

TENSION AND CONFLICT IN THE LABOUR DISCOURSE COMMUNITY Labour Prime Ministers' Speeches to the TUC¹ (1969-2008)

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Abstract – Trade Unions have been the most important constituency of the British Labour Party since 1900. The relationship between the party and workers' organizations has undergone deep changes, resulting in the open confrontation that characterised the years of the latest Labour governments (1997-2010). Labour Prime Ministers' speeches to the annual conference of the Trade Union Congress form a genre on their own as they are addressed to a distinctive discourse community and respond to specific purposes (Swales 1990). They are institutionalised ways of acting semiotically (Fairclough 2003, 2006), thus aspects of the social practice of governing. This article provides a critical genre analysis of speeches by Labour Prime Ministers to the TUC from 1969 to 2007 to reveal the frictions inside the Labour discourse community.

Keywords: Great Britain; genre analysis; discourse analysis; trade unions; Labour Party.

1. Introduction

Genre analysis has had paramount importance in the field of English For Specific Purposes (ESP) as a pedagogical tool. Within CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), genre is conceived of as a standardised, more or less flexible, way of acting semiotically (Fairclough 2003), and analysed in the articulation of the order of discourse as one of the semiotic moments of a social practice (Fairclough 2006). This derives in part from Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), where genres are studied as culturally and historically specific semiotic resources for doing communicative things (Van Leeuwen 2005) which change according to changes in society.

This article uses the tools developed in ESP for the study of genre and, according to the tradition of CDA, applies them to a particular relation of power, namely that between supposedly labour-friendly governments and the trade union movement. The article tracks the changing relationship between British Labour governments and the trade unions by treating the two organizations as a single discourse community (Swales 1990).

The first part of the article defends the view that trade unions and the Labour Party form a single discourse community by framing the discussion in relation to Swales's (1990) classic model. I set the discussion in the context of the changing economic and political landscape - from a Fordist to a post-Fordist mode of production and from a Keynesian Welfare National State to a Schumpeterian Competition State. The second part of the article presents an analysis of two features that characterise the genre, namely the use of intertextual references and the use of personal pronouns and adjectives. I argue that

¹ Trades Union Congress.

the first stage of the analysis, the use of intertextual references, highlights the most sensitive barometers signalling the shifts in the relationship between British Labour Governments and Trade Unions, as the representatives of the party shift from a frequent reference to union-party documents to a prevalence of references to texts authored outside the discourse community.

2. The political arm of the Labour Movement: genesis of the discourse community

The genesis of the discourse community under analysis is quite peculiar in the European context. The British Labour Party was founded as the political arm of the trade unions in 1900. In most European countries the process was the reverse, where socialist parties established and organised the labour movement. The first embryo of the Labour party was the Labour Representation Committee, established in February 1900, and it served as a steering committee for the small parties on the left of the political spectrum. It was only in 1906 that the Labour Party was officially created. Since then, trade unions have been the backbone of the party in financial terms as well as in terms of the provision of activists inside and outside the party. Moreover, unions provided the great majority of votes to the Labour Party at least until 1990 (Minkin 1991: 663).

When in government, the party was expected to produce worker-friendly policies. In different moments of its history, the interests, ideologies and practices of the two components of the labour movement have diverged quite significantly. When in opposition, the Party “could hide some of its differences behind ambiguous formulae, but the point of divergence became clear when it moved into Government”. (Minkin 1991: 112).

The years from 1969 to 2007 have seen seven Labour governments, three before the watershed of the Thatcher years and four after that. The old ones, led by Harold Wilson and James Callaghan operated in the context of a crisis of accumulation in the capitalist system and the subsequent crisis of the Fordist mode of production (Jessop 2002, Harvey 2005), to which the British governments answered with a corporatist policy (Harvey 2005). For trade unions this meant that they were invited to work with the government as *estates of the realm*, consulted on matters of economic and industrial policies, but in return agreed to limit their activity in the economic sphere in exchange for services granted to the workforce through the state apparatus. Such an exchange - industrial peace for participation in the policy making process - is normally referred to as Social Contract, which was symbolically broken in 1978 when a period of tough confrontation between trade unions and the government, known as the Winter of Discontent, broke out.

