

THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF PRONOMINAL CHOICE: EXCLUSIVE AND INCLUSIVE “WE” IN POLITICAL PANEL DEBATES

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Abstract

This study explores the use of the first person plural pronoun “we/wij” by government and opposition party members in panel debates from the Flemish talk show *De Zevende Dag*. Both groups of politicians enter this arena with divergent communicative goals, which has clear implications (i) for the type of propositions in which subclasses of “we/wij”-pronouns are generally involved and (ii) for the politicians’ assessment of the status of these propositions. Patterns with regard to these three implications are analyzed by means of a systemic functional approach supported with quantitative data. It is claimed that government and opposition party discussants either employ distinct patterns in accordance with their different aims, or that they use similar ones, albeit with divergent discourse functions. The former scenario turns out to be true in the case of exclusive uses of “we/wij” and the latter in the case of inclusive meanings. In that way, the paper sheds light on subtle differences in how government and opposition party discussants argue and deal with the invisible presence of an overhearing broadcast audience.

Keywords: Pronominal reference; Political panel debates; Systemic functional linguistics (SFL); Appraisal; Pragmatics; Activity type.

1. Introduction¹

In line with an increasing tendency in broadcasting media to present more compelling, attractive and dramatic forms of (political) interviewing, panel debates have become a commonplace in television shows from the 1980s onward (Clayman & Heritage 2002:

¹ This research formed part of the master thesis I wrote when I was enrolled in the Master of Advanced Studies in Linguistics (Cognitive and Functional Linguistics, University of Leuven, 2009-2010). I am very grateful to my former two supervisors, Anne-Marie Vandenberghe (*Ghent University*) and Kristin Davidse (*University of Leuven*), for their support and useful advices, as well as Jef Verschueren (*University of Antwerp*), for further remarks on earlier drafts of this article. Ellen Van Praet (*Ghent University College/Ghent University*) also deserves special mention, as she took care of the English translations of the Dutch excerpts presented in this paper. Finally, I want to thank my anonymous reviewer for his/her valuable comments and suggestions. I did my best to act upon his/her advices as much as I could, and I obviously take the responsibility for every mistake, imbalance or inconsistency that is left in this article.

299). The provocation of conflict between ideologically opposed interviewees, a typicality of this genre, serves as a strategic means for building and retaining the attention of an overhearing audience. So far, however, (political) panel debates have attracted relatively little systematic attention in comparison with traditional news interviews or talk shows. Moreover, most current (predominantly conversation analytical) research on panel interviews has almost exclusively focused on the moderator, and more in particular on how he/she succeeds in mediating conflict without overtly violating the professional ideals of journalistic neutrality (Greatbatch 1992; Clayman 2002; Clayman & Heritage 2002; Emmertsen 2006).²

In this paper, by contrast, other and much less discussed aspects of panel debates (and news interviews as well) are taken into account. The object of analysis is moved from the interviewer to the invited politicians, from the general sequential structure of a political panel debate to general characteristics of the discussants' discourse and from the interviewer's strategies of subtle conflict management to interviewee's strategies of dissociating from opponents and of affiliating with the overhearing audience. For that purpose, nine panel debates belonging to the Flemish talk show *De Zevende Dag* were transcribed and analyzed. Concretely, the research focus is on the Dutch first person plural pronoun "we/wij",³ on the *propositions* in which the various subtypes of this pronoun occur (ideational metafunction) and on the speaker's (i.e., the invited politicians) *evaluations* with regard to the necessity and/or the feasibility of these propositions (interpersonal metafunction). It is claimed that, with respect to these parameters, there are differences between government and opposition party talk, both on the lexicogrammatical level (distinct patterns) and the conversational pragmatic level (distinct discourse functions attached to similar patterns). Both sets of differences are interrelated with the divergent goals the invited government and opposition party members pursue in mediated panel debates.

This paper has the following structure. In section 2, the mediated political debate is characterized as an "activity type" in which invited politicians have concrete social identities (government-opposition) and pursue specific goals associated with these identities. Section 3 delineates the objects of analysis and presents the twofold research question. Section 4 deals with the employed systemic functional framework and its advantages for this type of research. Section 5 offers a brief description of the compiled data and the selection criteria. In section 6, characteristics with regard to pronominal choice of government party (6.1) and opposition party invitees (6.2) are discussed. Section 7 provides an overview of the main findings from the previous section. Finally, in section 8, concluding remarks are formulated as well as some thoughts concerning further research opportunities.

2. The activity type of mediated panel debates

Before moving onward to the analytical part, we first need to introduce the notion of "activity type" (Verschuere 2012). This concept is defined by Levinson (1992: 69) as a category "whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events

² Specific attention has been paid to the moderator's question design, which often serves to provoke or to intensify confrontation between the invited discussants.

³ In our analysis, both the atonic variant ("we") and the tonic variant ("wij") of the Dutch first person plural pronoun are taken into consideration.

with *constraints* on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions.” In that way, an activity type largely corresponds to Blom and Gumperz’s (1972: 423) notion of “social event”, a contextual frame which generally “center[s] around one or at the most a limited range of topics and [is] distinguishable because of [its] sequential structure.” It is true that panel debates typically cover one or two predetermined newsworthy issues (i.e., the (imminent) closure of the Opel Antwerp factory) and are characterized by two subsequent turn-taking systems: (i) an introductory question round, rigidly conducted by the interviewer, in which certain roles and tasks are preallocated (i.e., government and opposition party representative) and which strongly resembles the turn-taking system typical of one-to-one newspaper interviews (Emmertsen 2006: 572), followed by (ii) less structured ordinary conversational turn-taking principles once the discussion between the invited discussants gets going. Contemporary panel debates are also typified by (and differ from traditional news interviews in) a reduced involvement of the interviewer/moderator and by the dynamic interplay between interviewees (Clayman & Heritage 2002: 299).

In terms of constraints on participant configuration, panel debates belong to what Goffman (1981: 137-138) describes as “platform events”: Conversation between the ratified participants – that is, the interviewer (media representative) and the interviewees (political representatives) – is indirectly addressed to an invisible overhearing broadcast audience which cannot interfere. Accordingly, television panel debates can be considered *double-framed* forms of interaction, in which validity claims negotiated by the discussants (first-frame interaction) are subsequently negotiated by the audience (second-frame interaction) (Bull & Fetzer 2006: 7). Consequently, the discussants’ indirect contact with the audience affects their way of arguing. Mediated political discourse is primarily *persuasive* (Lauerbach & Fetzer 2007: 20): Simultaneously with the establishment of a boundary between the self and an “other”-group, political actors tend to form alliances with the overhearing mass audience, trying to win them over in the light of future elections (Simon-Vandenberg 1997: 353).

