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ABSTRACT Although the past plays a large part in election campaigns, predictions and promises are its lifeblood, with the various parties promising great things if elected and predicting doom if not. Indeed the 'manifestos' usually published at the beginning of an election campaign are a study in pledges, promises and wishes that parties use to entice the electorate to vote for them. Whilst talk of the future often dominates election discourse, one aspect of the future that is largely passed over without comment is the actual make up of the result, despite the relentless publication of opinion polls results. However, towards the end of the general election campaign in the UK in 2001, the Conservative Party began to warn of the dangers of the Labour Party winning the election by a large majority. The media gave wide prominence to this event, seen as tantamount to conceding defeat to the Labour Party, though the reaction of all the main political parties was to downplay its significance. In this article, we explore the discursive manipulation of temporal relations in the 2001 election campaign, and the politicians' work in gaining political capital out of the Conservative Party 'breach' in the routine election prediction structure.

KEY WORDS: *broadcast talk, election campaigns, future, media discourse, news, political discourse*

Introduction

During election campaigns, it is unusual to concede the likelihood of one's party's defeat even at the end of the election day with reliable indications of the results from the exit polls. For example, during an interview conducted by the BBC journalist Jeremy Paxman with the Secretary of Defence in the outgoing Conservative government, Michael Portillo, on the night of the 1997 British General Election, the Tory politician would maintain trenchant optimism about his party's victory till the very end. In response to Paxman's question asked at 10.13 p.m.: 'Michael Portillo, are you gonna miss the ministerial limo?', Portillo

replied: 'As Brian Mawhinney [Chairman of the Conservative Party at the time] said, I think we'll wait for the real results' (adapted from Lauerbach, 2000: 110). However, facing another defeat in the subsequent election of 2001, the leading politicians of the Conservative Party displayed a different orientation to the post-election future. During the final week of campaigning in the 2001 British General Election, the then leader of the Conservative Party William Hague, and the former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, at about the same time suggested in separate interviews that it would be bad for Parliament and democracy if the Labour Party were to be returned to power with a large majority. In what Blumler and Gurevitch would call the media attempt to 'create a dialogue between the parties, where it otherwise might not have existed' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995: 134; quoted in Lauerbach, 2003: 176), these comments were given extensive coverage by the media shortly after they were made and returned to repeatedly until the day before the election on 7 June 2001. The intense media interest that followed these comments centred on the presupposition of the prediction that, by warning about the possible shape of a Labour win, that is, by a 'landslide', Tory politicians are certain for the Labour Party to win the election. Thus, the Conservative Party was seen to have publicly predicted defeat for themselves the week before the election was to take place.

In this article, our analytic interest centres upon the discursive strategies in which the main political parties involved in the election (Labour Party, Conservative Party, and Liberal Democrat Party) position themselves in relation to the media reports of the comments by Margaret Thatcher and William Hague.

The transcripts analysed in this article are derived from the sample of recordings of all scheduled BBC Radio 4 news programmes (*Today*, *World at One*, *PM*, *The World Tonight*) over the course of approximately one month during the spring 2001 (21 May–15 June 2001). During this time the campaign for the 2001 British General Election was well under way and the recording schedule was able to capture a large proportion of the coverage given on Radio 4.

The analysis below focuses on several textual features or analytic categories as identified by Van Dijk (2001) in relation to political/media discourse: topics (or semantic macrostructures), local meaning (e.g. afforded by lexical choices), formal structures (e.g. nominalizations, intensifiers, hedging, etc.), and context models: domains, social roles, overall action and agentivity.

The future in broadcast news and political discourse

The new technologies available to media organizations, allowing instantaneous 24-hour global news reporting (Richardson and Meinhof, 1999), increase the emphasis upon the 'timeliness' of news, which according to Roshco (1999 [1975]: 34) 'requires the conjunction of: (1) *recency* (recent disclosure); (2) *immediacy* (publication with minimal delay); (3) *currency* (relevance to present concerns)' (see also Schlesinger, 1978). The emphasis on recency, immediacy and currency of news is emphasized by the popular understanding of news such as exemplified by the following dictionary definitions:

1 information about important or interesting recent events, esp. when published or broadcast. (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 9th edn, 1995: 917)

1: a report of recent events **2 a**: material reported in a newspaper or news periodical or on a newscast **b**: matter that is newsworthy. (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1983: 796)

However, other things being equal, the temporal dimension which makes a news item newsworthy is not its recency and immediacy (i.e. past orientation), or even currency (i.e. present orientation), but its relevance and consequences for the future. For example, Bell (1995: 326) observes that '[i]mmediacy is a wider concept than recency, since it encompasses the future as well as the past. Most news covers the past, and therefore immediacy is equivalent to recency. However, some news deals with the future, where immediacy means imminence'. Likewise, Ellis (2002) observes, '[t]he essence of the modern news bulletin lies in speculation about the future just as much as in witness of the common present', which makes news a 'perpetual update' (p. 75). This view is echoed by Scannell:

Broadcasting is always already ahead of itself. It is always already projected beyond the day that we and it are in, and indeed it must be so in order to produce for us the day that we are in. In always-being-ahead-of-itself the futurity of broadcasting shows up: that is, the future is always already somehow structured in advance, it is always anticipated (prepared for, cared for) in such structures. (Scannell, 1996: 152; cited in Ellis, 2002: 77)

This is why, Ellis argues, complete news items in one bulletin are either rare or inconsequential. Instead, one can expect a news anchor interviewing a reporter or another media pundit to comment on the future consequences of an ongoing story, even if it is likely to result in speculative guesswork rather than factual reporting. And this, in turn, allows TV viewers and radio listeners to make sense of the future, however illusory and deceptive that may be, and 'to come to terms with the uncertainties of the future' (Ellis, 2002: 76).

Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2007) note that despite analysts' orientation to the timeliness or recency of news, the link between temporality and news has generally not been explored in detail. In their overview of the concept of liveness in television news (especially with regard to mediating terrorism), Hoskins and O'Loughlin refer to Helga Nowotny's (1994) notion of the 'extended present'; with the intensification of the social and economic life, the present becomes extended and intensified to incorporate the past and the future. The extended present

tries to diminish the uncertainty of the future by recalling cyclicity and seeking to combine it with linearity. The present is no longer interpreted merely as part of the way on the straight line leading to a future open to progress, but as part of a cyclical movement. (Nowotny, 1994: 58)

In this sense, Hoskins and O'Loughlin argue, '[t]elevision news also mixes past, present, and future times, continuously summarizing what has happened whilst feeding audience expectations of future developments, in an ongoing present' (p. 37).

Our own work has shown similar strong links between futurity, uncertainty and newsworthiness. For example, Jaworski et al. (2003a) have demonstrated how the reporting of an upcoming 'diary' event, the 2001 execution of the 'Oklahoma bomber' Timothy McVeigh, remained on the agenda of British radio broadcast news for as long as there was uncertainty of a possible application for a stay of the execution by McVeigh's lawyers, and when this uncertainty was removed, another one concerning the possibility of videotaping McVeigh's execution kept the item on air. Elsewhere (Jaworski et al., 2004), we have shown how news 'leaks' are made newsworthy (or not) through the temporal manipulation of their relevance for the future.

The same orientation to the future in broadcast news can be observed in what Liebes (1998) has called 'disaster marathons', such as terrorist attacks in Israel, and more recently the events of 9/11 (Jaworski et al., 2005), as well as earthquakes, hurricanes, and major transport accidents. The reporting of 9/11 was characterized by enabling the public to deal with the trauma of the horrific events, and by the public observing the trauma of the reporters reporting them (Zelizer and Allan, 2002). The role of the media was to create a coherent narrative which would allow the public to comprehend what was going on – to make the extraordinary routine (Tuchman, 1973). However, before such a collective narrative (or narratives) came to be formulated, it was preceded by hours of 'live' reporting filled with less-than-coherent accounts, speculation and rumours (see Zelizer and Allan, 2002) including speculation of what will happen next and what the subsequent outcomes and actions should be. Here, the ideological significance of future-orientation of news becomes particularly transparent. As Montgomery (2005) has demonstrated, in the first days after the 9/11 attacks, the discourse of US politicians and journalists followed the path of mass hysteria taking the description of *the act* from less to more retaliatory: 'this cowardly act' → 'a well-co-ordinated, extensive assault' → 'an act of war' → 'war' (see also Graham et al., 2004). This echoes Liebes's (1998) commentary on the possible consequences of the Israeli TV reporting of Hamas suicide bombers' attacks on Israeli buses. In her view, TV's disaster routine may adversely affect the democratic process by blurring of the past (e.g. obliterating previous efforts to restore peace), and by shaping the public's attitudes and expectations of the future course of action: transmitting a message of failure (e.g. losing optimism, providing terrorists with a stage), and demanding instant, rather than weighted, solutions (often resulting in more blood being spilt).

The relevance of the future as a site of contested discursive domain in exerting political and ideological power is well documented by Dunmire (2005) in her analysis of George W. Bush's speech of 7 October 2002, in which he presented his administration's rationale for going to war with Iraq. Dunmire argues that politicians rhetorically transform possible and potential futures into known and inevitable futures, projecting their visions through dominant discourses as universal and grounded in common sense. For example, Bush uses nominalizations such as 'the threat comes from Iraq', 'today in Iraq we see a threat whose outlines are more clearly defined and whose consequences are far more deadly' (adapted from Dunmire, 2005: 491), which on the one hand elide and

displace agency (who exactly poses a threat?), and on the other objectify and reify the process and its 'deadly' consequences. In this way, Bush manages to transform 'potential future actions that could or might be taken by a particular agent against a specified patient at some point in the future into an objectified and atemporal entity that exists in and of itself in the present' (Dunmire, 2005: 493). Tony Blair has been similarly shown to deploy a number of rhetorical strategies such as nominalization and the 'cascade of change' (elaborate, unordered lists of social, political and cultural changes in the world) in support of the socio-political reforms proposed by New Labour as part of the ongoing, inevitable process of which 'globalization' and 'the new global economy' are integral parts (Fairclough, 2000).

The future has long been recognized as a political issue. Dunmire (2005; see also Dunmire, 1997) refers to Aristotle's treatise on classical rhetoric, in which he 'designates the future as the temporal domain of deliberate rhetoric: "political speaking urges us either to do or not to do something [. . .] [it] is concerned with the future: it is about things to be done hereafter [. . .]" (1954: 1358b 10)' (quoted in Dunmire, 2005: 483). More recently, Murray Edelman (1964, 1971, 1988) commented on the link between futurity and political discourse. In Dunmire's summary:

He notes that the function of political discourse is to present proposals and premises concerning future actions and policies that ought, should, or must be pursued. He further notes, however, that in making such proposals, political discourse also makes claims, assertions, and declarations about what will *be* in the future: what future realities will come to fruition, what future realities must be prevented, what future realities are desirable, and so forth. (Dunmire, 2005: 483)

Grusin's (2004) notion of premediation introduces another aspect of the relationship between the media and the future. In contrast to prediction, premediation does not just aim to get the future right, as in the weather forecast. Rather, it is a process whereby a multitude of possible future scenarios is generated and maintained. Grusin notes that the preponderance of premediations concerns possible future traumatic events such as the anthrax scare triggered by the postal anthrax attacks post-9/11, or 'the challenge to the everydayness of American life' (p. 24), triggered by the series of sniper killings in and around the Baltimore–Washington DC metropolitan area in the autumn 2002. Sustained premediation of potentially disruptive and shocking scenarios helps maintain low levels of anxiety among the public with the aim of preventing the possibility of a traumatic future.

