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The construction of a ‘narrative’ in Australian federal budget speeches, 1996–2013

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Given the significance of annual budgetary decisions in both fiscal terms and policy reach, the annual federal budget speech has a distinctive place in Australia’s parliamentary cycle. The speeches afford a government a significant opportunity to articulate its economic policy agenda and to contrast its agenda with that of its predecessors or the Opposition. This article reviews the budget speeches of two Treasurers, Peter Costello (Liberal, 1996–2007) and Wayne Swan (Labor, 2008–13), and compares them with respect to how they used the budget speech to position their parties and their governments. Costello’s speeches are singular, consistent and highly partisan. Swan eschewed the ‘ad hominem’ argument favoured by Costello, but failed to project an alternative, consistent narrative of his government’s agenda and achievements.

Keywords: Australian political discourse; budgets; linguistics; rhetoric

Introduction

The focus of this article is the role of the annual budget speech in constructing a government’s narrative about how it manages the economy, how and why it raises revenue, and how and why it spends it. Rather than simply a vehicle for new announcements, the budget speech has a rhetorical function. It affords a significant opportunity for a government to argue for its economic policy vision and to contrast its vision with the policies of its predecessors and/or the Opposition. The policy breadth of the speech is more wide ranging than any other speech in the Australian political cycle. Budget speeches are concerned with spending in areas including, but not limited to, health, education, infrastructure (road, rail and telecommunications), defence spending and national security, the environment, disability services, childcare and the arts. The speech puts on display the preoccupations and priorities of the government of the day. Since the genre of political speeches demands a point of departure or ‘exordium’ and requires some kind of summing up or ‘peroration’, then the speech can and has been used to create and sustain a narrative about the governing of the Commonwealth. In fiscal terms, the speech is associated with the decisions of an incumbent government with respect to Australia’s annual taxation

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and other receipts, which, in 2014, was forecast at \$385 billion or 23 per cent of GDP (Australian Government 2014a).

In its importance and scope, the Australian federal budget speech is akin to the American State of the Union address. Australia is, of course, a much smaller polity, and the American and Australian systems of government are different in important respects. The State of the Union is given by the head of the executive branch of government, while the Treasurer delivers the annual Australian budget speech. The rhetorical power of the State of the Union address is undoubtedly more visible: Campbell and Jamieson argue that the State of the Union puts American presidents 'in the role of national historian' and that 'more eloquent presidents have seized the opportunity to reshape reality and to imprint that conception on the nation' (Campbell and Jamieson 1990: 52). These differences are important, yet in one key respect the budget speech is much like the State of the Union. The budget speech is concerned with 'the state of the Commonwealth', with how Australia is faring as an economy and society, and with how an incumbent government plans to preside over Australia's development into the future. It is a speech which embraces the nation as a whole.

The context for this article is the Australian Labor Party's loss of government in 2013 after only two terms and in spite of considerable achievements. In 2011, the then Australian Treasurer Wayne Swan received the prestigious award of 'Finance Minister of the year' from *Euromoney* magazine for his fiscal management during the Global Financial Crisis. In its press release, *Euromoney* noted that Swan had had some luck on his side, becoming Australia's Treasurer after a period of great boom for Australia. However, the award recognised Swan's 'swift response to stimulate the economy in 2007/2008', his decision to put in place 'an exit strategy for the stimulus' and the restraint he exercised in 'imposing a fiscal discipline that many other finance ministers refuse to adopt' (Euromoney 2011). *Euromoney* concluded that Swan had 'succeeded in getting most of the important decisions right'. It praised his 'strong and steady performance' while being Treasurer in a minority government and in the face of strong opposition. In a follow-up article, a *Euromoney* commentator noted the paradox that Swan was 'hailed abroad by everyone from the IMF to the OECD but loathed at home' (Ellis 2011). The achievements of Swan's period as Treasurer were summed up by a senior Australian journalist, Bernard Keane, in October 2012:

Treasury, the RBA and the Labor leadership have turned the high-taxing, high interest rate, inflationary economy Labor inherited into a low-interest, low-inflation economy with significantly lower level of taxes to GDP than in the Howard years while maintaining employment growth. (Cited in Chalmers 2013: 5)

These achievements were not rewarded at the 2013 federal election, when a majority of Australians denied the Labor government a third term, handing government instead to the Coalition, even though its leader was the least popular prospective prime minister in 25 years (news.com.au 2014). A 2014 poll on who ranked as Australia's best Treasurer (Essential Media 2014) put Swan far behind his predecessor. Only 8 per cent rated Swan as the nation's best Treasurer. Swan ranked only marginally above his successor, Joe Hockey, who had produced only one budget. Swan's immediate predecessor, Peter Costello, who governed during the 'most extraordinarily auspicious time economically' in decades (Fenna 2007: 330) won the

popularity contest: of the Treasurers in the poll – Keating, Costello, Swan and Hockey – Costello was rated Australia's best by the largest proportion (30 per cent) of the sample (although 35 per cent answered 'don't know'). While Swan's score among Labor voters was higher than that in the general sample (18 per cent rated him Australia's best Treasurer), a same proportion of Labor voters (18 per cent) considered Costello to be Australia's best Treasurer. Among Liberal/National Party voters, 54 per cent chose Costello, with just 3 per cent choosing Swan. Among Green voters, Costello was also preferred to Swan (18 per cent to 8 per cent).

