Prejudice and empathy in political discourse: A look into language used by politicians in the asylum seeker debate

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Abstract

Political discourse often evokes strong emotions in people and can stir a whole nation. It is powerful. For these reasons it is vitally important we are aware of the subtle and at times not so subtle messages, agendas and perspectives that politicians convey through their language. The following study examines the language used in 32 Labor and Coalition speeches over an 18-month period in relation to the refugee and asylum seeker debate. Discourse Analysis methodology was used to identify common words and phrases present in the debate, analyse their frequency and then, using elements of Systemic Functional Linguistic theory, identify and discuss the semantic framework in which these words and phrases appear. How politicians use language in this area, in addition to the level of discriminatory discourse used by these politicians, were the main areas of investigation. The findings are noteworthy with disparate elements of positive and negative, and compassionate and discriminatory discourse found between the two main political parties.

Introduction

"Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" ([1946, p. 367](#)). These famous words written by George Orwell succinctly sum up the influential and at times manipulative tendencies of political discourse. While we all have the ability to manipulate the linguistic choices we make in order to influence, control and persuade others, politicians appear to be especially guilty of this. Using language to influence the electorate, gain votes, discredit one's opponent and manipulate or guide the public's understanding of a complex issue is not unusual in politics. Of particular relevance to the public, and presently the topic of much comment and dialogue in the Australian media, is the debate on immigration with respect to those seeking asylum and refugee status in Australia.

The simple fact that politicians are debating a serious humanitarian concern rather than a new tax makes this asylum seeker/refugee debate all the more significant. If language imparts certain influential qualities, it likewise bestows on politicians an enormous moral and ethical responsibility. Because of this, the current political discourse on this issue may have the potential to shape how many Australians regard people seeking asylum.

Currently there is much heated discourse in Australian politics and the immigration debate does not seem to be immune to this type of rhetoric. The following research examines 32 parliamentary speeches, primarily looking at how the two main political parties in Australia use language in reference to the refugee and asylum seeker debates. This study investigates the use of loaded words and phrases[1], both with negative and positive connotations, who uses them, how frequently they are used, and in what semantic context. The study will also help determine whether

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[1] The study focuses on the language used, rather than policy details.

the language used is a reflection of each party's political beliefs. A summary of each party's official online statement is as follows: the Coalition's stated beliefs encourage wealth and employment through incentives aimed at businesses and individuals as well as promoting freedom and equal opportunities for all Australians (Liberal Party of Australia, n.d.). The Labor party's statement contain similar sentiments on the need for growth, freedom and equal opportunities, however in addition, there is also an emphasis on health, education and Australia's role as a positive global citizen (Australian Labor Party, n.d.).

It is also relevant at this point to refer to a recent media release by the UNHCR dated 23 November 2012. The UNHCR restated that all asylum seekers must be treated fairly and given proper protection by signatories (including Australia) of the Human R ights Convention. The UNHCR also reiterated that asylum seekers arriving by boat are not deemed illegal but instead are merely undocumented arrivals and thus should be treated fairly and in the same manner as any other immigrants until their claims have been reviewed and processed (2012). Accordingly, Australia has an international and binding humanitarian obligation to treat ethically, fairly and compassionately any person who arrives on Australian soil, regardless of mode of arrival.

Literature Review

There has been a considerable amount of research over the years on political discourse and attitudes in language. Most closely related to this research paper are two studies conducted by Every and Augoustinos (2007, 2008) examining the discourse constructions of racism in Parliamentary debates on asylum seekers. Every and Augoustinos focus only on the party in government; in both cases the Coalition. Moreover, their data comes from a small selection of

speeches. In contrast this study has compared both sides of the political spectrum and encompasses a much larger corpus. In speeches from 2001, the Coalition government was found to use racist language which was identified in the following areas: using categorical generalisations when discussing asylum seekers, discourse regarding the nation which builds mythical constructs such as "us" and "them", unequal treatment of asylum seekers in respect to other immigrants, and finally discussion around cultural differences (Every & Augoustinos, 2007). As noted by Every & Augoustinos (2007), these important and revealing findings illustrate clear examples of discriminatory language used among Coalition members

Particularly relevant to discriminatory and prejudicial language used in media and politics is the research conducted by Lukin (2012) on the grammatical constructs used by media and politicians in reference to "war". Lukin applies the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, seeking to expose the true meaning behind discourse by focusing on different grammatical elements. For example, we can compare the different semantic meaning behind the following sentences, keeping in mind that they are all describing the same event; a) *10 Iraqi civilians lost their lives in Bagdad* b) *US special forces killed 10 Iraqi civilians c) 10 Iraqi civilians were killed as a result of a US attack*. This is a simple example illustrating that semantic meaning relies heavily on word order and lexical choice.

Van Dijk has written extensively on the subject of discourse analysis and in much detail on political discourse. Of particular interest was Van Dijk's paper on the ways in which politicians in western parliaments express certain attitudes, often prejudiced and racist, towards a minority group (1993). Van Dijk discusses what he calls the *negative other-presentation,* which he has identified as a characteristic in parliamentary debates particularly among conservative parties. This

varies but may include instances where immigration is regarded as "illegal". In addition, Van Dijk

writes that often refugees will be described as "economic refugees", or in other words "fake"

refugees (1993). In another study, van Dijk and Rojo analyse the discourse used by Spanish

politicians with regards to the expulsion of African immigrants whom they deemed to be *illegal*

([1997](#)).