Just as the US government multiplies and extends its own networks of political, investigative, and juridical practices to prevent the occurrence of another 9/11, so the media multiply or proliferate their own premediations of potential terror attacks, or war in Iraq, as a way to try to prevent the occurrence of another media 9/11. Like the US government's establishment of a color-coded security system of terror alert, the media's preoccupation with premediating the future strives to maintain a low level of anxiety among the American public in order to protect them from experiencing the immediacy of another catastrophe like 9/11. The desire that no future event (war, snipers, terrorism, etc.) be unmediated is the desire to see, or

more precisely to premeditate, the future, the desire that the future never be free from mediation. (Grusin, 2004: 26)

Premeditation may also serve more local, strategic purposes of both politicians and the media. As highlighted in the previous quote, this need not be the sole or even key motivation for premeditation to take place, but it is more closely related to the strategic prediction-making considered in this article:

For American and in some sense global audiences as well, the most visible and powerful manifestation of the logic of premeditation in the two years following 9/11 was the onslaught of media coverage leading up to the war in Iraq. Beginning with the 2002 State of the Union Address, the Bush administration repeatedly played out the war against Iraq in print and television news media. Cynically, such premeditations functioned to help ensure that the American public would return control of the Congress to Bush's Republican Party in the 2002 midterm elections. Equally cynically, however, this premeditation of the war against Iraq allowed the networked news media to increase their ratings in the run-up to war as well as to engage in a kind of audience testing on how best to cover the war when it did occur. Thus we had the proliferation of premediated war shows like 'Countdown to War' or 'Showdown with Iraq' not only as a ploy for ratings but also as a way to help cable news networks like CNN, Fox, and CNBC determine how best to present the war to the American public to obtain the largest audience share. (Grusin, 2004: 27; see also Doane, 1990)

Scollon and Scollon (2000) extend the notion of futurity to other domains of social life, in their study of 'anticipatory discourse'. They argue that, in their actions, social actors predominantly orient to the future in anticipation of some outcome. Therefore, theorists and analysts of social action (including discourse and conversation analysts) need to take the future-oriented perspective of social actors in order to understand their actions. Scollon and Scollon identify four features in terms of which anticipatory discourse can be theorized. In summary, texts can display certain orientations and take specific stances:

- 1) Orienting to future events, actions or states (in contrast to the past orientation associated with narratives, for example).
- 2) Taking an epistemological-ontological stance with regard to our knowledge of the future and future events: a) *oracular* stance – the future is known and inevitable, there is nothing that can be done about it; b) *agnostic* stance – the future is fundamentally unknowable and unknown, nor can it be fixed in any way; c) the intermediate stance between a) and b) is the *probabilistic* stance – the future and our knowledge of it is neither fixed nor entirely free, and some outcomes of present actions are more likely than others.
- 3) Taking a stance with regard to human agentivity in relation to future events, actions or states: a) *fatalistic* – there is nothing a person can do about the future; b) *agentive* – humans can be effective in bringing about change in the future.
- 4) Identification of specific discourse genres in which anticipatory discourse is instantiated, for example, weather forecasts, teaching syllabi, advertisements, medical diagnoses, political speeches about the inevitability of globalization, etc.

In applying Scollon and Scollon's matrix to the media discourse in the context of the UK General Election campaign, we focus on *election predictions* as a type of speech act orienting to the future actions of social actors (politicians, political parties, media organizations, general public, etc.). As has been noted above, the discourse genre scrutinized here (broadcast news) is predominantly constrained by the actors' future expected outcomes. We also demonstrate how the shaping of the election and post-election futures by politicians (and the media) can be strategically deployed in different places on the knowledge axis (oracular versus agnostic) and agency axis (fatalistic versus agentive), thus performatively shaping different ideological positions, opening or foreclosing possible lines of action, or establishing particular relations of power (see Dunmire, 2005; Hebdige, 1993; Van Dijk, 1989).

'Routine' predictions and speculation in election campaigns

Although the past plays a large part in election campaigns (e.g. when politicians boast about their achievements or enumerate their opponents' blunders), predictions and promises are their lifeblood. Political parties promise their electorate a bright future if elected and predict doom if not. Indeed, political party election manifestos, election broadcasts, posters, and other forms of election advertisements (Pinar Sanz, 2003) are full of pledges, assurances, vows and aspirations that parties use to entice the electorate to vote for them. The sincerity of these acts cannot obviously be fully tested until after the election (and only for the winning party), which gives the parties complete freedom in creating an unfalsifiable future worldview which is constructed to serve their strategic aims at the *present* moment (i.e. during the election campaign). That discrepancies between election promises and their execution happen is well illustrated by the Labour Party pledge in their election manifesto in 2001 not to introduce university variable top-up fees in the UK. In fact, the Labour Government forced the Higher Education Bill endorsing top-up fees on 27 January 2004 through the House of Commons, albeit by a paltry margin of five votes. In the run-up to the Commons' vote on the Bill, when accused of lying and backtracking from their election pledge, Tony Blair explained that the promise not to introduce top-up fees in 2001 had referred to the time-frame of the next (i.e. current at the time of speaking) Parliament, and that the new Bill would not come into force until after the next election (in 2005).