The New Labour governments, which took office for the first time after 11 years of conservative rule in 1997, found a totally different economic and international situation. The neoliberal credo, with its unlimited faith in the capacity of free markets to work efficiently and consequent need for deregulation (Harvey 2005), changed the role of governments in the economy. Thus, the idea of a new relationship between the political arm and the industrial arm, which had been taking shape during the years in opposition, was first tested in 1997. The document which replaced the social contract during New Labour rule was the Warwick Agreement, signed by trade union officials and party leaders in 2004. The meetings that produced the agreement were mostly sponsored by the unions which had started to criticise New Labour for not delivering the policies they deemed

necessary for the well-being of working people. The agreement was the result of the renewed activity of a body which had been created in 1994, at the moment of the birth of the “New Labour Party”, the Trade Union Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO), a committee where unions and the party were to coordinate their policies. Warwick was also important because at a moment of disillusionment of union members with the Labour government, it granted union support for the 2005 general election campaign, the third, and last, election won by Tony Blair as leader of the party.

3. Corpus

The corpus is made up of all the speeches given by Labour prime ministers to the TUC annual conferences. This does not happen every year so the number of speeches is smaller than the number of years in power. The addresses are the ones given by Harold Wilson at the end of his first term in office in 1969, and at the beginning of his second term, in 1974. The last two addresses of the pre-Thatcher years are the ones delivered by James Callaghan in 1977 and in 1978. Tony Blair's addresses were in 1997, 1999, 2002, and 2006. The last address is the one given by Gordon Brown in 2007. The total number of words included in the corpus is 46,381, evenly divided between the nine speeches. On two occasions the genre was abandoned or changed: in 2001 no address was delivered because of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, which took place on the second day of the conference, while in 2006 the address was accompanied by a question and answer session.

4. Prime Ministerial Speeches to TUC Conferences: Assessing the Social and Textual Aspects of the Genre

Bhatia (2008, 2004) highlights two different directions which genre analysis normally takes: (a) from the social context to the text, which sometimes risks leaving textual characteristics unnoticed, and (b) from the text to the social context, which may ignore important aspects of the context in which the text takes place, together with the socio-historical aspects that always influence the performance. In order to see “the whole of the elephant” (Bhatia 2004: 156) the two directions need to be put together. This is possible thanks to the method of triangulation, which in CDA has been interpreted as continuous movement between four different layers of context (Wodak & Mayer 2001), thus necessitating a constant comparison between the findings on one level with those on the others.

The four layers of context in this case are the economic landscape and its articulation in the discourse of neoliberalism at the global level, while at the local level it is defined by the socio-historical changes in British society and by the events that characterise the 50 years of history under analysis here and, finally, the restricted discourse community in which texts - as “semiotic moments of social events” (Fairclough 2006: 30) – are produced. I gave a description of the first two layers in section 2 above and now I will move into the realm of the discourse community and the texts taken into consideration.

Swales's classic definition of genre is particularly useful:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some sets of *communicative purposes*. These purposes are *recognized by the expert members of the parent*

discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale of the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and *influences and constrains choice of content and style*. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, *exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style content and intended audience*. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as as prototypical by the parent discourse community.

Swales (1990: 58) [emphasis added]

Thus, a discourse community is a *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of a genre. According to Swales (1990) there are six main factors that characterise a discourse community:

- Broadly agreed set of common public goals;
- Mechanisms of intercommunication;
- Participatory mechanisms;
- One or more genres;
- Specific lexis;
- Threshold level of members with content and discursive expertise

4.1 The Labour discourse community

How does the hypothesized Labour discourse community meet this definition?

By looking at the genesis of the party, described above, we can say that the common public goal of the Labour discourse community is the furtherance and defence of the rights of working people. For the Labour discourse community has many sources of information and feedback in order to enable members to participate in its decisions. There has always been some kind of liaison committee which worked for the electoral campaigns, and where the political and the industrial arm were equally represented, such as the TULO in the present days, the mechanism is also active at local level and the two levels communicate through newsletters and a website but also through personal communication.