Method of data collection and analysis

Material and Participants

The analysed data comes from 32 parliamentary speeches taken from the Hansard Parliamentary

record ([Parliament of Australia, n.d.](#)). The speeches date from 22 March 2011 to 16 August 2012

and for consistency, were only taken from two areas in the Senate: "Matters of Public Importance –

Asylum Seeker" and "Amendments to the Migration Legislation Bill". These dates were chosen as

this topic was a hotly debated issue at the time and covered a period where there was no change of

government. As it was also important to obtain enough data, 32 speeches provided a viable sample

to work with. To ensure a fair representation, the 32 parliamentary speeches were split evenly

between the Coalition and Labor. Initially, speeches from the Greens and Independents were

considered though it quickly became apparent that there were not enough speeches from either

party to be representative. Consequently the decision was made to focus on the two key political

parties. The information in [Appendix I](#) tables the data collected for each speaker, which includes;

party, state, gender, age, prior employment sector and total word count. While not all of these

variables are necessarily relevant to this particular study, they may be significant to subsequent

analyses of this data, hence their inclusion.

Procedure & operationalisation of key constructs

A concordance program called SysConc© was used to extract and analyse the data. Words and phrases were selected by reading through a selection of speeches at random to gain a sense of what language appeared most significant to the study. As the process of extracting the data began, new phrases and words were added to the list as they appeared.

The findings in Appendix II resulted in the study being split into two main sections. The first part of the study was concerned with the overall count and frequency of words and phrases as outlined above, focusing on words or phrases which were particularly discriminatory and negative, compassionate and positive or where the results showed a higher use by one party. These words and phrases were then examined and discussed in relation to their context and use.

The second part of the study involved selecting the most striking and significant findings and analysing these by applying a Generic Semantic Structure (GSS) to each utterance in context. GSS is an analytical approach drawn from the area of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The GSS is a linguistic model identifying themes in the text such as "International Platform", "Criticism", "Compassion" and "Case Study". These themes are applied to each utterance or phrase, see Appendix III to see the GSS in its totality. As this is a relatively small study, the GSS was only applied to the phrases which used the terms *asylum seeker* and *refugee*. This approach is suitable to this particular study as it allows researchers to study the semantics over a large quantity of data. The GSS was formulated by selecting one speech from Labor and one from the Coalition, identifying their main semantic themes, and then further classifying the semantic moves[2] within each stage.

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[2] For example, a semantic move in the "case study" theme may be "negative case study" or "positive case study"

This created a prototypical Semantic Structure of a parliamentary debate on asylum seekers and a solid framework that could then be applied across the data.

Results and Discussion

Frequency of Words and Phrases

The total frequency of the 19 words and phrases, seen as a percentage below in Figure 1, reveals some considerable differences between the language used by Labor to that of the Coalition. The following analysis will focus on the results displayed below in Figure 1 which show the most disproportionate language use between these two parties. The areas of difference include: *asylum seeker/refugee, illegals/illegal arrivals, health/mental health of asylum seekers/refugees, queue jumping. T*he phrases *turn back the boats/stop the boats* and Pacific solution are also investigated. Unfortunately, due to the size of the study, other terms worthy of discussion, such as *border protection* and *offshore processing*, have been omitted from the paper.

Figure 1. Frequency of words and phrases

Words / Phrases
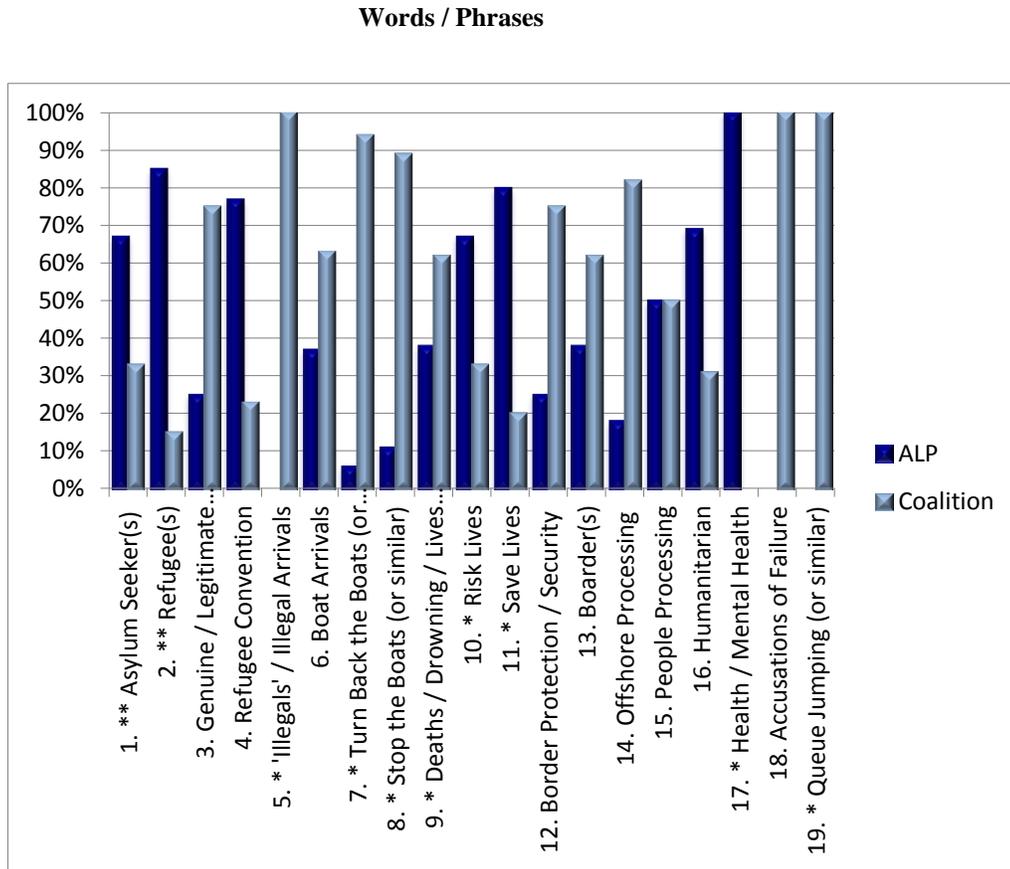
Asylum seeker and *refugee* were clearly more frequent in Labor speeches despite an equal number