Not unlike other forms of broadcast talk focusing on the reporting of diary events, leaks and other headline news, media discourse which constitutes election campaigns includes frequent references to the future abounding in what Scollon and Scollon (2000) have called anticipatory discourse (see earlier). For example, common predictions and speculations during election campaigns take the form of the media reports and pundits' comments on the results of ongoing opinion polls (gauging current support for the parties as a predictor of the future outcome of the election), politicians' promises of improvements in

social services, 'crackdown' on crime, lower taxation, higher taxation (albeit for 'good' causes), and so on. Such positive self-predictions are inextricably linked to the negative other-predictions, which state the calamity that would befall the country should the opposition win the election. The structure of these types of predictions involves projecting a future scenario to a point past the election where the next government is in the process of executing, or has executed, their promised policies. The positive or negative interpretation of proposed policies contained in the respective manifestos are often regarded as the backbone of a party's bid for election and undergo intense scrutiny during the election campaign.

The following three extracts exemplify media discourse centred around such *routine* predictions made by politicians as part of the ongoing election campaign. They instantiate what Andrew Hoskins (2007) refers to as 'media templates', or routine ways of interpreting, organizing, or narrativizing current news stories. Here, they rely heavily on linking past and future political actions into an 'extended present' of the election campaign and the political parties' building of rhetorical contrasts of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (see Van Dijk, 1992, 1997).

Extract 1

Today, 26.05.2001 (broadcast between 7–8 a.m.)

- PC = unidentified Political Correspondent
- 01 PC: Tony Blair's confident prediction that a re-elected Labour
 02 government could persuade the British people to join the Euro,
 03 has given William Hague the opening that he's been waiting for

In extract 1, the leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is attributed with a 'confident prediction' concerning future actions of the Labour government which is not yet in office, but whose future existence is presupposed for the prediction to be viable. In the correspondents' report the presupposed future, 'a re-elected Labour government' (lines 1–2), is nominalized, which provides an objectified state of (future) affairs, regardless of how it is going to be achieved, on whose responsibility, and so on. This reified assumption of winning the election becomes then a given which makes another prediction of another future action possible (persuading the British people to join the Euro). The Conservative Party is then reported (not transcribed here) as using the same 'confident prediction' as a way of galvanizing action against the Labour Party by campaigning to stop the second prediction from becoming a reality (of course, only by voting the Conservatives into office).

In the next extract, a similar negative other-characterization of the Labour Party by the Conservatives is reported. However, unlike in extract 1, the Tories are not reported to counter a Labour-generated prediction but instead themselves generate a news item framed as a 'leak', informing (or *warning*) the electorate about the possible future Labour government's inaction and favouring the interests of the European Union over Britain (see also Jaworski et al., 2004):

Extract 2

Today, 23.05.2001 (broadcast between 6–7 a.m.)

- PC = unidentified Political Correspondent
- 01 PC: . . . today what they're t- trying to .hhh bring in front of
 02 everyone's eyes is what they d- describe as a secret European
 03 Commission document which shows that the Commission fully
 04 intends .hhh to harmonise tax rates that's r- rates of VAT on .hhh
 05 even things such as zero-rated goods that we have at the moment
 06 >children's clothes newspapers food< as well as income tax .hhh and
 07 er the Labour g- government if re-elected would just roll over and
 08 play dead .hhh >in the face of the Commission's plans<

The chain of predictions reported in extract 2 appears to be even more complex than the two-tiered example cited in extract 1. The 'firm' prediction about the future is that of the European Commission intending to harmonize taxes across Europe. This claim is authenticated by the reference to a 'secret . . . document' (lines 2–3), which then becomes a safe platform for accusing the future Labour government of intended inaction (lines 7–8), and the subsequent, implied increase of VAT in Britain. However, the report seems to embody a Tory point of view on the future by referring to the *possible* Labour government in a conditional clause ('if re-elected', line 7) rather than a temporal one ('when re-elected'). Thus, the reported Tory viewpoint of the election outcome suggests that it continues to maintain faith in its unequivocal victory.

The above prediction (or 'leak') is framed by the BBC as a news item concerning the ongoing election campaign, although the media organization clearly dissociates itself from the propositional content of the prediction made therein through unambiguous allocation of agentivity in bringing out the story to the Conservative Party and the use of highly tentative reporting verbs 'what they're t- trying to bring' (line 1), and 'what they d- describe' (line 2). If the routine election prediction by the Conservatives embodies a probabilistic stance (Scollon and Scollon earlier), the media frame suggests a degree of distancing from it by adopting an agnostic stance.

Our last example demonstrating the reporting of routine predictions comes from the extract in which the *Today* programme sets its own reporting agenda for the day (see Ellis, 2002; Fitzgerald et al., in press; Jaworski et al., 2003b), or its 'issue of the day' (Garton et al., 1991), extract 3 contains a summary of the three main parties' election issues for that day:

Extract 3

Today, 22.05.2001 (broadcast between 6–7 a.m.)