In order to pursue its goal the Labour discourse community has also developed different genres that correspond to the different activities that have a discursive aspect. Apart from the genre which is the focus of the present research, genres such as common policy documents and even the manifestoes for elections, can be seen as the fruit of the cooperation of trade unions and constituency members.

There is also a specific lexis that belongs to the discourse community of labour in its binary composition. For example, only the activists can immediately recognise the acronyms which refer to the different committees and bodies inside the organisation as well as short names for policy documents. Other lexical items that constitute the specific vocabulary of the community are a mix of political and economic discourse, which reflects the double soul of the organisation.

Finally, it takes a long time before newcomers become able to manage the different discourses and generic resources that belong to the discourse community. Thus, for Labour it is also true that different layers of membership, according to the expertise of the individual in both the content and the discursive aspects of the practice, can be found.

4.2 Generic features

Purpose is the most important characteristic of genre; it puts together the social and the descriptive aspect in genre analysis. Indeed genres take the form that they do because they are forged in order to perform a communicative action. This means that through the analysis of the regularities in the organisation of texts that belong to a same genre we can gain some sense of the purpose for which it was developed inside the discourse community. Party speeches, the colony (Bhatia 2004) in which the genre belongs, always have multiple purposes, and Prime Ministerial Addresses to the TUC are no exception to this rule. From an analysis of the speeches and of the context in which they occur, I maintain that the following purposes can be highlighted:

- Creating party internal consent;
- Creating and reinforcing a sense of common belonging;
- Assessing past action in terms of their coherence with the general goals;
- Gathering support for new policies.

The goals are pursued through stages (Van Leeuwen 2005, Martin and Rose 2003: 9) that are described below, but there is also an overarching goal that is performed throughout the texts which is that of shaping public opinion, as the speeches are reported in the mainstream media.

The speeches always have an introduction with salutation to the Congress or particular members inside it, and a valediction in which prime ministers always place their explicit request for support for policies, for the party, or for the government in general. These two are the stages in which individuals can perform an appropriation of the genre² (Bhatia 2004, Fairclough 2003) without risking a modification of the conventions that could make the utterance non-prototypical in the eyes of the parent discourse community.

The stages between the salutation and valediction are:

- interpretation of recent past;
- reinforcement of communal values;
- description of policy measures.

In the texts which make up the corpus, the three intermediate stages are always performed by returning to the same themes. The stage *interpretation of the past* changes according to whether the government preceding the speech was a Conservative or a Labour one. In the last case the stage is performed through a reference to the policy documents put in place by the government that are assessed according to their effectiveness in achieving the common goals. The *reinforcement of communal values* is normally performed through reference to common history, explicit statements about the union-party relationship and some reference to international issues. The third stage is normally performed through the description of the policies proposed for the future again as consistent with the common goal. Such strategy smoothens the passage from this stage to the final one dedicated to *valediction-demand for support*.

The 'static' aspects described so far, together with the fact that, according to Swales's definition, the community made up by TUC trade unions and the Labour Party is indeed a discourse community, allow us to use the 'episodes' in which such aspects are shaken to track the modifications of the values and practices of the discourse community.

² In the corpus, this happens especially with Tony Blair's addresses in which he hybridises the genre with poems and jokes in the salutation.

As Berkencotter and Huckin maintain, genres are “sites of contention between stability and change” (Berkencotter and Huckin 1995: 6), and the balance between stability and change depends on the balance of the forces to which they are constantly subject. In our case such forces start with the very general level of the organization of the productive system, and the place that the two components of the discourse community play in it, to get to the very specific history of their reciprocal relationship. Or as Bhatia puts it: genres are “reflections of disciplinary and organisational cultures” (Bhatia 2004: 23), thus instances of change in genres can be taken as signs of the evolution of the discourse community and its practices. The following section presents and analyses these changes, arguing that instances of intertextuality and the use of pronouns made in the text are signals of a contentious alliance.

5. Signs of a 'contentious alliance'

The following two sections present the linguistic analysis of the texts in the corpus according to the two features presented in the introduction, namely intertextual references and the use of personal pronouns. The changes through history of such features of the genre are considered clear signs of the ‘contentious alliance’ between the two components of the discourse community.