of speeches and overall similar word counts. Note also that the Coalition has much higher

frequency in such areas as *border protection(12)*, *offshore processing(14)*, the mode of *arrival(5, 6)*

and *accusations of failure(18)*. This dramatic difference possibly suggests that the emphasis for

Labor speakers remains people-orientated while the Coalition's emphasis seems to be on other

factors, perhaps even seeking to dehumanise the debate. Given the topic, these two terms are

clearly important nominal constructs and as such the Coalition's low frequency is surprising. A more

in-depth analysis of these terms and how they are used in context will be presented in the second part of the study relating to the semantic stages.

Jumping the queue

The term *jumping the queue*, or similar phrases, gives the impression that there is an imaginary queue, and furthermore that people who arrive here by boat are doing so at the expense of others who are more deserving. Remarkably, this reference was used a total of eight times by Coalition speakers while the only Labor speaker to make any reference to this term is Melissa Parke who claims that the notion of a queue or an orderly path is a myth. *Jumping the queue,* as seen in the example (i) below spoken by Christopher Black of the Liberal Party, appears to imply that those who arrive by boat are not *legitimate* or *genuine refugees.* Furthermore, example (ii) seems to suggest that people who *jump the queue* are able to do so simply because they have cash to pay for their journey, as if this automatically disqualifies them as a refugee.

> i) I have made the observation in this place before, and I believe it to be true, that there is a high
> degree of corruption in the actual refugee camps, where people who are legitimate refugees accepted
> by this country get somewhere near the **top of the queue** but never, ever get a guernsey. Why?
> Because of the **corrupt payments** that are going to those who manage those refugee camps from
> others who **jump the queue** and suddenly find their way (Christopher Black, Liberal Party, Senate
> Hansard, 16/06/11).

ii) Before that time there was no sense that our system of refugee settlement was corrupted or unfair,

with your chances of settlement in Australia dependent on your contacts with criminal networks and

your capacity to pay hard cash to **jump the queue** (Sharman Stone, Liberal Party, Senate Hansard,

15/08/12).

Illegals

Tony Abbott's use of the term *illegal* to describe people who arrive by boat, as highlighted recently

in an article from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, has cause much media attention and public outcry

([Flitton, 2012](#)). Despite legal experts challenging the appropriateness, not to mention the legality of

this use, Abbott appeared inflexible, adamant that people who arrive by boat are illegal and refused

to back down on using the term (Flitton 2012). Given the tenacious view taken by the leader of the

Liberal Party, it is not surprising to see a similar sentiment reflected in the language of Coalition

members, with 81% of utterances with the term "illegal" referring to a person as (*the*) *illegal*, *illegal*

arrivals or *illegal immigrants*. Note for example the extract below (iii), from John Cobb, member of

the National Party. This extract adopts a negative and discriminatory tone by suggesting that those

who arrive by boat are not only illegal, which as stated above is disputable, but are part of some

form of queue.

iii) Despite the evidence of 22,000 illegal arrivals, almost 1,000 deaths, damage to our international

reputation and a $4.7 billion blow-out in costs, Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister, refused to change

course. …. That is what they expect others to have to do as well, because every illegal that comes here

puts someone who is doing it legally at the back of the line. (John Cobb, National Party, Senate

Hansard, 15/08/12).

Mental health

Remarkably, any reference to the general health and mental well-being of asylum seekers/refugees

only appears in Labor speeches. Note also that Labor speakers discussing this particular topic were

all female. While this is an interesting observation, it is difficult to determine, without further

research, whether gender plays any role in topic selection or compassionate speech. Regardless of

gender differentiation, the Coalition does not appear to give any consideration to the general

health and mental well-being of asylum seekers/refugees. Labor on the other hand does. This may

suggest that Labor speakers place more emphasis on the compassionate side of this debate.

Extracts (iv) and (v) illustrate some of the language used by Labor in relation to mental well-being.

iv) The evidence is clear that length of confinement is associated with progressive deterioration in

mental state (Anne Urquhart, ALP, Senate Hansard, 25/06/12).

(v) In particular, there are strong concerns about the devastating consequences, including **severe**

mental health issues, of detention of asylum seekers for indeterminate periods on Nauru and Manus

Island. (Melissa Parke, ALP, Senate Hansard, 15/08/12)

Turn back the boats & the Pacific solution

Loaded terms such as *turn back the boats*, *stop the boats* and *Pacific Solution* were far more

common in Coalition speeches than in Labor. However these have not been further analysed given

that they formed part of the Howard Government's policy on asylum seekers/refugees, and hence it makes sense that these terms would appear be used more frequently by the Coalition. Despite the frequency of terms not being relevant, political slogans such as *turn back the boats* and *stop the boats* seek to dehumanise the situation of asylum seekers and refugees by moving attention away from the plight of the people. Research by Otto Santa Ana, as outlined in his book *Brown tide rising* ([2002](#)), showed a link between inflammatory language used in politics and media and the discrimination of a minority group. While Santa Ana used the Latino migrants in America as his subject, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the language illustrated above could also potentially lead to discrimination of a minority group in Australia.