- PC = unidentified Political Correspondent
- 01 PC: Labour's election campaign today is likely to focus on the issue
 02 of health. Tony Blair will promise that Labour would if
 03 returned to power set up a University of the National Health
 04 Service, to help medical staff acquire new qualifications .hhh
 05 and spend one hundred million pounds on providing h-

06 childcare for nurses, .hhh the Conservatives will set out their
 07 manifesto for pensioners, pledging to increase the basic state
 08 pension by more than the rate of inflation .hhh the Liberal
 09 Democrats will focus on their achievements in the Scottish
 10 Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, .hhh which they'll say
 11 show that the party can make a real difference in government

The future orientation of the parties' campaigning is conveyed by the near-synonymous reporting verbs 'promise' and 'pledge'. According to Searle (1969), one of the 'propositional content conditions' for a promise *p* is that '[i]n expressing that *p*, *S* [i.e. the speaker] predicates a future act *A* of *S*' (p. 57, italics in the original). In our example, we need to replace 'speaker' with 'principal' (Goffman, 1981), but the same condition of 'ascertaining the future' is present with the implied certainty of winning the election by the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. The Liberal Democrats are reported as extrapolating their future actions from the evidence of their past achievements, although their (realistic) expectation to win the election is not very high, which is signalled by the lower epistemic modality of the modal verb 'can' (rather than 'will') in 'the party can make a real difference in government' (line 11).

The temporal structure of routine predictions as those exemplified above is significant in that it involves at least a two-tier sequence: the taken-for-granted result of the election (the unlikely or undesirable win by the opposition versus the certain or desirable win of one's own party), and the unfolding political scenario beyond the election. In other words, in the case of the British Election Campaign in 2001, in the party political discourse of election predictions (as opposed to the media pundits' commentaries on the opinion polls, for example), we find little if any debating of the specific possibilities of winning or losing the election. That is uniformly presented as a certainty in one's own favour.

As has been mentioned, other things being equal, in the context of news, the certainty of a future event seems less newsworthy than its uncertainty. Thus, by insisting on the election results as 'certain', the two main political parties minimize the amount of any potentially damaging speculation about their ability to win the election, and can engage in the construal of positive self-presentation through the projection of their policies beyond this point in the future. In Scollon and Scollon's (2000) terms, their orientation to the future is strategically probabilistic or oracular in their own favour, and highly agentic by promising to bring about desirable changes in the future.

A non-routine prediction

Because routine predictions are a common feature of election campaigning, they do not attract much, if any, media meta-commentary. However, when the Conservative Party launched its 'strategy' of making a non-routine election prediction, which aimed not so much at increasing the Conservative vote but reducing the Labour vote (Butler and Kavanagh, 2002), the media took note and the prediction itself became the focus of attention.

On 31 May 2001, the former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher suggested in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph* that a Labour landslide in the upcoming election would result in an ‘elected dictatorship’. William Hague also raised the issue in a BBC interview on the evening of 31 May. These comments were reported on the late night BBC Radio 4 news programme *The World Tonight* (see extract 4). On the *Today* programme the next morning, this was the main story of the day (see extract 5).

Extract 4

The World Tonight, 31.05.2001 (broadcast between 10–11 p.m.)

NC = Nick Clarke
 01 NC: William Hague, dogged by his failure to secure a shift in the
 02 opinion polls, .hhh used a BBC interview to warn against
 03 another Labour landslide. .hhh he was working to get a
 04 Conservative majority. .hhh but he feared a repetition >of
 05 that Labour landslide, < .hhh and said it would be extremely
 06 dangerous for the country.

Extract 5

Today, 01.06.2001 (broadcast between 6–7 a.m.)

PD = Peter Donaldson, JB = Jonathan Beal
 01 PD: Baroness Thatcher has joined William Hague in warning of
 02 the danger of a Labour landslide at the General Election. (.)
 03 in a newspaper interview the former Prime Minister said a
 04 huge majority in the Commons .hhh would lead to an elected
 05 dictatorship. (.) in today’s campaigning the Conservatives
 06 will present their proposals for inner-city regeneration, .hhh
 07 while Labour and the Liberal Democrats plan to focus on
 08 public services. (.) from Westminster our political
 09 correspondent, Jonathan Beal.
 10 JB: William Hague told the BBC that it would be ba:d for
 11 Parliament and the country if Labour won another landslide
 12 .hhh it’s a view shared by Lady Thatcher who says she
 13 applauds strong government, .hhh but not one sustained by
 14 cronies, ciphers, and a personality cult

The news item reported in extract 4 gains newsworthiness on several counts. In terms of Galtung and Ruge’s (1999/1965) news values, the item is *unexpected* (the prediction is atypical – it forecasts the opponents’ rather than own victory), it is *unambiguous* (Labour’s victory is predicted unequivocally), and it is *negative* (Hague’s prediction is meta-pragmatically glossed as a ‘warning’, he himself is said to ‘fear’ ‘another Labour landslide’, the consequences of which could be ‘dangerous’). Such experientially negative vocabulary also dominates extract 5. The illocutionary force of Thatcher’s interview is reported as a ‘warning’, and the report engages in the overwording (Fairclough, 1989) in the semantic area antonymous to ‘democracy’, ‘elected dictatorship’, ‘cronies, ciphers, and a personality cult’.

Later in the day (1 June 2001), the Tory prediction remains headline news:

Extract 6

World at One, 01.06.2001 (Headlines at 1 p.m.)

- NC = Nick Clarke
- 01 NC: the political parties have all sought to dampen speculation
 02 about a possible Labour landslide victory. .hhh we'll hear
 03 how each party tries to argue the prospect away, the Liberal
 04 Democrats tell us why they expect to be the most effective
 05 opposition party. .hhh and I'll ask the Conservatives why
 06 they've chosen to focus on the possibility .hhh of being
 07 beaten out of sight.

In extract 6, Nick Clarke highlights the newsworthiness of the Hague/Thatcher prediction by setting it as the main agenda item for the lunchtime news programme. He announces commentaries on the issue from all the main parties although somewhat counterintuitively, he also signals that the matter poses a problem for *all* the parties, including Labour – the apparent beneficiaries of the prediction.