Labor's failure to win a third term of government was, for at least some commentators, explained in a lack of what is popularly termed a 'narrative'. This criticism was levelled at the Labor government less than a year into its first term, by former Prime Minister Paul Keating, who said 'If there's any problem the government has ... it is to not have an overarching narrative in place' (O'Brien 2008). In the lead up to the 2013 election, this claim that the Labor government lacked a narrative became received wisdom (Chalmers 2013). Columnist for *The Age* newspaper, Waleed Aly, wrote 'Labor's problem is ideological. It doesn't really mean anything any more, and probably hasn't since Paul Keating lost power in 1996' (Aly 2013). A narrative, Aly continued, is essential for a government and not 'an optional, esoteric extra'.

This article considers Labor's election loss in the context of how Costello and Swan articulated the policy agendas of their respective governments and parties in their annual budget speeches. The analysis shows a coherent and consistent framing of the Coalition's economic agenda in Costello's speeches. By contrast, Swan's speeches neither clearly nor consistently frame a government agenda and did not make distinctive and visible the achievements of the Labor Party in office. Given the national attention that the annual budget garners, it is not insignificant that Swan failed to make use of the rhetorical opportunity afforded by the budget speech over his six years as Treasurer. While critiquing Swan's rhetorical failures, I do not suggest that Labor's communications on its own explain its 2013 election defeat or perceptions of Swan's time as Federal Treasurer. Swan's former Chief of Staff and now member for Logan (Queensland), Jim Chalmers, has written:

it has become too easy and nostalgic to blame Australia's entrenched pessimism on a lack of salesmanship or an inability for the Rudd and Gillard governments to 'sell' their substantial economic achievements as successfully as those of the past. Whether this is true or not ... at best it fails to explain the full story. At worst it's lazy, simplistic and wrong. (Chalmers 2013: 14)

Chalmers argues that the alliance between Australia's extreme Right, the Liberal Party and media and business organisations has been 'even more successful than the American Tea Party upon which they have modelled their modus operandi in "throwing sand into the gears of government then complaining that it doesn't work"' (Chalmers 2013: 14). The political system, Chalmers argues, rewards doom-sayers and hyper-partisans, and sections of the media specialise in confecting outrage. Chalmers cites a 2012 survey which showed that Australians were 'less confident in their economy and its prospects than the hardest hit citizens of Europe were of theirs' (Chalmers 2013: 6). Labor's inability to 'sell' its economic achievements is, as Chalmers suggests, not the full story.

However, a political party must present and argue for its agenda, both for itself and for its constituents. In comparing Costello and Swan's budget speeches, the article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Australian political discourse, which I briefly outline in the following section. Then I consider the context of the budget speech, before discussing the concepts relevant to the linguistic analysis on which my interpretation is based. I introduce the notion of a 'rhetorical unit' (Cloran 1994; 2010), which allows us to make visible key aspects of the rhetorical choreography of a speech. In addition, I discuss some grammatical systems from which speakers must choose in the act of making meaning: these choices are especially relevant to the general visibility of a government's actions. Finally, I compare the two Treasurers, with regard to the structure of their speeches, rhetorical manoeuvring, and some patterns in grammatical and lexical choices. Costello's narrative takes shape around his consistent denigration of the previous Labor government, and through assuming a narrow measure of a government's economic success. Swan, by contrast, avoids denigrating his predecessors as a means to position his party and government with respect to managing the economy. In avoiding the 'ad hominem' approach, he fails to produce a consistent alternative framing for the Labor government's economic policy agenda.

Studies of Australian political discourse

Studies of Australian political discourse, it seems, are still 'frustratingly rare' (Dyrenfurth 2010: 41).¹ Dann (2008), Walter and Uhr (2013) and Walter (2014) deal specifically with federal budget speeches. Dann's article, drawing on lexical frequencies and automatic semantic cluster analysis (using Leximancer) in Costello's final speech (2007), and Swan's first speech (2008), concludes that Swan's speech is more partisan than Costello's. My own findings do not support this claim. Walter and Uhr (2013) and Walter (2014) explore budget rhetoric in the second term of the Labor government. Walter and Uhr argue that Labor 'surrendered rhetorical control' by conflating 'a judgement regarding prudent macro-management' (2013: 431) with an election promise, so that good government came to be equated with budgeting for surpluses.

Walter (2014) develops the case by looking back to Costello's budget rhetoric. He argues that 'normative' judgements about the government's management of the economy can be traced to Costello's first budget speech, from which current notions of 'fiscal discipline' and 'responsible economic management' derive (Walter 2014: 35). Walter seeks evidence for this claim by comparing Costello's first speech with those of the previous Labor treasurer, Ralph Willis, for whom the objective of the budget was social benefit, rather than fiscal prudence. However, the speeches of Keating, like Costello's, show a strong preoccupation with casting Labor's budgets as economically prudent and sensible. Fenna writes 'through the 1980s, Labor had contributed to making fiscal prudence an article of faith in Australian politics' (2013: 97). What Walter (2014) shows, however, is the narrowing of the meaning of what constitutes 'good economic management' in Costello's language, a narrowness echoed by Labor in Opposition. When Labor returned to government,

¹ Relevant works include Dann (2008), Dowding et al. (2012), Dyrenfurth (2010), Fenton-Smith (2008), Grube (2010, 2011), Kabanoff et al. (2001), Kane and Patapan (2010), Uhr and Walter (2014), Walter and Uhr (2013) and Walter (2014).

and the Coalition to Opposition, both sides continued to make budget surpluses the defining measure of good economic management.