The *Pacific Solution* was the name given to the Howard Government's policy of offshore detention – a system designed to manage people arriving by boat seeking asylum and refuge. It is a term which is frequently used today by members of the Coalition, with speakers often referring to its success and the need to return to some form of a *Pacific solution*. As Every and Augoustinos (2007) concluded, the language used by the Howard Government in the asylum seeker debate had overtones of racism and discriminatory discourse. Given their finding, and the language featured in this study, one could compare the term *Pacific solution*, a systematic policy aimed at deterring boats and transferring asylum seekers/refugees to offshore detention centers who are then locked up for an indeterminate amount of time, with the term *final solution*, used by the Nazi regime during World War II, and which carried with it the intention of eliminating the entire Jewish population by means of mass genocide. Of course there is no suggestion that the Howard Government or members of the Coalition had/have even a remotely similar or extreme strategy such as genocide, nor is it proposed that the Coalition endorses Nazi sentiments. Nevertheless, one

must ask why a euphemism such as the *Pacific solution*, so closely related to the loaded and xenophobic 20th century term, the *final solution*, was deemed appropriate for such a delicate and serious issue as human displacement. Importantly, both forms of *solution* appear to deal with what a group presented as an unwelcome minority.

The various semantic stages used in the expressions *asylum seeker* and *refugee*

There is a definitional variation between *asylum seeker* and *refugee* and for the most part the speakers in this debate adhere to these differences. However there are times when the terms seem to have been used interchangeably by speakers from both parties. Whether this has been done deliberately or not may be the basis for further investigation.

The following semantic analysis will focus on how the speaker uses the terms *asylum seeker* and *refugee* when referring to people. Due to time and size constraints, terms such as *the asylum seeker debate*, *asylum seeker claims, refugee camps, the refugee convention* and similar will be excluded. There are eight semantic stages in all, but the analysis has been limited to the following four semantic stages: *International Platform, Compassion, Case studies and Criticism*[3]. Below, Figures 2 and 3 display the breakdown of semantic stages for asylum seeker and refugee and represent the total number of utterances for each phrase. These figures have then been allocated a semantic move. Tables 1-4 give a more detailed analysis of the semantic moves realised in each stage. See Appendix IV for a breakdown of the semantic moves for all eight stages.

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[3] International Platform: describes any discourse relating to the UN, global refugee issue, any notion of an international queue. Compassion: discourse including health and safety of AS/R, recognition of AS/R plight, protection of AS/R, calls for empathy, promoting a fair system for all. Criticism: any discourse involving criticism. Case: either positive or negative case studies

Figure 2. Refugee *breakdown by semantic stage*
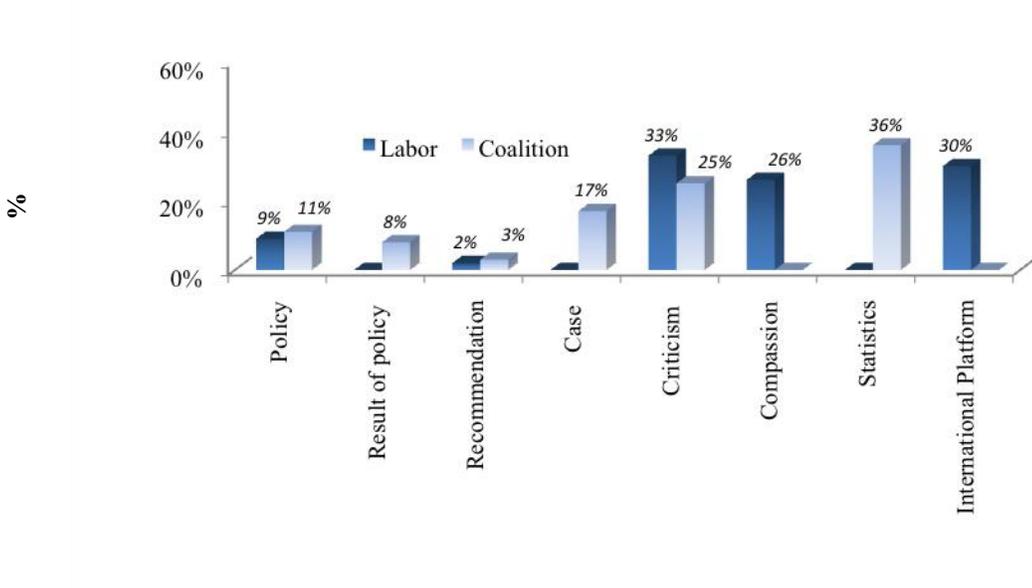
Figure 3. Asylum Seeker *breakdown by semantic stage*
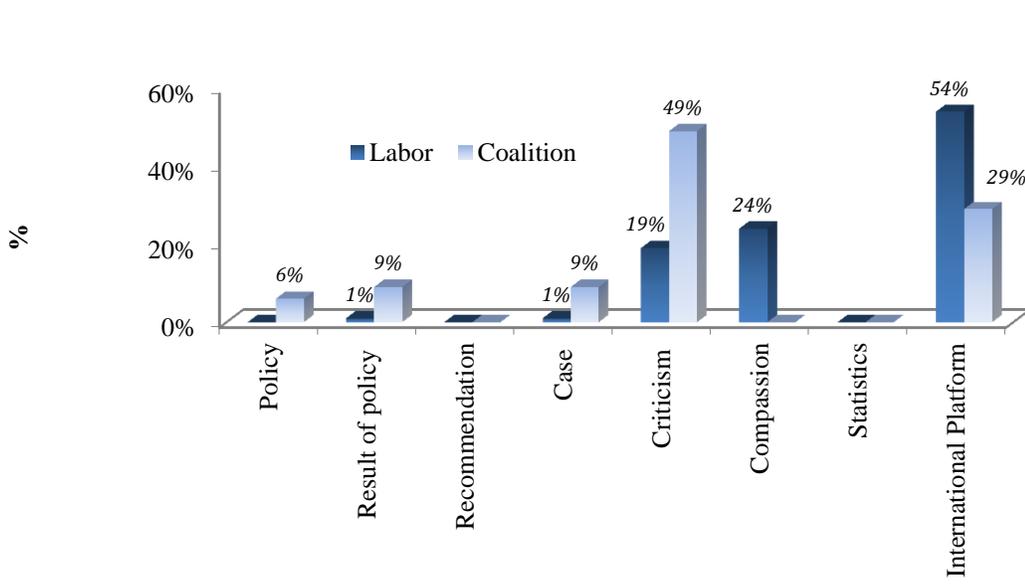
Table1. Semantic Stage: **International Platform**