Before discussing the implications of the prediction, however, the programme deals with the motifs of the Tories' unexpected and apparently self-defeating move:

Extract 7

World at One, 01.06.2001 (Feature)

- NC = Nick Clarke
 MT = Margaret Thatcher
 R1, R2 = unidentified reporters
- 01 NC now the question is on the minds of all the political leaders
 02 today. .hhh a question none of them can afford to tackle head
 03 on, what would be the effect of a second Labour landslide.
 04 .hhh yesterday William Hague took the highly unusual step
 05 of speaking openly about the dangers as he sees them. .hhh of
 06 Tony Blair winning a hu:ge majority. (.) Baroness Thatcher
 07 has also warned of the dangers of what she calls an elected
 08 dictatorship. .hhh but while she was out campaigning in
 09 Romsey, in Hampshire, she spoke of (.) reducing Labour's
 10 majority .hhh and in a rather crowded and noisy butcher's
 11 shop, she hinted that overturning that mijo- majority might be
 12 too big a task too achie:ve in one go.

(Background 'shop' atmosphere; Thatcher's voice is relatively distant)

- 13 MT: there is a big Labour majority a:ready. (.) and we want to
 14 reduce it .hhh so we're warning people. (.) it does kind of
 15 become as I said it does kind of become .hhh an elected
 16 dictatorship. (.)
 17 R1: when you say reduce (.) reduce the majority that means
 18 they're still going to have a majority in your eyes (.)
 19 MT: I know full well that it's very difficult to get down from a

understood as part of the fixed repertoire of political rhetoric. In his 'Election 2001 Diary', the journalist Donald Macintyre (2001) reports on how during one of the press conferences at Conservative Central Office, he and other journalists anticipated, and even tried to provoke, the 'non-routine' prediction of the Labour landslide victory from William Hague early on in the election campaign:

More frustratingly, we try in vain to get Hague to say that another Labour landslide would be a disaster for the country. The danger for Hague, of course, is that this means admitting the possibility of defeat. But it was a tactic used, as we point out to him, with spectacular success by the Liberals in the 1995 Queensland state election.

The annoyance for us is that right at the end of the campaign he resorts to just that tactic. (Macintyre, 2001: 596)

Thus, what we call here a 'non-routine' prediction, is not a wholly atypical strategy adopted by some parties in election campaigns, which – without too much contradiction – allows us to call them 'routine non-routine predictions'. In terms of Scollon and Scollon's matrix of anticipatory discourse (see above), by producing one, the Tories continue to score highly on the oracular end of the knowledge axis (certain knowledge of the future), but by changing the proposition of their prediction ('another Labour landslide victory'), their highly agentive view of the future shifts from presenting themselves as the main agents of change to vesting the voting public with the power to shape the future: the 'elected dictatorship' of the new Labour government can only be prevented or reduced by the electorate's tactical voting or abstaining from voting altogether.

Building political capital in a new environment

Having established the certainty of the Tory prediction, and fixing its interpretation as the Tory incitement for a negative vote, the *World at One* programme seeks to gauge the three main parties' extrapolations of their positions from it. In this section, we examine further responses to the non-routine Tory prediction given by the leader of the Liberal Democrats Charles Kennedy, the leader of the Labour Party Tony Blair, and finally the leader of the Conservative Party William Hague. (Although broadcast on *World at One*, the interviews are ones recorded earlier that day, two explicitly located in morning press conferences.)

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS: UNSOUND PREDICTION AS OPPORTUNITY

During the early part of the election campaign, the Liberal Democrats' leader Charles Kennedy had already publicly conceded that his party were unlikely to win the forthcoming election (Butler and Kavanagh, 2002). Whilst seemingly similar to the Hague/Thatcher prediction, the difference was that the Liberal Democrats were proportionally the smallest of the three main parties with 46 members of Parliament compared to the Conservatives' 165, and Labour with 418. Thus, Kennedy can be seen here as continuing his line of 'realism' by not aiming to overturn the Labour majority, but by adopting the opportunity to re-define the aspiration of his party to become the first (even if not most populous) opposition force in the Parliament.

Extract 8*World at One*, continues from Extract 7

- 01 NC: once said however, it's hard to unsay.hhh and in a way
 02 Charles Kennedy of the Liberal Democrats .hhh has already
 03 acknowledged the same possibility .hhh by proposing a new
 04 role for his party (.) if it were to happen. he repeated his
 05 formula this morning.
- 06 CK: if there is a Labour majority (.) then that government needs
 07 an effective opposition. now it's quite clear (.) from what
 08 we're reading about the state of the Conservative Party, that
 09 it's not going to come from the Conservative Party, it's
 10 preparing .hhh for a very different battle (.) which will
 11 commence, (.) in one week's time. .hhh we will not (.) touch
 12 wood .hhh uh have those difficulties internally to: .hhh
 13 grapple with, .hhh and therefore we're in a position to
 14 provide that so- (.) irrespective of what the numbers are .hhh
 15 if there's a second term majority Labour government, (.)
 16 Parliament and the country (.) needs (.) a disciplined,
 17 vigorous, opposition. .hhh and I think we're better placed to
 18 provide it than the Tories possibly can even begin to be .hhh
 19 next week.
- 20 NC: .hhh Charles Kennedy. his strategy then is to put in people's
 21 minds the idea that his party's all that stands between the
 22 nation and four years of single party domination of the
 23 political scene, .hhh (.) but to do so without being too
 24 negative about the Lib Dems' own prospects.