In these studies of Australian political discourse, there has been only minimal penetration of concepts from the 'rhetorical turn' (Dyrenfurth 2010; Finlayson 2004). Analysis has largely consisted of attention to lexical choices, either simply as relative frequencies and machine-generated collocational patterns (e.g., Dann 2008) or with regard to some particular category of words, such as Walter and Uhr (2013), who use the notion of 'evaluative-descriptive' lexical items from Skinner (2002). Skinner presents this notion without any attempt to define or delimit its scope. Yet, no category of word is self-evident. Dowding et al. (2012) use the coding scheme from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2014). However, Mikhaylov et al. show that the CMP is 'highly prone to misclassification and stochastic coding errors' (2012: 90). There is considerable scope for studies of Australian political oratory to be based on more robust linguistic analysis, to make the interpretation of political discourse more evidence based. The approach used here, like Fenton-Smith (2008), draws on a kind of critical linguistics which enables analysis of the structures, meanings and potential effects of linguistic patterns in their relevant contexts (Halliday 2003). This article also includes the first application of Cloran's rhetorical unit schema (Cloran 1994; 2010) to the analysis of political oratory. Dyrenfurth has noted the cross-disciplinary tensions in the 'rhetorical turn', arguing that:

Studies of political discourse, or any social discourse for that matter, clearly run the risk of providing poorly contextualised explanations of socio-political phenomena or failing to emphasise the material circumstances that give rise to or laid the groundwork for political discourses. (2010: 47)

Mindful of this issue, my analysis of Costello's and Swan's speeches locates the budget speech in its parliamentary context. In addition, I briefly sketch the context of the economic conditions that shaped the periods in which these Treasurers served. The flip side of Dyrenfurth's point is that the study of language also requires its own specialisation. The 'awe-inspiring power of language' derives from its complex internal organisation, a function of the long history of humans using language to interact with each other and make sense of their ecosocial environment (Halliday 2003). Even a short text is a complex ensemble of patterns, so only a selection of features of the budget speech texts are analysed here.

The budget speech: its context, function and linguistic patterns

According to the Australian government's budget website, the annual budget:

sets out the fiscal and economic outlook for Australia, and includes expenditure and revenue estimates for the current financial year, the budget year, and three forward financial years. It shows the Government's social and political priorities, and how the Government intends to achieve these. (Australian Government 2014b)

The location of the delivery of the budget is the lower house of Parliament. The lower house remains 'the principal forum for rhetorical contestation in the Australian polity', being the place where 'government is formed, the prime minister sits, and the opposition strives to call the government to account during question time'

(Kane and Patapan 2014: 5). Moreover, bills concerning appropriations and budget measures belong to the lower house: it is the responsibility over money bills that distinguishes the power of the lower house from the Senate.

Before turning to the rhetoric of these two Treasurers, it is important to put their periods of office into the context of the economic circumstances of the times. In a review of half a century of Australian economic policy, Fenna concludes that ‘the powerfully constraining effect of economic circumstances means that the content of [the parties’] policies is rarely if ever going to be as different as their respective ideologies would suggest’ (2013: 90). In relation to economic policy, Fenna argues ‘context is nearly everything’ (2013: 90). The defining feature of Costello’s period as Treasurer was a mining boom. Costello served as Treasurer during the ‘most extraordinarily auspicious time economically and went on to enjoy almost ideal conditions for governing, conditions that no party in power have experienced for decades’ allowing the Howard government ‘to distribute largesse without compromising the budget’ (Fenna 2007: 330). This windfall was squandered by the Coalition ‘on electorally driven expenditure of little lasting value’ (Fenna 2007: 339). Much was made by Costello of an inherited deficit, but Fenna argues that Costello exaggerated the size of the deficit, by ‘significantly underestimating projected revenues’ (2007: 339). Costello’s first budget, far from being the ‘major fiscal turn-around’ that Costello claimed, in fact ‘capitalised on existing trends as the economy grew strongly for the fourth consecutive year’ (Fenna 2007: 335). By contrast, although Australia was in robust fiscal health as he took on the responsibility of Treasurer, Swan was at the helm during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, which was described by the IMF as ‘the deepest post–World War II recession by far’ on a ‘truly global’ scale (International Monetary Fund, 2009, p. vii).

The power of speech has been understood since well before the ‘rhetorical turn’ in the social sciences and humanities of recent decades. Political speeches have been the object of study for over 2000 years (Gunderson 2009). Australian federal budget speeches can be seen as part of a long tradition, in which language has been the central medium for the achievement of ‘spontaneous consent’ (Gramsci 1971). A political speech involves choices over particular words (the choice between, for instance ‘tax’, ‘price’ or ‘levy’), choices over grammatical structures (for instance, between ‘the government created new jobs’, ‘new jobs were created’, or ‘during the last 12 months, unemployment fell’), choices pertaining to the forms of argument (the choice, for instance, to argue ‘ad hominem’, or not) and over the overall structure of the text, including how its elements are ordered. Taking the last of these first, and drawing on studies of oratory from the classical period, in particular, from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (see Lanham 1991), the typical elements of a political speech have been described as:

- Exordium, which catches the audience’s attention.
- Narration, which sets forth ‘the facts’.
- Division, which sets forth points stipulated and points to be contested.
- Proof, which sets forth the arguments that support one’s case.
- Refutation, which refutes the opponent’s arguments.
- Peroration, which sums up arguments and stirs audience.

Australian federal budget speeches begin with an ‘exordium’ and end on a ‘peroration’. They include an ‘economic forecast’, and they contain a selection of

announcements from the budget. Table 1 sets out the structural elements (Hasan 1985) of the budget speech, based on Costello and Swan's speeches. The caret (^) symbol denotes 'followed by'. The elements in the square bracket can vary their order, but only locally: that is, with respect to the other elements in the brackets. Thus, the element 'economic outlook' can either precede or follow the budget announcements.