5.1 Intertextuality

The recourse to intertextuality in the speeches analysed has a double value. Some characteristics of texts external to the event which are brought in by the speakers are signs of generic integrity (Bhatia 2004: 127), while others can be considered signs of change in the practices of the labour discourse community. Among the instances of intertextuality that could be found in the texts, the category I shall give most attention to that of the texts explicitly referred to in the speeches by their title. In all instances found in the texts such documents are simply evoked and I consider this fact in itself a signal of a continuity in the practices of the discourse community in which knowledge of such documents can be taken for granted by all members taking part in the discursive event. As Fairclough states, intertextuality can be interpreted as “how texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts” (Fairclough 2003: 17). The dialogic aspect is the most important at this stage because this is where the differences in the development of the discourse community start to be visible. Who the authors of the texts brought into the prime ministerial speeches are, is important to understand with whom the speakers deem it important to be in a dialogue.

In other words, quoting a party-union joint document as 'Old Labour' leaders such as Wilson and Callaghan do, is very different from making reference to voters' letters or documents produced by the European Parliament, or by the government alone, as the two masterminds of 'New Labour', Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, do in their speeches.

The evolution is clearer if we look at it historically, starting from Wilson's speech in 1969. On the one hand, Wilson refers to union-party joint documents on pay restraint with the TUC, but on the other hand also to the White Paper *In Place of Strife*, a first attempt at a social contract, authored by Barbara Castle, the secretary of state for employment from 1967 to 1970.

In 1974 the document quoted is the *Social Contract*, signed by the representatives of the political and the industrial arm of the labour movement and implemented for the

two first phases of the planned wage restraint. The same is true for James Callaghan's speech in 1977, where the intertextual reference is to a joint policy document: *The Next Three Years and Into the Eighties*. Callaghan repeated the same strategy in his 1978 address, referring to *Into the Eighties, An Agreement*, the new policy document authored by the liaison committee in July.

The use of common documents in the seventies is a clear signal of the economic doctrine which was prevailing at the time in response to the crisis of Atlantic Fordism (Jessop 2002, Harvey 2005); a corporatist policy which was common in European social-democratic governments (Harvey 2005: 13).

The situation had changed radically by the time Labour returned to government in 1997. The Thatcher years had deregulated and privatised many public assets thus reducing, among other things, the number of workers employed by the state and the possibility for the governments of granting any social wage, i.e. the services such as the National Health Service, the schools, unemployment benefit and other benefits provided by the state.

Such a shift is signalled by the authorship of the documents that are taken as sources of authority and quoted in the speeches. Tony Blair in 1997 used the election Manifesto, the white paper *Fairness at work*³, and the *Social Chapter* (a funding document of the European Union). The same document was referred to again in 1999, together with another EU document, the *Working Time Directive*.

The routine of official documents citation was broken by Blair in the same speech when he referred to the letters he had received from Labour voters, again used as a source of authority. Blair's leadership of the Labour Party was characterised by the attempt to dilute trade union membership in the party by encouraging non trade union individuals to join.

After one year of voluntary absence and the events of September 2001, Blair addressed the TUC conference again in 2002. The intertextual elements in this occasion are limited to the only government document on industrial policy which had been approved in the meantime, the 1999 *Employment Act*.

The relationship kept worsening. Indeed Tony Blair did not participate in the conferences of the following four years. When he went back to speak to the TUC conference in 2006, Blair did it in the role of an outgoing Prime Minister. On such occasion he referred mostly to his own address of 2002. By 2006 the unions had become disillusioned with the idea of the 'friendly government' and before the 2005 elections they had managed to force the party, with a veiled menace of withdrawal of their support in the electoral competition, to a common table convened in order to design the economic policies for the new Labour government. The document that sparked from such table was the *Warwick Agreement*, referred to by Blair in 2006. The reference deserves to be quoted here. Blair says "As part of the Warwick Agreement, as you know, we have introduced the Gangmasters' Licensing Act ...", thus the common document is used as a harbinger for a government document to which is the real source of authority in the sentence. Brown in 2007 refers again to the Warwick Agreement, in the following terms: "Thanks to your campaigning and the Warwick Agreement this will be in addition to bank holidays." This gives the common document a more proactive role by making it, together with union campaigning, the source of change. This is also a sign of the peculiar attitude demonstrated by Gordon Brown at the beginning of his mandate which was that of recovering the historical compact with the unions while going on with neoliberal policies,

³ See Ortu (2008) for an analysis of the two documents.

summarized by journalist Seumas Milne as “Rhetoric and Reality” (see Ortu 2009 for a more complete account).