Principally, Kennedy's turn consists of roughly the same response to Nick Clarke's question repeated twice, though with some variation (compare lines 6–14 and lines 15–19). This repetition gives the impression that the position of power he claims for his party is greater than the sum of the arguments he can offer, and it also works persuasively in terms of what Tannen (1989: 51) calls after Koch (1983) 'presentation as proof', ratifying one speaker's ideas by linking them to another's – here Kennedy's own. Or, he may just want to keep the floor to himself for longer even though he seems not to have anything new to say on the topic, or to prevent the interviewer from asking another question (see Jucker, 1986). Furthermore, through the repetition and over-lexicalization of the positive attributes of his party in opposition as 'effective', 'disciplined' and 'vigorous', Kennedy establishes and reinforces the position of the Liberal Democrats as the second force in the Parliament, even if not numerically so.

Kennedy does not demonize Labour in the same way the Tories do. Rather, he aligns his party with Labour and builds his political capital (Bourdieu, 1991) by claiming the constructive role the Liberal Democrats will play in the democratic process of the next Parliament ('if there is a Labour majority (.) then (.) that government needs an effective opposition. '; lines 6–7). At the same time, Kennedy takes high moral ground vis-à-vis the Tories as unviable election rivals contrasting his party's strength and unity with the Tory Party being in disarray,

and unwilling to play their ‘numbers game’ (‘irrespective of what the numbers are’, line 14).

Throughout his turn, Kennedy uses a mixture of intensifiers, for example, ‘it’s quite clear’ (line 7), ‘even’ (line 18), hedges, for example, ‘touch wood’ (lines 11–12), ‘I think’ (line 17), as well as a couple of subtle hesitations and false starts (lines 12, 14), which arguably positions him as a decisive but balanced and level-headed politician. His confidence is further underscored by claiming knowledge of the current situation within the Conservative Party facing internal power struggle (lines 7–10), and the resulting high deontic modality about what ought to happen (e.g. ‘that government needs an effective opposition.’; lines 6–7), and epistemic modality about what will happen (e.g. Conservatives’ internal battle and Liberal Democrats’ readiness for work as effective opposition) within the clearly defined time-frame of ‘next week’.

Kennedy can be seen here as playing a fine-grained political game trying to establish for himself and his party an optimal position between the two stronger parties. Fairclough (2003) cites Laclau and Mouffe (1985), who ‘theorize the political process (and “hegemony”) in terms of the simultaneous working of two different “logics”, a logic of “difference” which creates differences and divisions, and a logic of “equivalence” which subverts existing differences and divisions’ (Fairclough, 2003: 100). It appears then that Kennedy applies the logic of equivalence to align the Liberal Democrats with the Labour Party in building the joint programme for the democratic process, while applying the logic of difference to disassociate his party from the weak and ineffective Tories.

LABOUR: ‘THIS POLL HAS NOT HAPPENED YET’

In the transition between the Kennedy and Blair segments, Clarke reveals his tactic of questioning Tony Blair (at a press conference recorded earlier) about the Hague/Thatcher comments as ‘oblique’: ‘and all this poses uh (unclear) for Labour too .hhh talk of landslides tends to make people stay at home, (.) a- as Mr. Blair well knows .hhh so I tried to tempt him with an oblique approach.’ As is evidenced by his question reproduced at the start of the next extract (lines 1–6), Clarke’s obliqueness moves away from the Tories’ admission of impending defeat and the implication of the vast majority to be achieved by Labour, to the question of how Labour would actually handle its vast majority. In other words, the newsworthiness of Clarke’s questioning shifts from the certainty of the Labour decisive win to the more speculative issues of the future actions of the Labour government.

Extract 9

World at One, continues from Extract 8

- 01 NC: uh: >thank you Nick Clarke World at One< um: (.) would
 02 you regard the: size of any majority you might achieve as: (.)
 03 offering you a bigger or a lesser mandate to undertake what
 04 you describe as radical reforms, in other words .hhh is the
 05 size of the majority to do with the scale of the reforms you
 06 think you’d be able to undertake. (1.0)

- 07 TB: I want to make one thing really (.) clear at the outset, .hhh
 08 this poll has not happened yet (.) we have no majority .hhh
 09 the election (.) has not happened (.) the election happens next
 10 Thursday .hhh (.) and .hhh ee- we: have the extraordinary
 11 situation >of course this is the Conservative strategy.< (.) this
 12 is the latest part of the Conservative strategy. .hhh and we
 13 have the extraordinary spectacle of a Conservative Party and
 14 a Conservative leader, .hhh either asking people not to vote
 15 (.) or to vote Conservative not because they have anything to
 16 offer .hhh on the economy, or schools and hospitals .hhh (.)
 17 but in order (.) to reduce a so-called Labour majority in an
 18 election that hasn't even happened (.) every vote (.) for the
 19 Conservatives (.) is a vote for cutting investment in public
 20 services by twenty billion pounds, .hhh every failure to vote
 21 (.) helps that Conservative vote, .hhh and if people in this
 22 country want the investment, (.) on the basis of a strong
 23 economy, going in to our schools and hospitals, (.) then
 24 they have to come out and vote for it
 25 NC: Tony Blair trying to get the vote out (.) but what about the
 26 Conservatives? who started the whole thing off .hhh William
 27 Hague has set himself the complex and delicate task of
 28 warning about something .hhh which he insists is not going
 29 to happen.