Semantic Stage	Semantic Moves	Labor	Coalition	Labor	Coalition
		Refugee	*Refugee*	*Asylum seeker*	*Asylum seeker*
International Platform	Humanitarian obligation/intake	19%	3%	-	-
	Global refugee issue	33%	11%	20%	-
	Notion of an international queue	-	14%	-	-
	UN Convention	1%	-	2%	-
	Regional cooperation	-	-	9%	-
		54%	**29%**	**30%**	**-**

The first semantic stage*, International Platform*, illustrates dominance by Labor in both *refugee* and *asylum seeker* uses. There appears to be a greater emphasis by Labor when discussing the Global Refugee Issue with 33% (*refugee*) and 20% (*asylum seeker*), and 19% when discussing Australia's Humanitarian Obligation/Intake. Compare this with the Coalition's 11% and 3% on Global Refugee Issues and Humanitarian Obligations/Intake, and only when used with the term *refugee*. Labor was the only party to mention *refugee* or *asylum seekers* in relation to the UN Convention or Regional Cooperation while the Coalition was alone in their reference to an International Queue. These results indicate Labor speakers tend to focus on the issue from a global scale, or from a broader perspective. The Coalition on the other hand seems to focus their attention elsewhere. The examples from both Labor and the Coalition are suggestive of the positive and negative rhetoric frequently found in the debate.

> vi) It is not widely understood that Australia's resettlement of **refugees** out of refugee camps, one of the best such programs in the world, is something that we do as a good global citizen and is a very important contribution to the global challenge presented by the millions of **refugees**, but we do not have a legal obligation to operate this program (Melissa Parke, ALP, Senate Hansard, 15/08/12).

vii) Earlier this afternoon we heard my colleague Senator Scullion referring to the 15.4 million **refugees**

around the world. We know, as a result of the discussions over Malaysia, that more than 90,000

genuine refugees are rotting in asylum camps and refugee camps in Malaysia, and we know the story

of the Horn of Africa. (Christopher Back, Liberal Party, Senate Hansard, 16/06/11).

Table 2. Semantic Stage: Compassion

Semantic Stage	Semantic Moves	Labor *Refugee*	Coalition *Refugee*	Labor *Asylum seeker*	Coalition *Asylum seeker*
Compassion	Recognition of AS/R plight	15%	-	7%	-
	Fair system for processing	1%	-	9%	-
	Health & Safety of AS/R & right to basic needs	1%		11%	-
	Protection of AS/R	1%	-	-	-
	Call for empathy from Australians	-	-	-	-
	Call for empathy from Parliament	1%	-	-	-
		24%	**-**	**26%**	**-**

The semantic stage of *Compassion* deserves focus as not once has a speaker from the Coalition,

when referring to *asylum seekers* or *refugees*, done so with any sense of compassion. While in 24%

and 26% of references to *asylum seekers/refugees* Labor speakers have focused on the recognition

of the asylum seeker/refugee plight, the need to provide for their basic human rights and a call for a

fair system for processing applications. This semantic stage, which appears to be lacking in the

Coalition speeches, appears to correlate with the findings above relating to the Coalition speakers

omitting any reference to general health and mental well-being of asylum seekers/refugees.

Table 3. Semantic Stage: **Case Examples**

Semantic Stage	Semantic Moves	Labor Refugee	Coalition Refugee	Labor *Asylum Seeker*	Coalition *Asylum Seeker*
Case Examples	Negative AS/R case example	-	9%	-	17%
	Positive AS/R case example	1%	-	-	-
		1%	**9%**	**-**	**17%**

Another remarkable difference between the two parties is the positive and negative portrayal of asylum seeker and refugee cases. The Coalition, when discussing asylum seeker/refugee case studies has in almost all cases used a negative story such as rioting. This is outlined below in an extract from Cory Bernardi's speech (viii). These seek to exemplify asylum seeker/refugee behaviour as negative and destructive. In stark contrast are the few positive portrayals highlighted by Labor speakers, with an extract from Bob Carr below (ix). This is an important observation as it seeks to highlight the possible sentiments and viewpoints shared by party members and the clear positive and negative discourse evident in the speeches. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the Australian community only hear these stories either through political discourse or through the media. These kinds of negative and positive depictions could possibly have some influence on public opinion.