5.2 The use of pronouns

This section highlights the most evident aspects of change, focussing mostly on the use of pronouns which help us to understand how the relationship between the two components in the discourse community has changed from being a *comradeship* (Wilson 1969), to a *partnership* (Blair 1997). The difference between the two is clear at first sight, being comradeship a noun with strong political connotations that point towards the worldwide socialist tradition, where women and men belonging to the party and the trade unions would call each other “comrade”. On the other hand the noun partnership has a more neutral political connotation and is more frequent in business discourse. The first examples come from Harold Wilson's speech of 1969.

- 1) Your invitation to me to be here today is my opportunity to give you a progress report on the first five years' fulfilment of what we agreed together ...

In (1) the use of pronouns construes two different entities, but Wilson construes the relationship as deriving from some mandate, for which the 'mandatary' has to report to the party issuing the mandate, thus giving to the trade unions a prominent role in the relationship. Further on he says:

- 2) It is a mark of the maturity, the influence of the trade union Movement in our democracy that no Government could proceed [...] except on the basis of consultation with the organized trade union movement. It is still more a mark of the common purpose of the Labour Movement as a whole, that no Labour Government would want to.

In the first part of (2) Wilson recognises the influence of organised labour and the need for every government to consult it when decisions of industrial policy have to be taken, but he goes further to say that Labour Governments do not do it out of necessity, but out of conviction.

The concept of *labour movement* is fundamental for an understanding of the relationship of the two components of the labour discourse community. According to Minkin (1991) the idea of a labour movement was both functional and coherent with the idea of the two arms, the political and the industrial, as well as with the furtherance of common goals.

In this view the relationship was defined in terms of a common loyalty and a deeply felt commitment to a wider entity and purpose – the Labour Movement. This 'movement' is both a description and an aspiration. At its most inclusive, the description involved a triple series of institutions created by the workers to represent their interests as producers, consumers and political citizens. Each grew and gained their own victories and achievements in different spheres but they shared a common purpose and engagement in a common struggle. (Minkin 1991: 4).

The movement was still an ideal, present in the discourse of governments on trade unions, as confirmed by the following example taken from the same address:

- 3) ... that compact we made together at the Blackpool Congress [...] was based on the pledges I gave you on behalf of the political movement

In (3) the reference to the political movement implies the reference to the same ideal in

which the labour movement was conceived; as the union of the political and industrial movements, which is construed by the use of the inclusive *we* at the beginning of the sentence. On the other hand the use of *you* in the second part of the sentence, even if still framed inside a unitary conception, is a tool used to draw a distinction between the two arms of the movement.

The last example that comes from the address of 1969 continues with the idea of a unified community in which the labour movement is seen as a whole:

- 4) ...for every one of us realises what it means for this movement, for all the millions we represent

The use of the first person plural is inclusive of both the political and the industrial movement, those who are represented are clearly workers, but they are represented by the unity of the movement and not only by a part of it.

The 1970s were the years of the social contract, which, in the following examples from the 1974 speech, is referred to with a possessive pronoun and attributed to the will of both components of the labour movement. The construal of the relationship as a permeation of two bodies that act together goes on in (5), (6) and (7), through the use of the possessive adjective *our* and the inclusive *we*.

- 5) Our social contract was promulgated by the governing bodies of the TUC and the Labour Party in a joint statement on February 28, 1973.
 6) ... we are all members one of another
 7) ... battles and ideals which have inspired our movement throughout our history

Number (6) in particular makes explicit the idea of permeation, by clarifying that membership to the labour movement is something that the industrial and the political arm share.