The exordium element has a particular responsibility, rhetorically, for doing the political work of the budget speech, since this element requires a speaker to interpret the new budget announcements within some larger framework. Cicero describes the exordium as that 'which brings the mind of the auditor into a proper condition to receive the rest of the speech' (1949: 41). He suggests that the orator 'who wishes his speech to have a good exordium must make a careful study beforehand of the kind of case which he has to present', and that one of the most common faults in the construction of the exordium is for it to be 'general, common, interchangeable ... one which can be tacked to many cases, so as to seem to suit them all' (Cicero 1949: 53). To analyse the 'exordium', I draw on 'rhetorical unit' analysis (Cloran 1994; 2010), a form of analysis which brings into view how speakers move around topical options (from the interactants themselves, to things in a shared visible field, to absent and potentially abstract entities) and what options they take up in a temporal landscape (such as past, present or future, current present or timeless present, imaginary future, etc.). In constructing these rhetorical units, speakers combine choices regarding the nature of the grammatical Subject of a clause (the Subject being the element of a clause in which is vested responsibility for the validity of the proposition (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014)) and choices which construe the 'event orientation', to which the grammatical options in the tense system and the modal system (e.g., the use of modal verbs) are crucial.

Table 2 sets out some examples of rhetorical units from the exordium element of Costello's first speech, among which we find five of the small, but not closed, set of rhetorical units proposed by Cloran (Figure 1). The first, an 'observation' describes an entity 'in terms of characteristic or timeless doings, preferences, attributes or function' (Cloran 2010: 44). The second is a 'recount', a proposition oriented to a time prior to the moment of speaking. A speaker can refer to a near past time, or one that is relatively remote. The third example is a 'conjecture', a rhetorical unit in which the speaker speculates on what might happen if a certain condition or set of conditions is fulfilled. The fourth is a 'plan', which is a projection of what the speaker intends to do. A 'plan' is oriented to a future over which the speaker can exercise volition. The fifth example is a 'prediction', which as the name suggests, involves the speaker in predicting a future action, either one that is non-volitional on his/her part or one that is either volitional or not on the part of another agent.

Table 1. Generic structure of Australian federal budget speeches

Move motion ^ Exordium ^ [Economic Outlook • Budget Announcements] ^ Peroration ^ Commend motion

Notes: More technically, 'general structure' is the 'generic structure potential' (Hasan 1985), that is, a statement of possible arrangements of a Federal budget speech, based on the corpus for this paper. But see footnote 2.

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Table 2. Rhetorical units in Costello’s first speech as Treasurer

#	Extracted examples	Rhetorical unit	Grammatical Subject/central entity	Event orientation
1	This Budget implements the key election commitments of the Coalition	Observation	<i>This budget</i> (co-present entity)	Habitual
2	The budget outcome for the past year was a deficit of \$10.3 billion	Recount	<i>The budget outcome for the past year</i> (absent/abstract entity)	Prior
3	[If we took no corrective measures] it would be \$9.6 billion this year	Conjecture	<i>The budget outcome for the past year</i> (absent/abstract entity)	Hypothetical
4	[Although we did not create it,] we will take the responsibility to fix it	Plan	<i>we</i> (interactant)	Future (volitional on the part of the speaker)
5	The measures I announce tonight will reduce the underlying deficit by around \$4 billion this year and \$7.2 billion over two years	Prediction	<i>The measures I announce tonight</i> (absent/abstract entity)	future (non-volitional by speaker, ± volitional if another entity)

In these examples from Costello’s first speech as Treasurer, we see a kind of rhetorical choreography, in which he observes that his budget meets the Coalition’s election promises, he denigrates the fiscal management of the previous Labor

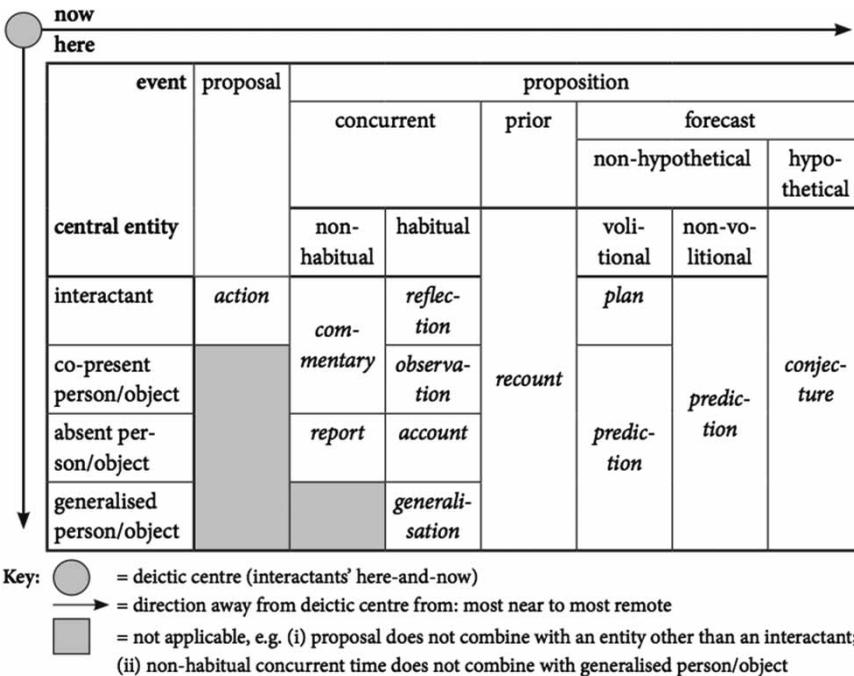


Figure 1. Cloran’s rhetorical units combining selections in event orientation and central entity

government, he constructs a grim picture of what the future would be had Labor been re-elected, his government takes charge of the apparently dire fiscal situation not of his party's making and he predicts a much brighter future as a consequence of his first budget.