Personal pronouns are seen as one of the most obvious means by which politicians are able to achieve such complex goals. As Chilton and Schäffner (1997: 216) argue, pronominal choice gives implicit information concerning the situational intersubjective positioning of referents in the mental discourse universe entertained by the speaker. It reveals how the politician positions himself/herself with regard to his/her discussants and, by extension, to the audience at a given moment of speaking. In that sense, pronouns express aspects related to *social or person deixis* (Levinson 1983: 68ff; Verschueren 1999: 20; Huang 2007: 136ff): They generally mark the social relationship between the speaker and his addressee(s), or between the speaker and people or entities referred to.

The nature of these universes obviously depends on the hidden agendas of the politicians in question. As Zimmerman (1998: 90) points out, these orientations are inextricably linked to the “situated identities” which the discussants wish to be associated with or which are allocated to them at the onset of the debate – that is, identities which come into being within this specific activity type and which are somehow constrained by it. The most prominent and significant situated identity set in the analyzed political panel debates is the distinction between government and opposition party membership (see below). Both identities are connected with specific goals: In mediated panel debates, government and opposition party members enter into

a discussion with different priorities and strategies. On the linguistic level, this may have two possible implications: (i) government and opposition party discussants adopt distinct lexicogrammatical resources tailored to their divergent interests or (ii) they use similar patterns, albeit with different discourse functions.

3. Focus and research questions

Our concrete focus is on differences between government and opposition party discussants in Flemish television panel debates with respect to the choice of the pronoun “*we/wij*” and to the lexicogrammatical environment in which this pronoun is located. Two remarks need to be made here. First, we limit ourselves to “*we/wij*”-pronouns which adopt primary participant microroles and which, hence, can be related to what Dowty (1991: 572) classifies as a P(roto)-Agents. Roles linked to this supercategory have the following properties: “(a) volitional involvement in the event or state, (b) sentience (and/or perception), (c) causing an event or change of state in another participant, (d) movement (relative to the position of another participant), ((e) [existence] independently of the event named by the verb).” Second, we start from the basic exclusive/inclusive meaning distinction of “*we/wij*”, a key topic in most studies on social deixis (Levinson 1983: 69; Iñigo-Mora 2004: 34; Huang 2007: 139). The former refers to the group the speaker affiliates him- or herself with, thereby excluding the interlocutors and the audience); the latter includes the interlocutors and/or the audience.

Concretely, we will examine (i) the nature of the propositions in which referents expressed by variants of the “*we/wij*”-pronoun are involved and, when possible, (ii) the speaker’s – government or opposition discussant – evaluation of the necessity and/or feasibility of these propositions. Next, patterns in government and opposition party talk found through this twofold analysis are connected to the specific goals both groups of politicians pursue in the specific activity type of a mediated political panel debate. As we mentioned before, we expected to find:

- distinct patterns with respect to (i) and (ii) in government and opposition party talk.
- similar patterns with respect to (i) and (ii), albeit with different discourse functions.

4. Methodological frame

The study below is primarily text analytical, empirical and qualitative (although strongly supported by quantitative evidence if necessary). Following Simon-Vandenberg’s (1987) analysis of the strategic use of pronouns in the mediated Reagan-Mondale debates in 1984, we adopt a predominantly systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004; Eggins 1994; Martin & Rose 2007 [2003]). SFL starts from the premise that in essence, every language has three (meta)functions: (i) to refer to the world around us and to relationships between people, objects and concepts in that particular world (*experiential metafunction (ideation)*), (ii) to express language users’ interpersonal relationship with discourse referents as well as

with contextual factors (i.e., interlocutors, conversational setting) (*interpersonal metafunction*) and (iii) to create a coherent message (*textu(r)al metafunction*).

From that angle, SFL offers the right tools to investigate (a) the nature of propositions in which referents expressed by the “we/wij”-pronoun occur (*experiential metafunction (ideation)*) and (b) the speaker’s assessment of (aspects of) their status in terms of necessity and/or feasibility (*interpersonal metafunction*). The former will be analyzed by means of the Transitivity system network and the associated taxonomy of participant microroles and process types (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 302). For each individual category of “we/wij”-pronoun, it is asked in which process (or predicate) types they are most typically involved.⁴ As for the latter, attention will be mainly paid to Mood⁵ choices expressing deontic (Deo) and dynamic modality (Dyn).

5. Data collection

5.1. Corpus details and selection criteria

In order to offer a representative set of different government and opposition party members (31 politicians in sum (16 government party discussants, 15 opposition members)), our corpus consists of nine transcribed political panel debates conducted in the Flemish television programme *De Zevende Dag* (‘The Seventh Day’) in 2008 and 2009. This Sunday morning talk show, broadcasted by the Flemish-Belgian public broadcasting organization VRT (channel: *Één*), consists of a succession of regular features concerning political, cultural, culinary, sport and human interest related topics. However, the main part of the show deals with topical political subject matters. Within this specific section, the political debate is a recurrent item in which one or two of such topics are discussed. As indicated in Table 1, these debates last approximately 20 minutes, with the exception of (II), which is almost twice as long given the obvious major concern regarding the December 2008 government crisis. Discussions are hosted

⁴ The ideational metafunction of SFL distinguishes six process types:

- Material processes (Pm) prototypically denote processes of ‘doing’ in a physical world (e.g., *He gave a present to his mother.*).
- Mental processes (Pme) refer to inner experiences, either emotional (Emo) (e.g., *She is feeling really embarrassed about his behaviour.*), cognitive (Cog) (e.g. *They understand the problem.*), or perceptive (Pp) (e.g., *We heard a strange noise in the garden.*).
- Verbal processes (Pv) have to do with conveying (spoken or written) messages (e.g., *He told me the story of Peter Pan.*).
- Behavioural processes (Pb) are located at the boundary of material and mental processes, and mainly refer to conscious, deliberately experienced inner processes (e.g., *He is listening to the radio (vs. He hears the radio).*).
- Finally, existential processes (Pe) express the existence or the occurrence of a particular referent (e.g., *There are many people on the street.*).
- Relational processes (Pr) involve the attribution of a specific property to a referent (e.g., *These flowers are beautiful.*), the identification of a referent (e.g., *Elephants are mammals.*) or the expression of a possession relationship (Pp) between two referents (e.g., *This house is John’s./John has a house.*).

⁵ In the SFL framework, Mood refers to linguistic elements expressing the positioning of speakers or writers (generally in terms of distance (dissociation) or proximity (affiliation)) with respect to the referents (people, objects, concepts) they mention in discourse.

by so-called “Wetstraat watchers”⁶ – that is, journalists particularly specialized in the Belgian political scene.

As Clayman and Heritage (2002: 299ff) underline, panel guests are carefully selected on the basis of divergent and even contrasting viewpoints in order to assure a verbal clash (i.e., divergent ideological backgrounds, different power statuses). This certainly holds true for the debates of *De Zevende Dag*: Generally, four discussants are invited, two of them typically belonging to decision-making bodies (i.e., government) and two of them typically pointing out the problematic nature of these decisions (i.e., trade union representatives, opposition party members). In this paper, we only focus on panel debates in which (both federal and regional) government and opposition are opposed to each other.⁷ This dichotomy, for that matter, appears to be preallocated. First, in each of our analyzed debates, government and opposition party members sit across each other. Second, the introductory question round is mostly characterized by a rigid turn-taking structure in which the interviewer first gives the floor to the (two) government party members and only subsequently seeks to elicit a reaction from one of the opposition discussants.