Inevitably, Tony Blair cannot dissociate Clarke's question from the negative campaigning of the Tories predicting a landslide victory for Labour, and he adopts a position which attempts to block any discussion of this possible future. He opens his response with a flat refusal to accept talk of something which 'has not happened yet' (line 8). Then Blair shifts the temporal focus from the post-election future to the present: 'we have no majority .hhh the election (.) has not happened (.) the election happens next Thursday' (lines 8–10). Thus, whilst at other times Blair engages in making confident statements about Labour's success in the post-election future (see extract 1), it is only viable for him to do so in parallel to similar tactics adopted by his main opponents. The shift in the Tory campaigning focus from positive self-presentation to negative Labour presentation in the post-election future necessitates Labour's change of stance from certainty to uncertainty of the future.

CONSERVATIVES: JUST A ROUTINE PREDICTION

Finally, as part of the same report, Clarke turns to the Conservative Party leader to account for his prediction made the day before:

Extract 10

World at One continues from Extract 9

- 01 NC: uh: Nick Clarke World at One (.) w- what made you deci:de
 02 yesterday to concede for the first time that you might come a
 03 distant second so explicitly. [Hague starts chuckling] a:nd
 04 how do you answer the Labour charge that what you seem to

05 be doing is saying to people .hhh it's better not to vote at a:ll
 06 than to vote Labour and invite all these horrors you've (.) laid
 07 out this morning?=
 08 WH: ('smiley' voice throughout) =uh nobody who's listened to
 09 what I've said could think I said either of those things .hhh
 10 uh I: repeated very uh: clearly yesterday .hhh that the: that
 11 the Conservative campaign is going very well, (.) that we're
 12 extremely upbeat about it, .hhh and that we are working for a
 13 Conservative (.) majority. .hhh yes we point out the dangers
 14 of an arrogant (.) government, of course we do we've had an
 15 arrogant government for the last four years. .hhh and of
 16 course .hhh we point out the dangers of a government of spin
 17 and arrogance at the sidelining of .hhh of Parliament I feel
 18 that is in: grained in the Labour Party now .hhh whatever
 19 majority they were to win in the election if they were to win
 20 the election, of course we have to point that out.

Confronted by Clarke about his non-routine prediction, William Hague engages in a major, political 'u-turn', that is, he simply denies conceding defeat to Labour and restores the unmarked stance of 'working for a Conservative (.) majority' (line 12–13). In his attempt to normalize the earlier prediction, Hague engages in more temporal manipulation by shifting the focus of his comments from what the future under a strong Labour government will be like (see extract 5), to what it has been like for the past four years (lines 14–18). Therefore, he seems to re-label the force of his earlier claims from a future-focused 'warning' to a past-focused 'assessment'.

Conclusion: future, discourse, performativity and power

According to Fraser (1975), futurity may be the earliest level of human sense of time, and also the most manifest level of temporality in the higher animals. In the evolutionary development of organisms, goal directedness may be the basic, instinctual biotemporal activity in the sense of, for example, making provision for anticipated environmental changes. This includes many organisms with no recognizable trace of any but very short-term memory, which do, nonetheless, instinctively, provide for anticipated distant necessities, even if only for periodically predictable events. In children, the earliest temporally developing ideas are not memories but expectations, and references to the future are said to be grasped earlier than references to the past. Fraser also cites John Cohen (1964), whose survey of the history of divination lists over 100 methods of fortune telling, which attests to the human fascination with and need for 'knowing' their future.

The conceptions of the future, and degree to which it can be scrutinized and controlled have varied over time (see Glasser, 1972). In the European tradition, in Early Medieval France, the future was not known and foreseeable. The only way to stabilize and tame it was to bring one's own will and intention to bear. The link between the present and the future was thus established through willing and acting *now*, so that one would continue to do so in the future. In the

late Middle Ages, approaching the Renaissance, when Europe was witnessing increased progress in scientific discovery, and especially in the medical science, where foreseeing the course of a disease as far as possible was paramount to the success of a diagnosis, the desire to influence and shape the future in the present became a powerful social force. Although still dominated by the strong fatalism of Christianity, individuals began to struggle with the unpredictable and unforeseen forces in their lives, bringing poverty, misery, sickness, death, etc., shifting their concerns to achieving prosperity and longevity. The renewed interest in controlling the future came in the 19th century, marked again by rapid new developments in science and technology, creating new rational sensibilities.

Risk was excluded, death lost its terrors, statistics clothed the menacing and the incomprehensible in indifferent language, insurance companies calmed their clients' fears of the contingencies that might befall them, so that the future did in fact take on the quality of the present, albeit in a somewhat vague and colourless way. (Glasser, 1972: 288)

Parliamentary elections are *prima facie* goal-directed, anticipated events routinized through the use of media templates (Hoskins, 2007) which typically involve orientations to future plans, pledges and promises, often based on the 'evidence' of one's own or the opponents' past actions. Through their construction of the accounts of the past (see Blommaert, 2005) as well as references to the future, politicians (and the reporting journalists) create strategically their preferred versions of the present in a succession of looped, cyclical media events. Consistency is not a highly valued currency. By claiming the future as known or unknown, and controllable or uncontrollable, politicians may shift their positions with regard to the 'extended present'. As Nowotny (1994: 58) states '[t]he future, [. . .] separable from the present by a fluid dividing line, admittedly promises the wealth of all possibilities and contingencies, but only a limited range of these possibilities can become present reality'. Election campaigning, alongside other genres of political discourse, appears to define and limit the future possibilities for the present moment. These are truly performative acts (Austin, 1961; Butler, 1990) through which social actors make knowledge-based claims to power (Foucault, 1980).

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION

[overlapping speech
.	falling intonation
,	fall-rise intonation
?	rising intonation

(.)	brief pause under 1 second
<u>word</u>	emphasis
.hhh	hearable in-breath
>word<	increased pace
(comment)	additional information about the extract

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