> viii) You should let it influence it because if people are prepared to throw bombs at police whilst they are in detention being assessed for security concerns, if they are prepared to escape from lawful detainment, if they are prepared to break the law to get here, if they are prepared to set fire to buildings and hurt their fellow refugees or asylum seekers, are they really the type of people we want to have in this country? (Cory Bernardi, Liberal Party, Senate Hansard, 22/03/12)

> ix) Australia is made up of millions of individual stories, and some of the most inspiring of those Australian stories are told by refugees and the Australian children of refugees (Bob Carr, ALP, Senate Hansard, 16/08/12).

Table 4. Semantic Stage: *Criticism*

Semantic Stage	Semantic Moves	Labor Refugee	Coalition Refugee	Labor Asylum	Coalition Asylum
	Criticism of Labor Policy	-	11%	-	8%
	Criticism of Coalition Policy	6%	-	20%	-
	Criticism of AS/R debate general	1%	-	4%	-
	Criticism of politics & media	1%	-	-	-
Criticism	Criticism of detention	7%	-	-	-
	Criticism of mode of arrival	3%	31%	-	3%
	Criticism of actual person (AS/R)	-	6%	-	3%
	Accusations	-	-	9%	-
	Disparagement	-	-	-	11%
		19%	**49%**	**33%**	**25%**

The final semantic stage for analysis is *Criticism*. This stage has revealed further evidence which illustrates the vast difference of language use between the two political parties. The Coalition was found to engage in a variety of criticism in 49% of utterances relating to the term refugee. 11% are criticisms of Labor's migration policy which one could argue is to be expected from the opposition. Yet an enormous 31% criticise the mode of arrival and 6% make a direct criticism of asylum seeker(s). Labor is more evenly spread however with much lower results, only making up 19% of all Labor utterances using refugee. These refer mostly to criticisms of the Liberal policy, which again is to be expected. Interestingly and breaking away from the normal pattern seen so far, when discussing asylum seekers, Labor comes out on top with 33% of utterances relating to criticism. Note however that 20% of these utterances criticise the past Coalition policies. While criticising the policies of one's opposition is expected in parliamentary debate, prejudicial discourse concerning a minority group has the dangerous potential of fostering racial intolerance and discriminatory behaviour at the core of the Australian community.

> x) That is why I have always said and I have said this many a time before we have to discourage those
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> who would enter Australia illegally, jumping the queue, and be fair to all of those who have been

determined to be genuine refugees. **These people coming by boats are not refugees; they are asylum seekers**. (Ian Macdonald, Liberal Party, Senate Hansard, 16/08/12).

xi) We both agree that this country has the capacity to accept refugees, has a responsibility to accept refugees and is prepared to accept refugees who go through a process of seeking asylum **from outside of our borders** (Kerry Williams O'Brian, ALP, Senate Hansard, 10/05/11).

Summary of results

The research began with the aim of solely looking at the frequency of words used by politicians in the asylum seeker debate over an 18 month period. However during the accumulation of data it became apparent just how important it was to go beyond the count and look at the word or phrase in context. There were many instances where speakers were paraphrasing or directly quoting other members of parliament, the media or organisational bodies such as Amnesty International. In such cases the word or phrase was omitted from the final count.

Overall, these results suggest that there is more compassion and empathy in the language used by Labor speakers, while the language used by the Coalition has shown frequent instances of prejudice and disparagement, not just towards Labor but also towards refugees and asylum seekers. These results are significant especially given the current political climate and recent changes to Australia's immigration policy. They highlight the need for a greater awareness of language use to avoid cultivating discriminatory attitudes.

Further research

As this was only a small study there were many limitations placed on the analysis and presentation of results. The study could be expanded by applying a more detailed Systemic Functional Linguistic framework. This has the potential to reveal a much greater depth in meaning and purpose of the debates, and could possibly provide further observation of political ideology. Alternatively, a more comprehensive Discourse Analysis or Semantic theory could also be applied. It would also be worth investigating the compassionate use of language and how this relates to gender given that the results, as outlined earlier, point to a possible correlation between these two variables.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis have uncovered very clear and fundamental differences evident between the two parties. The study indicates that the Coalition, the more conservative of the two parties, employ discourse which appears to be rather negative towards asylum seekers/refugees. Labor, however use words and phrases which suggest compassion. Labor appear to also think beyond Australian borders with a much more international and collaborative approach. Overall, the evidence shows that the Coalition places more emphasis on the need to deter people from arriving by boat, while Labor speakers seem more focused on human rights and the global displacement of people rather than stopping the boats.

Parliamentary debates can reflect or influence public and media opinions, illustrating just how important and relevant these debates are to our national interest and identity. Regardless of how people end up in this nation and irrespective of cultural background, their ethical and compassionate treatment is vital. Political language which seeks to unite, educate and inform is

likely to be more socially beneficial than language used to manipulate, particularly in a debate of this kind. As Every and Augoustinos wrote in their paper (2007), expressions of prejudicial political discourse only ever seem to create a dangerously erroneous and inequitable barrier between "us" and "them".

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[Appendix I](). Speaker Information.