5.2. *Background information*

Before turning over to the analytical part of this paper, we first need to elucidate the central topics discussed in the selected panel debates. Besides, we also briefly clarify the ideological orientation of the different Flemish political parties represented in our subcorpus.

- In episode I, the rejection of an air tax (a tax on plane tickets) by the regional governments (Flanders and Wallonia) and its consequences for the 2009 federal estimate are discussed by the participants. The second central topic is the sale of Fortis Belgium to the French bank holding BNP Paribas. Fortis was a former Belgian-Dutch financial institution. Due to the repercussions of the global financial crisis, parts of the company were bought by the Dutch and Belgian state. The latter resold the majority of its Fortis Belgium shares to BNP Paribas. This decision was highly contested.
- In episode II, five party chairmen and –ladies debate the resignation of Belgian PM Yves Leterme and his first government on 18 December 2008. He and some other members of the Belgian federal government were accused of having influenced the judiciary during the Fortis trial.⁸ This was seen as a violation of the separation of powers.
- In episode III, the foundation of two distinct inquiry committees is discussed. The first one, the “Fortis inquiry committee” had the objective of investigating the alleged political interference in the Justice (see also: Episode II) and the

⁶ In the Brussels Wetstraat (‘Law Street’), the most important Belgian federal government buildings are located. Hence, the street name is often used as a metonymy (Croft & Cruse 2004) to indicate Belgian federal politics as a whole.

⁷ Note that, in the case of politicians who participated in more than one panel debate (e.g., Jean-Marie Dedecker), only one contribution was singled out for analysis. Panel contributions which were not taken into consideration, are italicized in Table 1.

⁸ The sale of Fortis Belgium shares to BNP Paribas (see also: episode I) was contested by the Brussels court of justice.

second one was meant to evaluate the Belgian policy with regard to the 2008 bank crisis (see also: Episode I). Likewise, the new Belgian PM Herman Van Rompuy's intention to not save on government spending in 2009 – despite the global financial crisis – is presented to the panel discussants.

- In episode IV, four members of the federal Parliamentary Committee on Finances discuss the rescue of KBC, a Belgian financial institution, through Flemish government funding. Particular attention is paid to the disunity among Flemish and Walloon parties in the federal government with respect to important policy decisions.
- In episode V, four members of the Fortis inquiry committee comment on new entanglements in their inquiry (see also: Episode III).
- In episode VI, two topics are central. First, new developments in the Koekelberg affair are discussed. Fernand Koekelberg, commissioner general of the federal police at the time, was accused of having suppressed an anonymous complaint against Guido De Padt, Minister of the Interior. Second, the four invited politicians declare themselves against or in favour of a future with nuclear energy in Belgium.
- In episode VII, four members of the (Flemish) Committee for Public Works, Mobility and Energy debate some mobility issues in Flanders: (i) the broadening of the Brussels ringway and the installation of a dynamic traffic management system, (ii) a future mileage levy for trucks and cars and (iii) the returns on public transport (bus and tram).
- In episode VIII, the growing waiting lists in the social service sector are the subject of discussion.
- In episode IX, two subjects are brought under discussion: The imminent closure of the Opel Antwerp factory (and possible Flemish strategies for preventing this) and the ban of all religious symbols (i.e., headscarves) in public schools in Antwerp.

Seven Flemish political parties are represented in our data set. Open VLD (“Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten” [‘Flemish Liberals and Democrats’]) is a progressive liberal party. CD&V (“Christendemocratisch & Vlaams” [‘Christian Democratic & Flemish’]), a centre party, particularly engages in public well-being, health and family affairs. SP.A (“Socialisten en Progressieven Anders” [‘Socialists and Progressives Different’]) is a left-wing social-democratic and progressive party. Groen! [‘Green!’], a left-wing progressive and ecological party, stands up for pacifism, social justice and sustainable development. Lijst Dedecker [‘List Dedecker’] (LDD) is a right-wing conservative-liberal party. Vlaams Belang [‘Flemish Interest’], an extreme right, conservative party, overtly strives for Flemish independence. Finally, N-VA (“Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie” [‘New Flemish Alliance’]) is a right-wing conservative party which, amongst other things, aims for the gradual transfer of powers from the Belgian federal state to the regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital Region).

DATE	TOPIC	LENGTH	MODERATOR	INTERVIEWEES	PARTY
(I) 8/11/2008	the 2009 estimate + the sale of Fortis Belgium to BNP Paribas	19:35 (5012 words)	Goedele Devroy	Luk Van Biesen (LVB)	Open VLD
				Etienne Schouppe (ES)	CD&V
				Johan Van de Lanotte (JVL)	SP.A
				<i>Jean-Marie Dedecker</i>	<i>Lijst Dedecker</i>
(II) 21/12/2008	the resignation of Leterme I	34:04 (8840 words)	Marc Van de Looverbosch	Marianne Thyssen (MT)	CD&V
				Bart Somers (BS)	Open VLD
				Caroline Gennez (CG)	SP.A
				Jean-Marie Dedecker (JDD)	Lijst Dedecker
(III) 18/1/2009	Fortis inquiry committees + 2009 budget deficit	17:57 (4533 words)	Goedele Devroy	Bart Tommelein (BTM)	Open VLD
				Servais Verherstraete (SV)	CD&V
				Peter Vanvelthoven (PV.I)	SP.A
				<i>Jean-Marie Dedecker</i>	<i>Lijst Dedecker</i>
(IV) 25/1/2009	dissent Flemings- Francophones with regard to KBC rescue	17:56 (4490 words)	Lieven Verstraete	Hendrik Bogaert (HB)	CD&V
				Rik Daems (RD)	Open VLD
				Dirk Van der Maelen (DVM)	SP.A
				Jan Jambon (JJ)	N-VA
(V) 15/3/2009	progress of the Fortis inquiry committee	20:59 (5152 words)	Goedele Devroy	<i>Servais Verherstraete</i>	<i>CD&V</i>
				Geert Versnick (GV)	Open VLD
				Renaat Landuyt (RL)	SP.A
				Gerolf Annemans (GA)	Vlaams Belang
(VI) 5/4/2009	Koekelberg affair + the future of nuclear energy	18:26 (4327 words)	Johny Van Sevenant	Jo Vandeurzen (JVZ)	CD&V
				<i>Bart Tommelein</i>	<i>Open VLD</i>
				Bruno Tobback (BTC)	SP.A
				Meyrem Almaci (MAC)	Groen!
(VII) 26/4/2009	mobility issues + road-pricing initiatives in Flanders	20:34 (4937 words)	Goedele Devroy	Hilde Crevits (HC)	CD&V
				Kathleen Van Brempt (KV)	SP.A
				Annick De Ridder (ADR)	Open VLD
				Monique Denhaen (MDH)	Lijst Dedecker
(VIII) 10/5/2009	the social service sector in Flanders	18:01 (4573 words)	Goedele Devroy	Veerle Heeren (VH)	CD&V
				Peter Vanvelthoven (PV.II)	SP.A
				Mieke Vogels (MV)	Groen!
				<i>Jean-Marie Dedecker</i>	<i>Lijst Dedecker</i>
(IX) 13/9/2009	closure of Opel Antwerp + ban of religious symbols in public schools	18:27 (4078 words)	Johny Van Sevenant	<i>Peter Vanvelthoven</i>	<i>SP.A</i>
				Ludwig Caluwé (LC)	CD&V
				Sven Gatz (SG)	Open VLD
				Filip Dewinter (FDW)	Vlaams Belang

TABLE 1. Overview of the analyzed panel debates (*opposition members are highlighted in gray).