The social contract was under stress when James Callaghan took office in 1976. Trade unions had reluctantly renounced free collective bargaining in order to help the government reduce inflation, but the grassroots in the trade unions started to organise resistance to the scheme as they felt the government was not living up to its promises of compensation for the losses in earnings. Inflation peaked in 1975 and by 1976 the social contract had reduced average increases in earnings from 27.6% in 1975 to 13.9% in 1976.

The tensions between the government and the trade unions are signalled by the linguistic choices made by the Prime Minister in his 1977 speech, through which distance is created between the two sides of the movement.

- 8) ... whatever happens this week in your deliberations here there will be no lessening of the need for the closest co-operation between the trade union Movement and a Labour Government.

In (8) Callaghan seems to be aware that a decision to abandon statutory wage policies to go back to free collective bargaining, had already been taken, but he still calls trade unions to co-operate with the government. The idea of cooperation is construed as a need, not as something which intrinsically belongs to a Labour government as it was in Wilson's words in (2).

- 9) As I say, I would have liked a third year but, all right, I am told it is not on. But other things won't be on, either. This is I think the situation that the Movement as a whole has got to discuss. We believed—I still believe—that despite all the difficulties a combination of

moderate earnings increases and reduced taxation is the best way to safeguard the interests of your members. I dare say some of your members do not believe it.

In (9) Callaghan still refers to the movement as a whole meaning trade unions and the party, but he starts to linguistically construe two separate groups by referring to trade union members as *your members*. The distinction continues in (10), (11) and (12).

- 10) This that you asked for and which we agreed ...
- 11) You have your responsibilities ...
- 12) We shall seek to meet your needs ...
- 13) I need your help and I trust that the Labour Movement as a whole will get it and we shall be able to go forward together.

By construing a division between trade unions and the government Callaghan also characterises the role of the two entities in the power relationship that is thus created. In (10) trade unions are put in a subordinate position, reduced to *asking for* something, a position which is then reinforced by the fact that the party has agreed, implying it is the party's prerogative to decide whether to agree or not. The government is also construed as being in the position to meet the trade union's needs in (12), the idea put forth linguistically is that of a powerful agent that evaluates the requests that come from a lower level in the pyramid of power.

The idea expressed in 1977 is reinforced by Callaghan in 1978, on the eve of the *Winter of Discontent*. The mood in the relationship is expressed quite clearly in (14). The idea of two agents, with only one with the power to decide, could only be read between the lines in 1977, but is expressed bluntly here through the use of an exclusive *we* that refers to the government alone, as well as the possessive adjective.

- 14) We have stated our conclusions. You know our views. We shall not depart from them ...

Only when referring to common documents such as *Into the Eighties, an Agreement* does Callaghan go back to the use of the inclusive *we*, and consequently the possessive adjective *our* that includes both parts of the labour movement as in (15), (16) and (17).

- 15) Into the Eighties — An agreement. It is a statement among other things about Britain's industrial future that has been drawn up by the Liaison Committee of the Trades Union Congress, and the Labour Party. It sets out our objectives and outlines our policies.
- 16) I come here today once more to ask for your support for this policy. There is no dispute between us on the objectives. Our jointly agreed document "Into the Eighties" truly states that inflation destroys the value of earnings.
- 17) The document — your document, my document — goes on to resolve that reducing the rate of inflation will continue to be a vital objective.

The document was indeed a common document as it had been elaborated by the TUC-Labour liaison committee, thus Callaghan's choices were limited for what the use of personal and possessive pronouns is concerned.

- 18) By our joint efforts — because we did work together in a very considerable way — we went a good deal of the way to achieve this during 1978.

In (18) Callaghan talks about pay policy, and recognises that trade unions, managed, in a regime of free collective bargaining, to voluntarily keep the increase in salaries under a certain percentage. He construes it as a joint effort by unions and the government to tackle

inflation by referring to 'our joint efforts'. Nonetheless the whole speech is quite clearly the end of the corporatist response to the crisis of Fordism and the Keynesian Welfare National State⁴, as a clear distinction between the role of the government and that of trade unions is construed in the text together with an idea of national or general interest – which is the objective of the government - that does not correspond to the interest of working people.