Many other grammatical systems are relevant in constructing a budget speech. For instance, the process of taking credit for good news or avoiding responsibility when the news is bad involves grammatical structures of particular kinds deployed in particular ways. One would reasonably expect in a political speech that the incumbent would seek to present his or her party in a favourable light, giving visibility to what the government has done, is doing or will do. On this point, there is a fascinating tension in budget speeches, with respect to what a government can and should take credit for in regard to the economic fortunes of Australia. Economists suggest that external economic conditions set the parameters of what a government of either persuasion can or must do (Fenna 2013), but Treasurers are not constrained, rhetorically, by external economic factors. They can choose to position the government as largely responsible for all the positive economic news, to share the credit around, or to acknowledge external forces as consequential in shaping the economic conditions in which they make a limited set of decisions. The same rhetorical options hold when economic news is bad. Consider, for instance, the following extract from Keating's (1985) speech, his third as Treasurer:

I move:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

In doing so, I present the Budget for 1985–86.

The Hawke Government stands before the people of Australia tonight proud of its record of economic success and confident that Labor's social priorities are being met.

The evidence of our achievement is indisputable.

We have turned the economy around from deep recession to a rate of growth which is one of the fastest in the Western World.

We have generated 410,000 new jobs and are well on the way to meeting-or even surpassing-our target of creating half a million jobs in our first three years of office.

We have reduced the unemployment rate from a peak of 10.4 per cent to 8.2 per cent.

We have arrested and turned around the blow-out that we inherited in the Commonwealth's deficit.

We have reduced inflation to levels not seen for a decade.

At the same time we have implemented the social priorities of the Australian Labor Party with vigour and with vision.

We have introduced Medicare, we have substantially lifted social security payments, we have increased spending on education, public housing and home purchase assistance, and we have funded the community employment program.

In our first two and a half years we have achieved a great deal. (Keating 1985)

In this speech, Keating used the achievements of his government as the means to frame the forward-looking budget. The grammar which underpins this rhetorical style includes a tense selection that extends from the past up unto the time of speaking ('have turned', 'have generated', 'have reduced', etc.), action verbs ('turn',

Table 3. Active, transitive, independent clause structures in Keating's (1985) budget speech

Actor	Process	Goal
We	have turned it around	the economy
We	have generated	410,000 jobs
We	have arrested and turned around	the blowout that we inherited ...
We	have introduced	Medicare
We	have substantially lifted	social security payments

'generate', 'reduce'), and a clause structure that is both typically transitive (i.e., a clause structure where there is an 'Actor' which impacts on a 'Goal') and in active voice (a clause structure where the function of 'actor' is also the subject of the clause). Compare, for instance, 'we have generated 410,000 new jobs' (transitive, and active voice), with '410,000 new jobs have been created' (transitive but passive, and lacking an agent), or with 'employment rose' (an example of what grammarians call 'middle voice', a structure in which there is no external agency). In addition, Keating ensures that the agent of these achievements is unambiguously, and visibly, the Hawke government. Finally, each action of the government is set out in an independent clause, rather than in a subordinate clause. This is an important linguistic choice for giving information a higher profile, or a greater 'semiotic weight' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). The structures Keating uses (see examples in Table 3) provide the most obvious and direct route to projecting a view of a government as capable, dynamic and effective.

The budget speeches of Costello and Swan

I turn now to the corpus of the speeches of Costello and Swan, first in relation to the way the Treasurers structured their speeches, before then considering the exordium elements of these budget speeches. In terms of structure, there is an interesting contrast between the two speakers with respect to the unfolding of the budget speech, in their placement of the 'economic outlook' element. The outlook presents figures on economic growth (measured as expansion or contraction of GDP), inflation, unemployment levels, current accounts and terms of trade, the value of the dollar, and levels of investment in various sectors of the economy. Not all are mentioned in any one speech, and one-off events can be relevant to this outlook (e.g., natural disasters). Also, the measures of the economy's health can be framed rhetorically (see e.g., Costello's first budget speech). On the basis of these 18 speeches, the discursive move of 'economic outlook' is an obligatory element of the budget speech.²

However, the location of the economic forecast in the unfolding of the speech can vary. Swan delivered the 'economic outlook' before proceeding to announce new budget measures. He gave the forecast right after the initial opening/exordium element, so that it formed the backdrop against which he then presented the details of the budget. Thus, his budgets were framed not only rhetorically, but by 'facts

² Though not included in this study, Hockey's first speech (2014) as Treasurer in Australia's new Coalition government did not include a recognisable economic forecast. Until there are more data on his period as Treasurer, it is difficult to conclude whether this is a one-off variation for this register or a new approach to the act of giving a budget speech.

and figures' on the state of the economy, and in light of the future predictions about the economy. These forecasts diminished the agency and the visibility of government in 'managing' the economy, because they were largely presented, as might be expected, via the grammar of 'middle voice'. Middle voice, a structure in which causation is absent, resonates with the presentation of economic indices considered to be outside the control of government. Thus, economic indicators are said 'to rise' or 'to fall', and the economy 'grows' or 'contracts', as processes occurring on their own without the management or intervention of outside forces. The implication of this order of elements is that before Swan set out his new budget announcements, he deferred to the larger forces at work shaping the environment in which his budgetary decisions were made. In this process, Swan speeches show a stronger preoccupation with 'the economy' in his budget speeches. Table 4 contrasts the frequency of the words 'budget' and 'economy' in Costello's and Swan's speeches.³ Costello and Swan are roughly equal in their use of the word 'budget', but they are quite distinctive in their use of the word 'economy'. For Swan, 'budget' and 'economy' are equally frequent. For Costello, the word 'economy' has only about one quarter the frequency of the word 'budget'.

