, as in "I want to help you". Table 10 lists all the nouns and pronouns with human referents occurring at least twice in a span of ten to the right of *to help.* Many of these are the semantic beneficiaries of the verb.

Con.	people (17), families (15), themselves (10), them (3), parents (3), offenders (2), women trainees (2), the unemployed (2)
Labour	people (12), them (11), children (7), parents (3), pupils (3), themselves (3), family (2), us (2), adults (2)
Liberal	people (6), farmers (4), them (3), family (2)

Table 10: Human beneficiaries of *to help* (occurring at least twice in a span of 10 to the right of the node in the same sentence)

There are some potentially interesting contrasts here in relation to frequency and rank (including the Conservative emphasis on families and Labour's concern with children), but once again a consideration of context can be revelatory. For example, the reflexive pronoun *themselves* appears in the Conservative and Labour lists, and the concordance lines reveal how it co-occurs with *to help* in a highly political way (Figure 7).

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                    government has a clear responsibility to help and protect those who cannot look after themselves. [Con. 1974 October]
  to protect the weak, the poor, the disabled,          to help those least able      to help themselves [Lab. 1974 October]
We want to work with the grain of human nature,         helping people                to help themselves – and others. [Con. 1979]
                    In the community, we must do more to help people                  to help themselves, and families to look after their own. [Con. 1979]
Conservatives believe equally strongly in the duty of Government to help those who are least able  to help themselves. [Con. 1983]
              JobClubs were first opened in 1985 to help the unemployed help            themselves back into jobs. [Con. 1987]
                    Above all, we want to help families                               to help themselves. [Con. 1987)]
       These policies are underpinned by our measures to help families              help themselves.  [Con. 1997]
... to refashion the welfare state on the basis of rights and responsibilities, with people helped  to help themselves, not just given handouts. [Lab. 2001]
```

Figure 7: Examples of *themselves* co-occurring with *to help* in Conservative and Labour manifestos

These examples show contrasts in how *to help themselves* is incorporated into political discourse. The first – which is often associated with a left of centre outlook – conveys the idea that government should directly help vulnerable people, for example: "those who cannot look after themselves"; "those who are least able to help themselves". The second – which is sometimes favoured by people on the right of politics – implies that government should provide people with the wherewithal and conditions to enable them "to help themselves". Significantly, the help on offer is qualified – potential recipients have to show that they are deserving of the assistance given, and the help they receive is "reward for approved social conduct" (Williams 1976: 46). It is clearly the Conservatives who favour the deserving beneficiaries of help, and noteworthy that when Labour refers to people 'being helped to help themselves, not just given handouts', it is in 2001 during Tony Blair's period of shifting the Labour party to the right.

To protect is also worth looking at from the perspective of human beneficiaries. To this end I focus on structures where *to protect* combines with an adverbial element introduced by *against* or *from*, as in *We have taken measures **to protect** the public **against lawlessness*** (Con. 1964). Concordance lines reveal notable contrasts between Conservative and Labour in relation to the law (since it is through the law that governments most clearly offer protection to people). As Table 11 shows, both parties pledge to protect people against/from crime, violence, exploitation and disruption of various kinds, but only Labour cites forms of

Conservative	Labour
1959. It will continue to be our policy **to protect** the citizens, irrespective of creed or colour, **against** lawlessness.	**1955.** Labour will take powers **to protect** the public **against** shoddy goods and unscrupulous trade practices.
Action will be taken **to protect** the public **against** the sale of sub-standard goods and to amend the law on weights and measures.	Meanwhile, it is our responsibility **to protect** the weaker peoples **from** being exploited, and to develop communities free from racial and colour discrimination.
1964. We have taken measures **to protect** the public **against** lawlessness and introduced compensation for the victims of violent crime.	**1970.** It is a first duty of government **to protect** the citizen **against** violence, intimidation and crime.
1970. Our purpose is **to protect** the citizen **against** disruption of lawful activities and, to that end, we will immediately institute an inquiry into the law affecting trespass.	**Feb. 1974.** It is the duty of Socialists **to protect** the individual **from** discrimination on whatever grounds.
1992. ... **to protect** law-abiding people **from** crime and disorder.	**1979.** The next Labour Government will continue **to protect** the community **against** discrimination and racialism.
We will always give the security forces our full backing within the rule of law, and – against Labour opposition – ensure that they have the special powers they need **to protect** the whole community **from violence**.	And we will take great care **to protect** working people and their families **from** the hardships of change.
We will set up a working party to examine what more can be done **to protect** the police and members of other emergency services **from** assault.	**1983.** Stronger legal safeguards are essential **to protect** customers – not least **from** shoddy goods.
1997. Introduce measures **to protect** the public **against** strikes that cause excessive disruption to essential services.	**1997.** We will create a new offence of racial harassment and a new crime of racially motivated violence **to protect** ethnic minorities **from** intimidation.