A triumphant Tony Blair opened, in 1997, the first speech of a prime minister to the TUC after 18 years. His honeymoon with the trade unions would not last long, but in September 1997 he was hailed by many as the man who brought Labour back to government.

The construal of the party-union relationship starts when he thanks the unions for helping the party in the electoral campaign in (19).

- 19) Thank you in the trade union movement for helping us in the task

The use of pronouns is very clear, there is a *you* and an *us* and simply a helping hand given by unions in order to have a labour government in power. When an inclusive *we* is used in the text it never refers to the complex of unions and party, but to the nation as a whole, as shown in (20) below.

- 20) If we seriously look ahead at what we face today, this is what we should dedicate ourselves to as a country, to build the most educated, skilled, adaptable and creative country in the western world. [...]. My message to you is very simple. I want the trades unions and the trades union movement to be part of that fight.

In Blair's years the number of first person singular pronouns in the speeches grew significantly, what in the seventies would have been the message of the political arm to the industrial arm, or at least of the labour government to the labour movement, in Blair's speeches become the message of the Prime Minister to the trade unions. Blair's is a call to join a battle in which he is the commander in chief and for which he has already decided the strategy. The invitation to join is an invitation to follow him not to look for solutions with him, as (21) confirms:

- 21) I think the trades unions could do even more to help us bring about the changes that we want to make. With regard to the Welfare to Work programme, I say to the trades union Movement, "Get involved in that".

The changes trade unions are called to help bring about have clearly been decided before, by a restricted policy committee, and only voted by a congress in which union representation had been "sensibly reduced".

In 1999 many unions had already noticed that Tony Blair was not delivering on what they expected, especially the repeal of anti-union laws of the Thatcher-Major years.

Blair resorts to the usual comparison Old vs. New labour in order to state clearly that the relationship has changed as in (22) where the deictic temporal reference is to the

⁴ See Ortu (2009) for a more detailed analysis of the address in this regard.

seventies in which the idea of the united labour movement was the prevailing one, or more generally old and new Britain as in (24). He has the vision and trade unions, *you*, can decide to be part of that vision or to simply disappear from the picture.

- 22) es, we are New Labour. You run the Unions, we run the government and we will never confuse the two again
 23) We share many of the same goals and values, but we are not in each other's pockets...
 24) ... be part of the modern economy and modern Britain that I want to see created. That is the vision of which you can be part.

In (23) both the values and the membership of the two organisations are finally construed as separated, while the values and goals that are shared are only *some*, the Wilsonian idea of 'we are members of one another' becomes clearly an obsolete one.

Blair's second term, starting in 2001 was marked by his attempt to "reform" the public sector according to the gospel of neoliberalism, which deepened further the divisions inside the discourse community. The examples that follow come from the 2002 address.

- 25) [this challenge] needs the trade union movement to work together with employers and government

Here Blair's discourse, characterised by the idea of partnership, finds a specific articulation in the genre of Prime Ministerial Addresses to the TUC, where the partnership described and promoted is a tripartite one, as in (25).

In (26) many themes are put together by Blair, starting from the critique of the trade union style of the past.

- 26) You re-made your reputation with the public, you worked hard to get a government in place that did believe in social partnership. It would be ironic if, just at the moment when trade unions are achieving such partnership some of you might decide to turn your back on it.

The critique is implicit in the expression "you re-made your reputation with the public", where it is assumed that trade union reputation was bad and needed re-building. For where the party-union relationship is concerned, the sentence that comes after is particularly meaningful. In it trade unions are construed as independent actors capable of working for a clear goal "you worked hard to get" which was theirs, not a shared one, and such goal is that of having a government "that did believe in social partnership", not a friendly government, not their government, but simply a government that, in Blair's own evaluation, was the most suitable for trade unions. The fact that things were getting worse in the relationship is signalled, among other things, by the need for the prime minister to answer in advance to a possible opposition to such partnership at the end of (26).

The change is even more evident when a reference to common documents is made as in (27) which is taken from Blair's last address as Prime Minister in 2006.