6. Analysis⁹

6.1. Government party members

6.1.1. The exclusive meaning of “we/wij”

In government party talk, the exclusive meaning of the personal pronoun “we/wij” remarkably often occurs with material process verbs modified by the deontic modal verb “moeten” [‘must’] (28 (out of 107) attestations (26.2%), see Table 2B).¹⁰ It

⁹ Every example in this paper is labelled as follows: Number of episode (from I to IX (see Table 1)); initials of the politician speaking (see Table 1); line numbers in the transcript.

¹⁰ Examples of this include:

clearly appears that government party politicians intend to stress the *necessity* of their actions: In addition, considerable attention is paid to the explanation of a rationale behind or the purpose of a specific future measure. In (1) below, BTM points out that budget surpluses are essential prerequisites for restricting indebtedness. This rhetorical effect is produced by means of a *non-finite enhancing purpose clause* (introduced by the conjunction “*om*” [‘in order to’]). In (2), ADR states that additional investments for public transport are necessarily required to tackle current traffic issues in Brussels. First, a *conditional clause complex* (conjunction: “*als*” [‘if’]) is used to emphasize the (taken-for-granted) inefficacy of only a broadening of the Brussels ringway. Second, through the causal-conditional conjunction “*dus*” [‘so’], the proposition expressed by the subsequent “*we*”-clause (the government’s future intention) is represented as a logical alternative:

- (1) “*Ik ik denk dat wij zo snel mogelijk, om de volgende generaties niet te bezwaren, om de factuur niet door te schuiven naar onze kinderen of kleinkinderen, zo snel mogelijk naar overschotten moeten gaan.*” (episode III; BTM; 351-354)

I I think that we need to head for surpluses as soon as possible, so as to not burden the next generations, so as to not pass on the invoice to our children or grandchildren.

- (2) “*Maar nogmaals [...], als men enkel die verbreding van de Ring aanpakt, dan gaat natuurlijk geen einde mee gemaakt worden aan het fileprobleem van de Brusselaars. Dus we zullen moeten investeren, op een verstandige manier, in bijkomend openbaar vervoer, [...]*” (episode VII; ADR; 76-79)

But once again [...], if only the broadening of the Ringway is dealt with, this will obviously not end the traffic-jam issues of the citizens of Brussels. We therefore will have to invest in additional public transport in a sensible way, [...]

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- “[...] en het zal aan ons gelegen zijn – CD&V en VLD, Open VLD, in the regering – om te zeggen “hey, bij de leest”, en euh, hier moeten wij de maatregelen nemen die nodig zijn voor het land.” (episode IV; RD, 245-247, 249) [‘[...] and it will be our responsibility – [the responsibility of] CD&V and VLD, Open VLD, in the government – to say “hey, let the cobbler stick to his last”, and, uhm, with respect to this we have to take the measures that are necessary for this country.’]
 - “Euhm, wel, ik vind dat we de druk moeten opvoeren, en wij moeten gewoon verdergaan. We moeten nu zorgen dat we met de andere gewesten een akkoord bereiken en we moeten doorgaan, want die kilometerheffing voor vrachtvervoer is essentieel om de mobiliteit te kunnen sturen in dit land.” (episode VII; KV; 426-430) [‘Uhm, well, I think that we have to increase pressure, and we just have to go on. We have to make sure that we reach an agreement with the other regions, and we have to go on, because that mileage levy for cargo transport is essential to control mobility in this country.’]

	MT	SV	HB	JVZ	ES	HC	VH	LC	BS	BTM	RD	LVB	GV	ADR	PV.I	KV	TOT
Pm	6	9	8	3	2	4	28	7	1	11	7	2	3	2	6	8	107
Emo	6	2	1	2	0	2	1	1	1	5	1	2	0	4	5	2	35
Cog	0	2	0	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	13
Per	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	7
Pv	1	1	2	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	1	4	2	0	1	2	19
Pb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Pr	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	3	0	1	3	0	13
TOT	14	14	11	7	3	6	39	8	6	19	9	14	9	9	15	13	196

TABLE 2A. Attestations of exclusive “we/wij” in government party talk.

	M T	SV	HB	JVZ	ES	HC	VH	LC	BS	BTM	RD	LVB	GV	ADR	PV.I	KV	TOT
Deo	1	2	4	1	1	0	3	1	1	7	1	1	1	0	0	4	28
Dyn	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	9
//	4	6	3	2	1	4	24	5	0	3	6	1	1	2	4	4	70
TOT	6	9	8	3	2	4	28	7	1	11	7	2	3	2	6	8	107

TABLE 2B. Mood choices in material process clauses with exclusive “we/wij” as Actor.

The necessity of particular measures is sometimes more explicitly conveyed, not seldom by means of pseudo-clefts (see (3) below)). In that case, the pronoun “we/wij” most typically (35 (out of 196) instances (17.9%), see Table 2A) occurs (i) as a Senser in emotive mental process clauses (e.g., “*wij als liberalen willen*” [‘we as Liberals aim for’] (4)) or (ii) as an entity in a circumstantial element of Angle (e.g., “*waar het voor ons op aankomt*” [‘what counts for us’] (3), “*wat ons betreft*” [‘according to us’] (4)).¹¹ As Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 276) note, both realizations are interrelated, since both of them are designed to reveal a particular viewpoint. The feelings expressed predominantly fall within the appraisal subcategory of *irrealis affect* (Martin & White 2005: 48), and mainly treat government party priorities (affect>inclination>desire):

- (3) “*In elk geval, een doorstart, wat men ook zegt, waar het voor ons op aankomt, is dat we naar een regering kunnen gaan die geloofwaardig is en die slagvaardig is, [...]*” (episode II; MT; 35, 37-38)

Anyway, as for a start up [of the government], whatever is said, *what counts for us*, is that we can head for a government coalition which is credible and which is decisive, [...]