Australian Labor Party

Gender	Name	State	DOB	Age	Prior Industry	W/Count
F	Lundy, Kate	ACT	1967	45	Construction	900
F	Parke, Melissa	WA	1966	46	Law	2,000
F	Polley, Helen	TAS	1957	55	Politics	1,500
F	Singh, Lisa Maria	TAS	1972	40	Politics	2,300
F	Stephens, Ursula	NSW	1954	58	Education	800
F	Urquhart, Anne	TAS	1957	55	Manufacturing	2,350
F	Brown, Carol	TAS	1963	49	Politics	1,400
F	Wortley, Dana	SA	1959	53	Education	1,350
F	Moore, Claire	QLD	1956	56	Public Servant	1,850
F	Bilyk, Catryna	TAS	1959	53	Education	1,550
M	Carr, Bob	NSW	1947	65	Journalist	1,650
M	Faulkner, John	NSW	1954	58	Education	450
M	Furner, Mark	QLD	1958	54	Union	1,550
M	Thistlethwaite, Matt	NSW	1972	40	Union	1,350
M	Thistlethwaite, Matt	NSW	1972	40	Union	1,100
M	O'Brian, Kerry Williams	TAS	1951	61	Union	1,400

The Coalition

Gender	Name	State	DOB	Age	Prior Industry	W/Count
F	Bishop, Bronwyn	NSW	1942	70	Law	1,300
F	Cash, Michaelia	WA	1970	42	Law	1,250
F	Stone, Sharman	VIC	1951	61	Business	1,050
M	Brandis, George	QLD	1957	55	Law	950
M	Christensen, George	QLD	1978	34	Journalist	1,800
M	Ciobo, Steven	QLD	1974	38	Finance	1,200
M	Cobb, John	NSW	1950	62	Farmer	800
M	Fletcher, Paul	NSW	1965	47	Law	1,550
M	Humphries, Gary	ACT	1958	54	Law	900
M	Kelly, Craig	NSW	1963	49	Business	1,750
M	Macdonald, Ian	QLD	1945	67	Law	1,100
M	Scullion, Nigel	NT	1956	56	Fisheries	1,400
M	Wyatt, Ken	WA	1952	60	Education	1,650
M	Back, Christopher	WA	1950	62	Business	1,500
M	McGauran, Julian	VIC	1957	55	Business	1,250
M	Bernardi, Cory	SA	1969	43	Finance	1,300

Appendix II. Word and phrase frequency.

Date	Party	Name	asylum seeker(s)	refugee(s)	(genuine / legitimate) refugee(s)	refugee convention	refugee (camps)	illegal (immigrant(s)) / immigration / entry /	people smugglers business / smuggling	people who can buy their way onto a boat' ** or similar	boat arrivals	turn back boats ** or similar	leaky boats	stop the boats ** or similar	reference to drowning at sea 'death' 'drown' 'died'	risk lives' or similar	any reference to saving lives	The nation-state ** or similar	The Malaysia people-swap	detention / mandatory detention	against all or some forms of 'detention'	boarder protection / security	border (s)	offshore processing	people processing	humanitarian intake/obligation/program	mental health, stress, general health	accusing the opposition of failure	queue jumping ** or similar
22-Mar-11	ALP	Catryna Bilyk	5						1							1					1	1	1	2		3	1			
10-May-11	ALP	Claire Moore	3	4												1					1	3				3		1		
10-May-11	ALP	Dana Wortley	7	5					10	1						1							2	2			2			
10-May-11	ALP	Kerry W O'Brian	2	18	1				1														1							
16-Jun-11	ALP	Carol Brown	21	3	2	2		1	4			1							1		1			1			6	2		
12-Sep-11	ALP	Matt Thistlethwaite	1	1	1				5							1						3	2		2		2			
29-Feb-12	ALP	Lisa Maria Singh	16	8	1								1			1					6	7					4	2		
25-Jun-12	ALP	Anne Urquhart	10	19	1	1			1					2					1			6		1			3	4		
25-Jun-12	ALP	John Faulkner	3												4															
25-Jun-12	ALP	Matt Thistlethwaite	1						1						3	1	2	1									1			
15-Aug-12	ALP	Helen Polley	9	2		1								2	3						1						2			
15-Aug-12	ALP	Mark Furner	9	2				2							3						3									
15-Aug-12	ALP	Melissa Parke	10	13		3	2		2							1			1					6			2	2		
15-Aug-12	ALP	Ursula Stephens	3												1									1			1	1		
16-Aug-12	ALP	Bob Car		13		2											1	2					1	2	1	3				
16-Aug-12	ALP	Kate Lundy	4	2		1			3	1						1	1						2			1				
sub totals			**104**	**90**	**6**	**10**	**2**	**3**	**28**	**1**	**6**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**14**	**8**	**4**	**13**	**0**	**10**	**22**	**6**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**28**	**10**	**0**	**0**