Swan's budgets were framed by the state of the economy, but Costello, by contrast, delivered the measures of the health of the economy as the penultimate move in his speech. By ordering the elements in his speeches in this way, Costello put maximal distance between his rhetorical framing and the traditional measures of the state of the economy. This choice created significant rhetorical advantages, in that Costello could separate the 'hard facts' of the economy from his rhetorical positioning of the poor economic management of his predecessors, and the agency of his government in 'fixing' the budget.

Let us now look more closely into the rhetorical styles of these two Treasurers. I briefly introduced the concept of the 'rhetorical unit' in the section of the article concerned with the context, function and linguistic patterns of the budget speech. (In the body of the article, I have glossed the rhetorical thrust of each rhetorical unit, rather than presenting the actual wording of the speech. See Appendix for a full analysis.) Table 5 presents the rhetorical units which make up the exordium of Costello's first speech. As his speech unfolds, we see 19 distinct units, in a comprehensive construction of what Costello calls an 'historic' turnaround in government finances (though recall Fenna's analysis of this claim noted above). Costello invokes the failures of the previous government and the putative size of the deficit and reflects on how governments should behave in the good times, and how a government must not avoid the tough decisions, and more. By contrast, Swan's exordium (Table 6) consists in only five rhetorical moves, in which he relates the budget to the government's election promises, he claims its outlays are offset by savings, he trumpets the size of the surplus and describes how it was achieved, and then extols the virtue of a strong surplus. Swan's topical focus and temporal loci are considerably narrower than Costello's. Swan does not put his budget into a political narrative about his government or party. He does not position the government and party with respect to the 12-year tenure of the previous government. He does not make predictions or conjectures of what 'will' or 'could be' the case. He contrives an exordium which is, to quote

³ The 'frequency' is measured as the number of instances of a lexical item compared with the total number of words in the corpus of speeches of each of the two Treasurers.

Table 4. Costello and Swan's use of 'economy' and 'budget'

	'Economy'	'Budget'	Ratio of 'budget' to 'economy'
Costello	0.151	0.529	3.5 to 1
Swan	0.562	0.599	1 to 1

Cicero, 'general, common, interchangeable ... one which can be tacked to many cases, so as to seem to suit them all' (1949: 53). This was, Cicero argued, one of 'the most obvious faults of exordia' (1949: 53).

The comparison in the rhetorical manoeuvring of the two Treasurers is stark. Costello was entirely focused on talking up the new Coalition government, while systematically diminishing the previous one. I have presented the analysis of only the first speeches by Costello and Swan, but the pattern observed here continues throughout their periods as Treasurer. Costello consistently framed his budgets by denigrating the previous Labor government. Not only are there constant references to Labor or to 'the previous government', but all such comparisons are invidious. Moreover, these references do not diminish as time goes on. Figure 2 shows the use of word 'Labor' in the budget speeches, by year, from 1996 to 2013. Costello recruited the word in 10 of his 12 speeches. Costello's first and final budget speeches did not use the lexical item 'Labor': both instead relied on the narrative of the Coalition as the party to rescue the country from financial peril in the first speech, and, in the final speech, the party that had done so much to remediate the putative terrible situation in which Australia found itself a decade earlier. In this process, Costello made Labor the owner of 'debt and deficit' (an association

Table 5. Exordium from Costello's first speech, analysed using rhetorical unit analysis

Unit #	Gloss of text segment	Rhetorical unit
1	Overview of the budget and to whom and to what it is directed	Reflection
2	Keeping our commitments, focus on savings and what our budget will do for Australia	Account
3	Doom and gloom of last year's budget outcome	Recount
4	How bad things would be if we did not take action	Conjecture
5	Governments should save for downturns	Reflection
6	But the previous government put Australia on path to debt and deficit	Recount
7	How terrible Australia would be if it continued on this path	Conjecture
8	This government could not stand idly by	Recount
9	We will fix this problem!	Plan
10	Our measures will fix the debt and deficit problem	Prediction
11	How great our budget is	Account
12	How great the future will be under these new measures	Prediction
13	No tax increases!	Account
14	You cannot avoid the hard decisions	Generalisation
15	What will happen if we avoid the hard decisions now!	Prediction
16	Our budget is fair	Account
17	We are not putting pressure on pensioners and low income earners	Reflection
18	High income earners and business have to make a contribution	Commentary
19	Overall assessment of the budget: balanced, strong, fair	Account

Source: Cloran (1994).

Table 6. Exordium from Swan's first speech, analysed using rhetorical unit analysis

#	Gloss of text segment	Rhetorical unit
1	Swan describes his budget, and invokes it as fulfilling election commitments	Account
2	The Government is making savings to fund this budget	Recount
3	The size of the surplus as proportion of GDP	Commentary
4	The features of this surplus	Account
5	The function of a strong surplus	Reflection

Source: Cloran (1994).

reinforced by the Coalition when in Opposition after the Howard government left office, as Walter (2014) shows). Figure 3 shows the 'concordance' lines for the word 'Labor' – that is, the words immediate to the left and right of the search term – in Costello's 12 speeches. Costello was relentless over these 12 years in associating Labor with poor financial management, and in creating a grim narrative about how dark Australia's fortunes would have been but for the coming to power of the Coalition in 1996.