- (4) “*En wij als liberalen willen zo snel mogelijk terug naar een begrotingsevenwicht en een begrotingsoverschot, zoals dat ook onder premier Verhofstadt het geval*

¹¹ Other examples of these uses (Senser in emotive mental process clauses or Entity in a circumstantial element of Angle) include:

- “*Voor ons, voor ons, voor ons is dat een totaal onmogelijk ... Ja, maar dat is een totaal onmogelijk ... Dat is inderdaad voor ons on-besprekbaar, laat ons hier duidelijk zijn, on-besprekbaar, [...]*” (episode I; LVB; 322, 324, 327, 329-330) [‘For us, for us, for us, that is a completely impossible ... Yes, but that is a completely impossible ... That is in fact non-negotiable for us, let us be clear about this.’]
- “*De CD&V heeft er nooit een geheim van gemaakt dat in dat soort verhaal wij euh kern-energie geen taboe vinden. Wij zijn geen fanatieke verdedigers van kernenergie, [...]*” (episode VI; JVZ; 255-258) [‘CD&V has never made a secret of the fact that, in that kind of story, we do not taboo nuclear energy. We are not fanatical supporters of nuclear energy, [...]’]

was. *Wat ons betreft moet dat al vanaf volgend jaar.*” (episode III; BTM; 333-334, 336, 338)

And *we as Liberals aim for* a budget balance and surplus as soon as possible, as was also the case during the tenure of (former) prime minister Verhofstadt. *According to us*, this should be realized from next year on.

As suggested by Hunston and Thompson (2000: 5) and elaborated by Pounds (2010: 110), there is a close link between the above illustrations of irrealis affect dealing with inclination and the examples of deontic modality in the preceding paragraph. Both expression types are equally meant to inform the audience of the government's or the party's future priorities. What differs, is their *evaluative force*. Irrealis affect “*we/wij*”-clauses are characterized by a high degree of personalization. By contrast, the type of “*we/wij*”-clauses from the previous section do not explicitly refer to affectual responses and hence are less personalized (see Bednarek 2009: 167-168 for an extensive discussion about degrees of personalization).

6.1.2. The inclusive meaning of “*we/wij*”

The inclusive meaning of “*we/wij*” is often used in contrast with (neighbouring) countries. Such comparisons may serve various purposes. They can function as a means to put country- or region-specific problems into a different perspective. This is the case in (5), where SV nuances the 2008 budget deficit of 2% by arguing that France and Great Britain are faced with more serious deficits. In (6), however, ADR's confrontation of Flanders with other European regions underlines the necessity of a mileage levy for cars and trucks:

- (5) *“Ja, wij applaudisseren niet voor een tekort van bijna 2%, maar als je dat vergelijkt met onze buurlanden, presteren we nog goed. Frankrijk, Groot-Brittannië zitten met diepere begrotingstekorten.”* (episode III; SV; 368-370)

Of course, we do not applaud a deficit of almost 2%, but when compared to our neighbouring countries, *we* actually *perform* well. France, Great Britain are facing bigger budget deficits.

- (6) *“Euhm, twee belangrijke zaken aan een kilometerheffing. Dus, eerst en vooral, vrachtvervoer, maar ook in de toekomst naar wagens toe. Dat is belangrijk om de buitenlanders mee te laten betalen op ons wegennet, want we zijn momenteel één van de weinige regio's in Europa waar dat nog niet gebeurt.”* (episode VII; ADR; 432-435)

Uhm, two important remarks regarding a mileage levy. So, first and foremost, for freight traffic, but in the future for cars as well. That is important in order to make foreigners pay for our road network, because at the moment, *we are* one of the few regions in Europe where that still does not happen.

A more generic variant of inclusive “*we/wij*” occurs in relational and broadly defined possessive process clauses in which a prepositional phrase expressing a spatial or temporal circumstance enhances the pronoun (McGregor 1997: 150-151). In this configuration, the first person plural pronoun serves to locate a loosely defined ‘we’-group – the politicians themselves, the other discussants *and* the audience – in concrete spatiotemporal frames which are characterized by their *intangibility* (i.e., the economic downturn of the European car production sector in (7)). The positioning of a large community in such frames serves specific strategic purposes. In (7), LC represents the imminent closure – and the unemployment of thousands of employees involved – as a repercussion of uncontrollable economic forces, and not as the consequence of passivity in the tarrying Flemish Government, as previously suggested by FDW (“*want euh ... ik hoop dat het open blijft, maar ik vrees van niet. En waarom? Omwille van het simpele feit dat ook, en vooral, de Vlaamse Regering te weinig en te laat heeft gereageerd.*” [‘because eh ... I do hope that it stays open, but I am afraid not. And (do you know) why? Because of the simple fact that the Flemish Government in particular reacted too little and too late.’] (episode IX; FDW; 51-53)). Thus, in this example, government party members seek to shirk responsibility for (future) problematic events, attributing them to objectified contextual factors which they are not in full command of. From that angle, their strategy shows striking correspondences to what Fairclough (2003: 98-99) defines as “*rationalization*”:

- (7) “*We zitten natuurlijk met een automobielsector in Europa die in teruggang is, waar dat er overcapaciteit is, [...]*” (episode IX; LC; 175-176)

Of course, *we are facing* an automobile sector in Europe which is on the decline, in which there is overcapacity, [...]

As Table 3A below illustrates, inclusive “*we/wij*”-pronouns most frequently (62 (out of 156) attestations (39.7%)) occur in material process clauses. These clauses are often modified by a linguistic marker of deontic modality (30 (out of 62) attestations (48.4%), see Table 3B): A first person imperative (“*laten we*” [‘let’s’]) (5 (out of 62) attestations (8.1%))¹² or a deontic modality operator (usually the modal verb “*moeten*” [‘must’]) (23 (out of 62) attestations (37.1%)).¹³ Interestingly, the material processes in question

¹² Another example of this includes:

- “*Laat ons een klein beetje rustig blijven en ervoor zorgen dat we de zaak aanpakken in het belang van iedereen, in het belang van de spaarders, en in het belang van de mensen die daar werken.*” (episode III; BTM; 273, 275, 277) [‘Let us remain a little bit quiet and *let us make sure* that we tackle the case for the sake of everybody, for the sake of the savers, and for the sake of the people who work there.’]

¹³ Other examples of this include:

- “*En natuurlijk is het essentieel dat een euh politiebaas goed kan samenwerken met zijn minister, da’s evident, maar we mogen dit niet laten verglijden tot een soort publiek debat: [...]*” (episode VI; JVZ; 31-33) [‘And of course it is essential that a uhm commissioner general of the federal police can work well together with his minister, that is obvious, but *we may not let this lapse* into a kind of public debate: [...]’]
- “[...] *als men enkel die verbreding van de Ring aanpakt, dan gaat natuurlijk geen einde mee gemaakt worden aan het fileprobleem van de Brusselaars, dus we zullen moeten investeren, op een verstandige manier, in bijkomend openbaar vervoer, euh, [...]*” (episode VII; ADR; 76-79) [‘[...] if only the broadening of the Brussels ringway is dealt with, the traffic jam issues of the

not only relate to concrete activities (i.e., accomplishments, situations of doing), they also concern proposed *attitudes*. These suggestions often function as subtle replies to previous comments of opposition party members which are seen as little cooperative. In (8), ES immediately reacts to JDD's claim that Leterme wanted to withdraw the state guarantee. BS's proposal to adopt a responsible attitude in (9) arises from the observation that, unlike CG, JDD and BVK especially intend to reap electoral profit from the government crisis instead of looking for possible solutions:

- (8) "Laten we toch niet vooruitlopen. Laten we wachten." (episode I; ES; 408, 410)

Please let's not run ahead of things. Let's wait.