At the same time we will continue to take whatever security measures are required **to protect** the people of Northern Ireland **from** those who seek to achieve their political goals by violent means.	**2001.** We will take action **to protect** NHS staff **from** violence and abuse.
2001. We will also introduce new laws **to protect** children **from** paedophiles who use internet chat rooms.	**2005.** We have extended legislation **to protect** people **from** discrimination at work to cover not only gender, disability, race and ethnicity but also religion and sexual orientation and – from 2006 – age.
2010. To protect our freedoms **from** state encroachment and encourage greater social responsibility, we will replace the Human Rights Act with a UK Bill of Rights.	It makes sense to provide citizens with an equally secure identity card **to protect** them at home **from** identity theft and clamp down on illegal working and fraudulent use of public services.
We will take further steps **to protect** people **from** unwarranted intrusion by the state.	[We] will not hesitate to use our capping powers **to protect** council taxpayers **from** excessive rises in council tax.
	2010. Wherever necessary, we will act **to protect** children's health **from** tobacco, alcohol and sunbeds.

Table 11: *To protect* + *against/from* **in the Conservative and Labour sub-corpora**

discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, gender and disability as something people are to be protected against (1955, Feb. 1974, 1979, 1997, 2005); and only the Conservatives offer

protection against the threat of industrial action (1970, 1997) and intrusion by the state (2010).

5   Conclusion

For reasons of economy, I have had to limit my analysis to the four keyest function words in Table 1. But I have shown how even this relatively short list of targets can provide sufficient evidence to vindicate an approach which places function words at the centre of a corpus-assisted discourse analysis. By using key function words to reveal potentially salient phraseological sequences, I have uncovered aspects of the beliefs and values of the parties producing the manifestos which might have remained hidden otherwise. The analysis has pointed to ways in which function words are implicated in the representation of human beings in relation to political values and actions. For example, for the Conservatives the sequence *we believe* (in the context of the high-frequency collocate *people*) is associated with traditional right-wing values such as freedom of choice and individual responsibility, in contrast to Labour, who express more left-of-centre beliefs in social care and equality, and the Liberals who champion localism and democracy (indeed *local* is the fifth most key word in the Liberal sub-corpus). Similarly, the theme of Conservatives valuing the freedom of individuals to make choices is evident in relation to sequences where *we will give* occurs in the context of *right(s)* and *power(s)*, where these rights and powers are invoked in relation to choice in public services – a marked right-wing value. A focus on the infinitive marker *to* also reveals contrasts, with *to help* used by the Conservatives in a context where the recipients are presented as deserving in some way, and *to protect* (when it occurs with an adverbial element introduced by *from* or *against*) used by Labour in contexts where discrimination on the grounds of race and gender are represented as threats (in contrast to the Conservatives, who perceive threats in the shape of industrial action and state intrusion). Finally, what is determined by inclusive *our* can reveal what the political party behind the manifesto wants to present as a shared value or commodity, and these co-occurrences in turn often reflect a right-left value divide, with the Conservatives claiming shared values in relation to aspects of history, heritage and the military, whereas the more left-leaning parties focus on concepts such as democracy, the environment and social care. Additionally in relation to *our*, contrasts are evident when it precedes *people* or *country*, with the Conservative manifestos more likely than the others to employ a conceptual metaphor in which the nation state is represented as a human body.

I have also shown how phraseology containing these four key function words reflects the political history of the period. For example, the pronoun *we* displays preferences in grammatical aspect depending on whether the referent of *we* is the party of government or the party of opposition (*we have* + past participle is favoured by incumbent parties to indicate what has been achieved in the past). The modal verbs selected by *we* are also sensitive to this distinction (*we would* occurs more frequently in the Liberal manifestos – the party with the least experience of government in the period 1945–2010, while *we will* + *continue* is particularly favoured by the Conservatives – the party with the most experience and perhaps, therefore, the highest expectations about continuing in power). In addition to reflecting a party's relationship to power, changes in the manifesto genre are also captured in key function words. For example, increase over time in the frequency of *we will* reflects the development of the manifesto from the written text of an electoral address given by a party leader to a full and detailed policy document setting out a party's plans for government; a development also accompanied by an increase over time of exclusive *our* + nouns such as *policies*, *plans*, *programme*.

I began this article by suggesting that the claim that function words were of limited interest in discourse analysis – critical or otherwise – was worth questioning, and it seems to me that

what has been uncovered here does indeed indicate that a re-evaluation of attitudes towards these often overlooked but fascinating lexical items is now needed.

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