This association between 'good management' and 'budget surplus' was so relentless in Costello's period that Fairfax economics columnist, Ross Gittens, coined the term 'Costelloism' during Costello's time in office to describe the belief that all public debt is bad. Gittens argued that the upside of 'this abhorrence of budget deficits and obsession with the elimination of debt is it left the Rudd government perfectly placed when it needed to spend big to counter the impact of the global financial

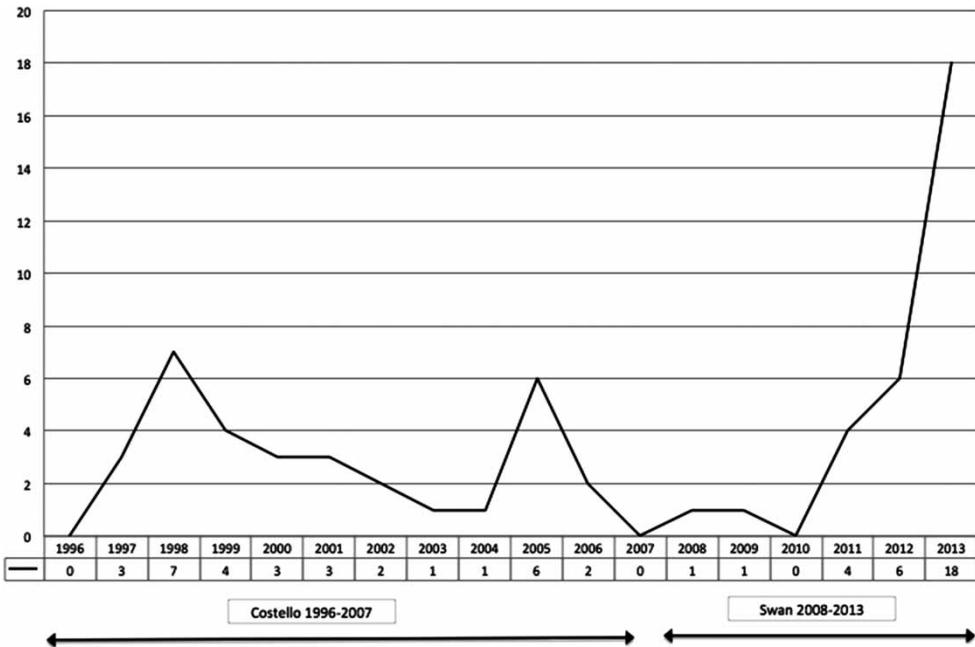


Figure 2. Use of 'Labor' in federal budget speeches

lidedated measures turned around a \$10.3 billion Labor deficit in 1995–96 and they lay out a path to a
 The savings rebate takes the place of Labor's L–A–W tax cuts which were never paid.
 Other Labor schemes to deduct contributions from take home
 We had lost our way — our budget, under Labor, was \$10.3 billion in deficit.
 I set up opportunities for the future by repaying Labor's debt.
 Our net debt to 1½ per cent of GDP — to wipe out Labor's debt for good.
 At the start of the decade, under Labor, small business interest rates were 20.5 per cent
 1990 — the lowest in eight years, the lowest since Labor's recession.
 Labor, which had put Australia in deficit, fought to keep
 it to 5 per cent, half the rate that applied under Labor at the beginning of this decade.
 In the last five years before the Coalition was elected, Labor ran up Commonwealth debt by nearly \$80 billion.
 And we have repaid over \$24 billion of Labor's debt.
 By 1 October — by 2002–03, we could repay all of Labor's debt.
 — the job of fixing the financial mess caused by Labor's splurge which ran us \$80 billion into debt over
 the budget period, we will have paid back \$50 billion of Labor's \$80 billion debt.
 The money was needed to pay the interest bills on Labor's debt.
 We want to live within its means and then to pay back Labor's debt.
 In the next year we will have repaid nearly \$60 billion of Labor's \$80 billion debt spree.
 The bill is \$4 billion per annum less than it was under Labor.
 In the next financial year we will have paid off \$61 billion of the Labor Government's debt.
 Supporting Australian families When Labor left office the home mortgage interest rate was
 By June this year we will have reduced Labor's net debt by around \$63 billion.
 Depending we will continue to make repayments of Labor's debt.
 Before that the last Budget of the Labor Government was in deficit — a deficit of 2 per cent.
 We are paying off Labor's debt and soon we can begin saving — saving
 The surcharge was introduced in 1996 when Labor left a large Budget deficit.
 We have now paid off most of Labor's legacy.
 I have previously tried to reduce this surcharge but the Labor Party has blocked it, so tonight I announce the
 After we balance our budget, reduce Labor's debt, and fund our services we should reduce it to
 affordable, to balance our Budget, and to repay Labor's debt.
 I have now eliminated the \$96 billion of net debt that Labor left the Australian Government when it left office

Figure 3. Concordance lines for 'Labor' in Costello speeches 1996–2007

crisis', but there was a considerable downside, in that it led to a decade or more of a
 lack of infrastructure investment (Gittens 2010). Another senior journalist, Mike Sec-
 combe, argued that Australian politicians had developed a 'surplus fetish' which was
 constraining the political debate on how our national revenues could or should be
 spent (Seccombe 2012). A new corpus of web English, the GlobWE corpus
 (Davies 2013) shows some evidence of a 'surplus fetish' in Australia, beyond the pol-
 itical class. GlobWE consists of 1.9 billion words of web English, from 20 different
 countries, collected in late 2012. Figure 4 shows the frequency per million words of
 the word 'surplus' in Australia, compared with 19 other countries. Australia is quite
 unlike the other 19 countries in the frequency of the use of the word 'surplus' at this
 time.