Date	Party	Name	asylum seeker(s)	refugee(s)	(genuine / legitimate) refugee(s)	refugee convention	refugee (camps)	illegal (immigrant(s) / immigration / entry /	people smugglers business / smuggling	people who can buy their way onto a boat '** or similar	boat arrivals	turn back boats ** or similar	leaky boats	stop the boats ** or similar	reference to drowning at sea 'death' 'drown' 'died'	risk lives' or similar	any reference to saving lives	The nation-state ** or similar	The Malaysia people-swap	detention / mandatory detention	against all or some forms of 'detention'	boarder protection / security	border (s)	offshore processing	people processing	humanitarian intake/obligation/program	mental health, stress, general health	accusing the opposition of failure	queue jumping ** or similar
22-Mar-11	LIB	Cory Bernadi	2		3		1	1		1				1		1				5			3	2				6	1
10-May-11	LIB	Julian John McGauran	0																	1								3	1
16-Jun-11	LIB	Christopher Back	4	1	4		4	1	2				1									3						10	2
25-Jun-12	LIB	Michaelia Cash	2			1						3	1	5					6				5		2	2		7	
25-Jun-12	LIB	Nigel Scullion	2	2					1	1		3			3	1		1					1	3		1			
15-Aug-12	LIB	Bronwyn Bishop	3					2		1		2		1	1	1		9					3	3				4	
15-Aug-12	LIB	Craig Kelly	13				2			1		1	1	2	6		1	1		2			1	1		1		1	
15-Aug-12	LIB	Fletcher	9	1			1											2					1	2		3			
15-Aug-12	LIB	Ken Wyatt	3	1	1	1		1	4			1		2	2			1	1				2	4	1	1			
15-Aug-12	LIB	Sharman N Stone		4	2				2	1		2	2	2										3		1		1	2
15-Aug-12	LIB	Steven Ciobo	2	1	3				1											1			1	6	1				
15-Aug-12	LIB	Gary Humphries	1						1			1		1	5								0			1	1		
16-Aug-12	LIB	George Brandis	1									1						1					1		1			4	
16-Aug-12	LIB	Ian Macdonald	1	6	4		4	1				1													1				3
15-Aug-12	NAT	Geroge Christensen	7		1	1		3	2	2		1	1	3				2					3	5	2	1			
15-Aug-12	NAT	John Cobb	1					4				1	1	1	1	1				1			2	1				1	
sub totals			51	16	18	3	12	13	13	3	8	15	5	16	23	4	1	14	8	10	0	18	13	27	7	12	0	36	9
TOTALS			155	106	24	13	14	16	41	4	14	16	6	18	37	12	5	27	8	20	22	24	21	33	14	40	10	36	9

Appendix III. Generic Semantic Structure

Generic Structure	^(Open)	^*Gambit	*Policy	*Result of Policy	*(Recommendation)	*(Quote)	*(Case)
Semantic Structure	*Form *Informal	*Exclusive *Inclusive *Use quotes to shift focus *Shift to blame Labor *Compare and *Contrast *'Timing' links	*Past Liberal policy *Past Labor policy *Current Labor policy *Importance of Bill *Call for bipartisanship	*Success of Liberal policy *Liberal policy saved lives *Human rights *Cost of policy *Australian Community suffers *Negative outcome of past liberal policy *Negative outcome of current policy *Positive result	*External: Houston report *Internal: Labor or Coalition *External: other	*Direct *Indirect	*Negative AS/R case *Positive AS/R case

*Criticism	*(Compassion)	*(Statistics)	*(International Platform)	*(Digression)	*(Interjection)	^Close
*Criticism of Liberal *Criticism of Labor *Criticism of AS/R debate *Criticism of politics & media *Criticism of detention *Criticism of mode of arrival Criticism of person: actual refugees/asylum seekers *Accusations	*Recognition of AS/R plight *Health/safety of AS/R *Fair system for processing applic. *Protection of AS/R *Call for empathy from Australians *Call for empathy from Parliament	*Number of AS/R arrivals *Sent by People Sm *Number of AS/R deaths *Number of AS/R in detention	*Humanitarian obligation / Resettlement Program *Global Refugee Issue *Notion of International Queue *UN Convention *Damage to reputation *Regional cooperation	*Digress off topic	*by Deputy Speaker *by member of Parliament	*Expired time *Abrupt *Formal *Informal

Appendix IV. Semantic stages and moves for *asylum seeker* and *refugee*.

Semantic Phase	Semantic Moves	Labor *Refugee*	Coalition *Refugee*	Labor *Asylum seeker*	Coalition *Asylum seeker*
Policy	Past Liberal policy		6%		6%
	Current Labor policy			2%	3%
	Call for bipartisanship			4%	3%
	Importance of Bill			2%	
			6%	**9%**	**11%**
Result of policy	Success of Liberal policy		6%		6%
	Liberal policy saved lives				
	Cost of policy				3%
	Negative outcome of past Lib policy	1%			
	Negative outcome of Labor policy		3%		
		1%	**9%**		**8%**
Recommendation	External: Houston report			2%	3%
	Internal: Labor or Coalition				
	External: other				
				2%	**3%**
Case	Negative AS/R case		9%		17%
	Positive AS/R case	1%			
					17%
Criticism	Criticism of Labor Policy on AS/R		11%		8%
	Criticism of Coalition Policy on AS/R	6%		20%	
	Criticism of AS/R debate	1%		4%	
	Criticism of politics & media	1%			
	Criticism of detention	7%			
	Criticism of mode of arrival	3%	31%		3%
	Criticism of person: actual refugees/asylum		6%		3%
	Accusations			9%	
	Disparagement				11%
		19%	**49%**	**33%**	**25%**
Compassion	Recognition of AS/R plight	15%		7%	
	Fair system for processing applic	1%		9%	
	Health and Safety of AS/R & rights	1%		11%	
	Protection of AS/R	4%			
	Call for empathy from Australians				
	Call for empathy from Parliament	1%			
		24%		**26%**	
Statistics	Number of AS/R arrivals				33%
	Sent by People Sm				3%
					36%
International	Humanitarian obligation / Resettlement program	19%	3%		
	Global Refugee Issue	33%	11%	20%	
	Notion of an International Queue		14%		
	UN Convention	1%		2%	
	Regional cooperation			9%	
		54%	**29%**	**30%**	