- (9) "[...] maar ik denk dat de houding die we allemaal moeten aannemen nu, de komende weken, da's weten dat er in juni verkiezingen zijn en zorgen dat de komende maanden we vooral aan de mensen denken, zo weinig mogelijk politieke spelletjes en proberen, daar waar we kunnen, samen te werken; [...]" (episode II; BS; 661-662, 664-665, 667)

[...] but I think that the attitude we all need to adopt now, in the course of the coming weeks, is to take into account that there will be elections in June and to make sure that, during the following months, we are mainly concerned about the citizens, to do as little politicking as possible and to try to collaborate wherever we are able to [...].

	MT	SV	HB	JVZ	ES	HC	VH	LC	BS	BTM	RD	LVB	GV	ADR	PV.I	KV	TOT
Pm	6	2	1	5	2	6	2	8	11	6	5	0	2	4	1	1	62
Emo	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	13
Cog	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	1	6	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	14
Per	3	1	0	0	3	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	13
Pv	1	0	2	0	1	2	3	1	0	3	3	1	0	1	1	0	19
Pb	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Pr	4	1	3	1	0	1	1	3	5	6	1	1	3	1	2	0	33
TOT	14	5	6	6	9	10	11	14	29	17	10	2	7	7	7	2	156

TABLE 3A. Attestations of inclusive "we/wij" in government party talk.

	MT	SV	HB	JVZ	ES	HC	VH	LC	BS	BTM	RD	LVB	GV	ADR	PV.I	KV	TOT
Deo	1	1	0	3	2	4	1	1	6	3	4	0	1	2	1	0	30
Dyn	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
//	3	1	1	2	0	1	1	7	4	3	1	0	1	2	0	1	28
TOT	6	2	1	5	2	6	2	8	11	6	5	0	2	4	1	1	62

TABLE 3B. Mood choices in material process clauses with inclusive "we/wij" as Actor.

people from Brussels are in fact not going to be concluded, so we will have to invest, in a sensible way, in additional public transport, uhm, [...]']

6.2. Opposition party members

6.2.1. The exclusive meaning of “we/wij”

Opposition party discussants significantly less often ($\chi^2=18.739$, $p=0.00001499$) make use of exclusive “we/wij” in comparison with their government party opponents. Moreover, exclusive “we/wij”-pronouns most commonly occur in verbal process clauses (23 (out of 68) attestations (33.8%)). This observation is in line with actions typically proposed or performed by opposition party members: Requesting for official documents, passing a bill, introducing a motion (10) or politicizing a particular topical issue (e.g., the waiting lists for disabled people in (11)):

- (10) “Wij zullen maandag een wetsvoorstel rond voorlopige twaalfden indienen.” (episode II; CG; 634-637)

We will introduce a motion concerning provisional twelfth on Monday.

- (11) “[...] en als het aan ons ligt, dan zullen we het blijven politiseren, daar mag u zeker van zijn.” (episode VIII; MV; 479-481)

[...] and if it is up to us, we will continue to politicize it, that is for sure.

	CG	DVM	PV.II	JVL	RL	BTC	SG	JJ	JDD	MDH	BVK	GA	FDW	MV	MAC	TOT
Pm	2	3	5	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	18
Emo	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	8
Cog	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	9
Per	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3
Pv	3	1	6	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	0	0	1	1	23
Pb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pr	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	7
TOT	10	6	13	9	1	1	3	2	3	4	7	4	0	2	3	68

TABLE 4. Attestations of exclusive “we/wij” in opposition party talk.

Some SP.A (DVM, JVL) politicians strategically adopt the exclusive use of “we/wij” (either in combination with material process verbs (e.g., “(terug)brengen” [‘bring back, restore’]) or in combination with mental process verbs of cognition (e.g., “schatten” [‘estimate’], “weten” [‘know’])) in order to highlight the merits of their own party in former government coalitions (thereby excluding other co-governing parties). SP.A belonged to the federal government coalition from 1999 to 2007 (Verhofstadt I and II) and had been continuously part of the Flemish government from 1988. Some (positive) experiences and realizations (e.g., “zijn wij [...] erin geslaagd” [‘we succeeded in’]) from these periods are brought into memory in order to corroborate the incapacity (e.g., “een rampzalig budgettair beleid” [‘a disastrous budgetary policy’]) of the current coalition. The underlying message is quite straightforward: “If we succeeded in accomplishing x (in a similar context), why does the current government coalition not manage to achieve x?”:

- (12) “Ja, ik euh denk dat het voor iedereen duidelijk is: deze regering heeft een rampzalig budgettair beleid gevoerd. Tussen ’99 en 2007 ... zijn wij, in een

paarse regering, erin geslaagd om de schuld terug te brengen met 30% punten, en de sociale, en de sociale zekerheid, en de sociale zekerheid in evenwicht.” (episode IV; DVM; 397-399, 401, 403)

Yeah, I uh think that it is clear for everyone: This government coalition has pursued a disastrous budgetary policy. Between '99 and 2007 ... *we*, in a liberal-socialistic government coalition, *succeeded in bringing back* national debt by 30% points, and in balancing social security.

6.2.2. The inclusive meaning of “we/wij”

Just like in government party talk, inclusive references of “*we/wij*” often occur in contrast with neighbouring countries. Opposition discussants almost exclusively use these comparisons in order to expose the mismanagement of the current government. In (13), JVL overtly denounces the take-over of the Belgian financial institution Fortis by the Dutch state and BNP Paribas (France). This is particularly marked by the negative connotation of the Dutch verb “*verpatsten*” [‘flog’], which can be interpreted as an implicit judgement dealing with (in)capacity. Besides, this failure is further stressed by a comparison with the other European countries, which did not sell their banks to foreign countries:

- (13) “*Maar we hebben wel – en dat heeft geen enkel ander Europees land (...) – twee grote banken naar twee andere landen verpatst.*” (episode I; JVL; 433, 435-436)

But *we did flog – and no other European country has [done] that (...) –* two big banks to two other countries.