- 27) As part of the Warwick Agreement, as you know, we have introduced the Gangmaster's licensing act...

The Warwick Agreement is not referred to as 'our document' as it was in the '60s and '70s, indeed no possessive pronoun is used to characterise it. What is important to note here is that by Blair's use of pronouns the action that derives from the agreement is construed as governmental action of which trade unions are simply informed. Example (28) is more

ambiguous in this respect because it is not possible to define unequivocally what are the values to which Blair refers when he talks about “our values”, while it is quite clear that the “hard headed policies” are an emanation of governmental elaboration and action.

28) ... [answers] that combine our values with hard headed policy

In (29) the invitation to participation in the policy debate, in the tripartite partnership sense typical of Blair's discourse, is repeated.

29) Over the coming months, we will be conducting this debate and refining policies on the basis of it. I say to you participate in it.

The personal pronoun *it* refers to the changing world economy characterised by globalisation, and again the use of the exclusive *we* in the first sentence and *you* in the last one construe two very separate entities. Thus Blair's mandate as Prime Minister and leader of the New Labour party is closed with the same concepts with which it was opened. His management of the relationship and its final transformation into a partnership was a long-term objective of his policy imbued with neoliberal concepts with a Christian twist (Jessop 2007, personal communication).

Brown's mandate, beginning on the 27th June 2007, started in a moment in which many trade union activists had a very critical view of the action of 10 years of New Labour governments.

Brown gives a taste of his idea of the relationship with trade unions while he articulates his “skills mantra” (Ortu 2008: 197) in (30), according to which the only way to survive in the globalised economy is that of transferring the new skills and knowledge needed in the labour market, in order to create an easily employable workforce.

30) For all its two centuries, the trade union movement of this country has been about enhancing the dignity and the work of labour. Today we are finding a new role which makes the task we undertake more relevant, more urgent and more demanding than ever. To enhance the dignity and value of labour in the 21st Century it is undeniable that we need to enhance the skills of every worker in this country.

If the first person plural pronoun is ambiguous in its interpretation, it is impossible to say whether it is the government, or even the party, that is finding a new role for trade unions, the clause that follows helps the interpretation. It is a call to action for trade unions in the field of workers' training, as the task undertaken needs to be inclusive of organised labour. Thus Brown, in this part of the speech, goes back to the kind of construal that was more frequent in the '60s and '70s.

The same is true for (31), where Brown includes trade unions in his construal of the globalised economy as an economic environment in which threats can be changed in opportunities of economic success provided countries are able to maximise such opportunities.

31) All of us ... we must maximise

Nonetheless Brown seems to be on two minds with respect to the relationship with trade unions as the examples in (32) and (33) show.

32) It s a point of principle for me as it will be for you

33) I want you to work with us as we talk to the 200 largest companies in Britain

Here the division between *us* and *you* is made clear twice, and especially in (33) is accompanied with the Blairite idea of the tripartite partnership of government, industries and organised labour.

34) I say to our trades unions in the public sector

Brown's schizophrenic construal of party-unions relationship continues throughout the text but, when it comes to his final appeal for support, the inclusive use of pronouns is again taken up, as in (34) where he refers to the trade unions in the public sectors as 'our trades unions', in the sense of belonging both to the TUC and to the party.

6. Conclusions

The analysis has shown, through the study of meaningful aspects of the genre *Prime ministerial addresses to the TUC*, how the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour party has evolved through time. The time-span chosen to trace such changes covers a period of deep transformations both for the production process and for the role of the state in the economy and both aspects were considered factors that would influence the relationship in the discourse community and consequently surface in the genre.

While some of the tensions were born together with the party and interiorised in its organisation, the analysis has shown that the change in the historical and economic context has exacerbated them, transforming the tensions into open conflicts. Nonetheless the discourse community in the sense adopted here still exists and it will continue to exist as long as trade unions keep financing and participating in the life of the party, on the socio-political side, and as long as there will not be an explicit abandonment of the public common goals that characterise the discourse community and that justify the existence of the genre as a tool for creating a sense of community and soliciting support for the policies of a Labour government, on the semiotic side.

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