As we argued before, a generic variant of inclusive “*we/wij*” is adopted by government party members to locate a large community including the government, the opposition and the audience in specific spatiotemporal contextual frames characterized by their uncontrollability. Since these frames are represented as elements which almost everyone is confronted with, they give an impression of factuality and taken-for-grantedness. In that way, they serve to rationalize (future) negatively perceived events and to disclaim government responsibility for them. In opposition party talk, however, a similar meaning of inclusive “*we/wij*” is sometimes appealed to in order to question this disclaim. For this purpose, the “*we/wij*”-group is *confronted with* an issue which is explicitly indicated as the *consequence* of government failure. This connection is typically realized (i) through a relational process clause with a circumstantial attribute (e.g., “*We zitten vandaag in de chaos; [...]*” [‘It is today that *we are* in the chaos.’ (episode II; BVK; 204-205)] (5 attestations), (ii) through a (broadly interpreted) possessive clause (e.g., “[...] *we hebben nu al twee jaar lang een situatie waarin de twee opeenvolgende ministers van binnenlandse zaken een soort oorlog uitvechten of vice versa, met de met de politiebaas, [...]*” [‘[...] for two years already *we find ourselves in* a situation in which the two successive Ministers of the Interior are at war or vice versa, with the with the police executive, [...]’ (episode VI; BTC; 112-114)] (9 attestations) or (iii) through a metaphorically used material process clause (e.g., “*Wat ik, wat ik verwacht – [...] – wij stevenen af op een soort van saneringsplannen in de*

sociale zekerheid, een soort van index zoals we onder rooms-blauw hebben gekend.” [‘What I, what I expect – [...] – we are heading straight towards a sort of financial reconstruction scheme[s] in social security, a kind of consumer price index like we experienced during the christian democratic-liberal government coaliton.’ (episode IV; DVM; 414, 416-417, 419)] (10 attestations).

An example which aptly illustrates the divergent goals government and opposition party members pursue with the generic inclusive pronoun “we”, is (14). The issue linked to the first person plural pronoun is a federal budget deficit of seven billion of euros in two years. PV.I not only pins this deficit on to the current government coalition (i.e., “*los van de economische crisis, met deze regering*” [‘apart from the economic crisis, with this government’]), he also dissociates himself (by means of an echoic, ironically loaded attribution (Sperber & Wilson 1995 [1986]: 238ff)) from the government’s rationalization strategy, in which all responsibility is passed to an intangible international economic crisis:

- (14) “*Da’s hetgeen wat we in, als oppositie, al maanden zeggen en wat door Leterme en door Reynders altijd ontkend is, want “het was allemaal de schuld van die internationale economische crisis.” Er is een tekort, los van de economische crisis, van 3,5 miljard euro, in 2009; 2008 is met eenzelfde tekort afgesloten. Met andere woorden, op twee jaar tijd hebben we een tekort, los van de economische crisis, met deze regering, van 7 miljard euro; Belgische oude franken: 280 miljard frank.*” (episode III; PV.I; 390-397)

That is what we, as opposition, are telling for months and what has always been denied by Leterme and Reynders, because “*it was all due to that international economic crisis.*” There is a deficit, apart from the economic crisis, of 3.5 billions of euro, in 2009; 2008 was closed with a similar deficit. In other words, within two years *we are facing* a deficit, apart from the economic crisis, with this government, of 7 billions of euro; Belgian francs: 280 billions of francs.

Just like in government party talk, inclusive meaning of “we/wij” is often found in material process clauses (85 (out of 181) attestations (47.0%), see Table 5A). Moreover, just like government party members, discussants belonging to an opposition party mainly adopt these constructions for urging their interlocutors: These proposals are, among other things, verbally realized by means of (i) first person plural imperatives (“*laten we*” [‘let’s’]) (3 attestations)¹⁴ or (ii) *deontically* modalized clauses (18 attestations).¹⁵ However, whereas government party discussants were also concerned

¹⁴ An example of this includes:

- “*En d’r zijn vele contacten geweest tussen gerecht en politiek. Laten we die oplijsten, kijken welke dat er bevestigd worden door alle getuigen en kijken waar dat er nog verder moet onderzocht worden.*” (episode V; RL; 138-139, 141) [‘And there have been many contacts between judiciary and politics. Let’s list them, let’s see which ones are confirmed by all witnesses and let’s see at which points there needs to be further investigation.’]

¹⁵ Another example of this includes:

- “*Ik denk dat het voor de stabiliteit en de toekomst van het land ontzettend belangrijk is dat we samenvallende verkiezingen hebben, en niet alleen dit keer, maar altijd euh vanaf de volgende keer, en dat we dat ook wettelijk verankeren. We moeten daar de grondwet voor wijzigen; wij willen daar een voorstel euh voor doen als SP.A.*” (episode II; CG; 245-250) [‘I think that it is

about the *attitude* of their fellow politicians, opposition party members only seek to spur on the other discussants (and the whole political community) to *action*. This is corroborated by the type of material process verbs used by opposition discussants: These verbs predominantly indicate concrete activities, rather than a particular attitude.

In addition to their necessity, opposition party members often intend to emphasize the *feasibility* of proposed future actions. This occurs, amongst other things, through expressions of *dynamic or competential modality* (19 (out of 85) attestations (22.4%), see Table 5B).¹⁶ This modality subtype indicates “an evaluation that the Actor (usually) of the situation [inclusive “*we/wij*”, BV] is capable of performing the action” (McGregor 1997: 229).

In (15), RL advocates the continuation of the 2009 Fortis research commission, in spite of the approaching Flemish elections: His suggestion is made explicit by the use of “*let’s*”-clauses (with the material process verbs “*zich (buiten de verkiezingen) stellen*” [‘not offer oneself (for re-election)’] and “*verderzetten*” [‘continue’]). The strategic employment of dynamic modality operators is illustrated in (16): FDW claims that – in a potentially autonomous Flemish region, hence the use of the epistemic modal verb “*zouden*” [‘should’] – it might be possible to take financially and economically interesting measures. This is repeatedly emphasized by a pattern consisting of the operator “*kunnen*” [‘can’, ‘be able to’], accompanied by inclusive “*wij*” as clause subject:

- (15) “*We kunnen misschien ook de zaken eens even omgekeerd bekijken. Laten we ons buiten de verkiezingen stellen en het onderzoek verderzetten.*” (episode V; RL; 393-395)

Perhaps we can just take a look at the object matter from the opposite perspective. *Let’s not offer* ourselves for reelection and *continue* the research.

- (16) “*En die flexibiliteit, die zouden wij maximaal moeten kunnen uitspelen in Vlaanderen, maar dat kunnen we niet, omdat we dat Belgische blok aan ons been hebben. Wij zouden kunnen die loonlast voor een stuk verlagen. Wij zouden kunnen fiscaal interessante euh maatregelen nemen om bedrijven euh aan te lokken naar hier en het aantrekkelijk te maken voor bedrijven.*” (episode IX; FDW; 116-118, 120, 122-123)

incredibly important for the stability and for the future of the country that the federal and the regional elections coincide, and not only this time, but always, uhm, starting from the next time, and [it is important] that we legalize that as well. For that purpose, *we have to amend* the constitution; as SP.A, we want to make a proposal for that.’]

¹⁶ Other examples of this include:

- “*Het belangrijkste is dat we alles kunnen onderzoeken, en dat we iedereen kunnen horen die we moeten horen.*” (episode III; PV.1; 157-159) [‘The most important thing is that *we can investigate* everything, and that we can hear everyone whom we have to hear.’]
- “*Jawel, d’r is een studie van EStar, die zegt dat simpelweg door slim energie te besparen we de twee kern-, de drie kerncentrales, de oudste reactoren, plus zeven van de s- van de meest vervuulende steenkoolcentrales al kunnen sluiten.*” (episode VI; MAC; 340-341, 343-346) [‘Sure, there is a study of EStar, which says that, simply by saving energy in a deliberate way, *we can* already *close* the three nuclear power plants, the oldest reactors, plus seven of the most polluting fossil-fuel power stations.’]

And that flexibility, *we should* fully *play this trump* in Flanders, but *we are not able to do* that, because we have that Belgian millstone around our neck. *We should be able to* partly *reduce* labour costs. *We should be able to take* fiscally interesting eh *measures* in order to eh *attract* business companies and to *make* it attractive for companies.

	CG	DVM	PV.II	JVL	RL	BTC	SG	JJ	JDD	MDH	BVK	GA	FDW	MV	MAC	TOT
Pm	7	5	3	2	12	0	6	1	2	6	3	9	23	2	4	85
Emo	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	7
Cog	0	1	0	1	2	0	3	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	15
Per	0	4	1	1	4	0	4	1	1	0	0	0	4	0	2	22
Pv	5	0	1	0	2	0	3	0	1	1	2	2	3	0	0	20
Pb	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pr	4	1	2	3	2	3	1	0	2	3	3	4	2	0	2	32
TOT	17	11	8	7	22	3	17	2	6	11	9	24	34	2	8	181

TABLE 5A. Attestations of inclusive “we/wij” (referring to discussants) in opposition party talk.

	CG	DVM	PV.II	JVL	RL	BTC	SG	JJ	JDD	MDH	BVK	GA	FDW	MV	MAC	TOT
Deo	1	0	1	0	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	2	21
Dyn	2	0	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	8	0	1	19
//	4	5	0	2	6	0	3	0	1	6	2	3	10	2	1	45
TOT	7	5	3	2	12	0	6	1	2	6	3	9	24	2	4	85

TABLE 5B. Mood choices in material process clauses with inclusive “we/wij” (discussants) as Actor.

7. Discussion: Differences between government and opposition talk

In the previous section, we examined both exclusive and inclusive “we/wij”-pronouns used by government and opposition party discussants in the selected panel debates. We particularly focused (i) on the nature of the propositions in which referents expressed by these pronouns are typically involved as well as (ii) on the politician’s positioning towards the necessity or potentiality of these propositions. Below, we will briefly juxtapose our main findings with respect to this research focus:

- (i) *Exclusive “we/wij”*. Generally, this pronominal meaning is significantly ($\chi^2=18.739$, $p=0.00001499$) more often used in government talk (196 attestations) than in opposition talk (68 attestations). In the case of government talk, exclusive “we/wij” mainly occurs in material process clauses (107 (out of 196) attestations (54.6%)). However, a considerable number of pronouns was also found to fulfill the participant role of Sayer in emotive mental process clauses (35 (out of 196) attestations (17.9%)). In sum, government party discussants primarily adopt the exclusive meaning of the first person plural pronoun in order to make mention of intentions (on behalf of the Belgian/Flemish citizens) or in order to indicate priorities and (strong) desires.
- In opposition talk, exclusive “we/wij” mostly occurs as a Sayer in verbal process clauses (23 (out of 68) attestations (33.8%)). Such a pattern obviously reflects the nature of activities commonly executed by opposition party members.

- (ii) *Inclusive “we/wij”*. Proportionally, this pronominal meaning is significantly ($\chi^2=12.621$, $p=0.00038144$) more often used in opposition talk (181 attestations) than in government (156 attestations) talk. Different discourse functions can be discerned.

First, in both government and opposition talk, this use of “we/wij” almost exclusively occurs in comparisons with other (neighbouring) countries. It was argued that opposition party members in particular appeal to such comparisons in order to sustain negative criticism (of the government).

Second, in both sets of talk, a rather generic meaning of “we/wij” was typically found in combination with possessive or circumstantial relational process clauses, serving to locate the ‘we’-group within a specific spatiotemporal frame. What differs, is the purpose for which these particular patterns (and their meaning) are employed: Government party discussants conceptualize a relationship between the ‘we’-group and intangible events (i.e., financial crisis) in order to minimize any responsibility for (future) incidents, while opposition members use the same construction to question this disclaimer, and to frame the ‘we’-group within a spatiotemporal context which is depicted as the repercussion of government failure.

Third, in both discourse sets, inclusive “we/wij” was often found within material process clauses which, in turn, were remarkably often modified by a first-person imperative (“let’s”-clause) or by a deontic modality operator (see sections 6.1.2.2 and 6.2.2.2). It appears that, once again, the same pattern is used for different goals by government and opposition party members: Proposals of the former are often related to the attitude of the co-present opponents, the latter almost exclusively seek to urge on their government party interlocutors to concrete actions. In addition, opposition party discussants sometimes try to emphasize the feasibility of proposed actions: As for material process clauses, dynamic modality operators more often (yet not significantly ($\chi^2=3.209$, $p=0.07323423$; Fisher’s test: $p=0.05532$)) occur in opposition talk (17 (out of 85) attestations (20%)) than in government party talk (4 (out of 62) attestations (6.5%)).

With respect to our twofold expectation formulated in section 3, it can be concluded that:

- government and opposition party talk generally differs in the type of process types/propositions in which the exclusive uses of “we/wij” occur. This dissimilarity reflects, among other things, the different type of activities executed by government and opposition party politicians respectively.
- although the types of process types/propositions in which the inclusive uses of “we/wij” occur, are generally the same, they serve different purposes in government and opposition party talk.

8. Concluding remarks

This paper intended to offer a brief insight into fine-grained yet significant differences in the way in which government and opposition party discussants deal with the divergent meanings of the Dutch first person plural pronoun “*we/wij*” in mediated political panel debates. It demonstrated how subtle pronominal choices in combination with selections from Transitivity and Mood (Appraisal) resources contribute to the image building of the self and/or the other. Needless to say that this implicitly affects the mental positioning of both towards the indirectly addressed overhearing audience. This is obviously intended by the invited politicians. After all, the audience is their ultimate addressee: They are the ones who, with an eye to future elections, need to be convinced of the necessity of an unpleasant measure and of the incredibility or invalidity of an opponent’s argument.

This study on its own obviously does not suffice to make substantial claims about different patterns in government and opposition party talk on either the lexicogrammatical or conversational pragmatic level. However, it can instigate further research on this topic. Ideally, its results should be complemented by analyses of panel debates between government and opposition in other institutional settings (i.e., parliament, political meetings, etc.). Likewise, a comparative study in which contemporary debates are juxtaposed to mediated political discussions during former government coalitions can also support the main findings in this paper: If a particular politician currently belongs to a government party but formed part of the opposition in the past, it would be interesting to see whether this is somehow reflected in his/her use of language in the two settings respectively. Only in that way we can learn more about “deeper molecular, atomic, and subatomic levels” (Clayman & Heritage 2002: 346) of interaction which often give rise to verbal struggles characteristic of panel debates between constitutionally and/or ideologically opposed guests.

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