By contrast, over his six budget speeches, Swan did not once take up the rhetorical
 option of denigrating his predecessors. Table 7 presents the references to the other
 party by these two Treasurers, either by party name or by invoking the 'previous gov-
 ernment' or 'our predecessors'. Swan made only two references to the Coalition by
 party name. Swan made some references to 'our predecessors' and to the 'previous

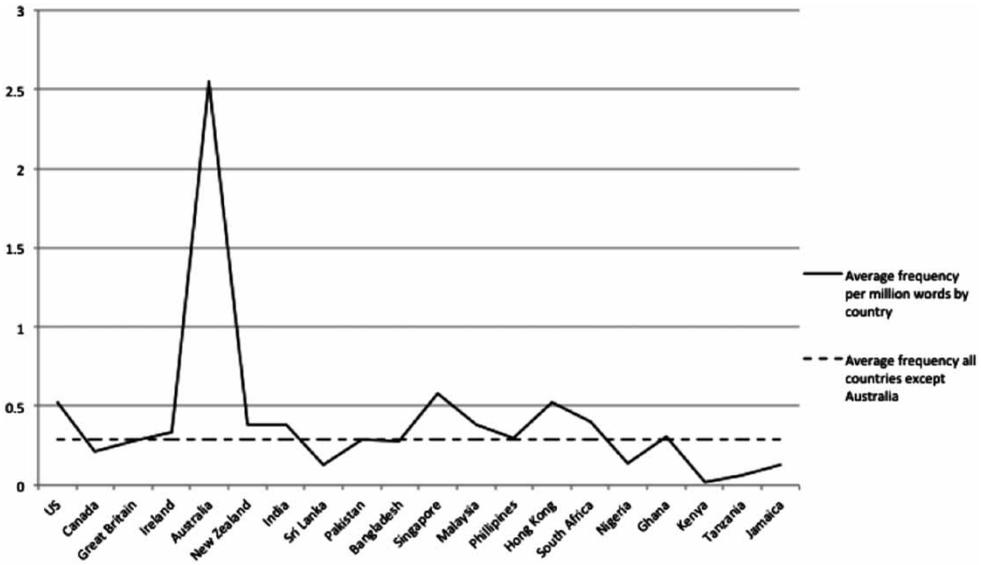


Figure 4. Frequency of the word 'surplus' in Australian public discourse, compared with all other countries in the Global Corpus of Web English, sampled December 2012

government', but he did not do so as a means of disparaging the Howard government. This is perhaps explained by the following comment in Swan's memoir of his period as Treasurer: 'I've always had the belief that, as Treasurer, I was working in a tradition and that it was important, if not paramount, to preserve the legacies of those who preceded me' (Swan 2014: 190).

If Swan was not attacking the legacy of the previous Coalition government, was he instead building a strong case of his government's achievements? If he was, was he doing so in an explicitly partisan fashion? Taking the second question first, Table 7 shows that Swan barely made reference to his opponents, but he did invoke his own party's name. As Figure 2 shows, Swan referred to 'Labor' in an oddly uneven fashion. In his first four speeches he used his party's name a total of six times; in his final speech he said 'Labor' 18 times. This distribution suggests that there was not a clear and consistent 'Labor story' across Swan's speeches.

Another measure of whether Swan clearly built a case around the government's achievements is how he represented the action, or potential action, of 'the government' (rather than the party). I discussed earlier the selection of grammatical features which most directly projects a clear, unambiguous agency and dynamism for an entity like 'the government'. In the course of making budget announcements,

Table 7. Reference to other party by Treasurers, and self-reference to one's own party

	Reference to Labor	Reference to 'Coalition' or 'Liberal/National Parties'	Reference to 'previous government' or 'our predecessors'
Costello	32	14	7
Swan	30	2	6

Swan, like other Treasurers, referred to the government in detailing specific commitments already made, or projecting specific future promises. Of particular interest is how Swan positioned the government in the exordia of his speeches, since in the opening phases a Treasurer has the rhetorical forum to build or maintain an overarching narrative about the government's overall agenda. It is the place where a speaker gives meaning to the many distinct, even disparate or contradictory decisions made in a budget. Considering the award Swan received from *Euromoney*, Swan did have a vision for steering Australia through the GFC, and a record of important actions through which he put this vision into practice. Keating or Costello would have said 'Our government stared down the GFC' or 'we shielded Australia from the worst during the GFC', but Swan never used this kind of direct construction. Instead, he gave credit to all Australians ('together we avoided the recession'). He used the 'middle voice' structure (e.g., 'Australia emerged strongly from the global recession'), a structure which occluded any role of the government in these processes. When he came closest to taking credit on behalf of the Labor government in overcoming the GFC, he put this crucial claim in a subordinate clause, for example 'Mr Speaker, *having beaten the global recession*, we now face these new challenges' and '*Just as we shielded Australian from the worst during the GFC*, we will continue to follow the responsible middle course'. The reason grammarians use the term 'subordinate' for this structure is that it downgrades the significance or the 'semiotic weight' (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014) of a message.

It was not only on the topic of the government's management of the GFC, however, that Swan failed to take the rhetorical high ground. One would not expect his early budget speeches to crow about the government's achievements, but his later speeches have a weirdly 'irrealis' quality. In other words, they project 'yet-to-be-realised' actions as goals, or as 'the purpose' of the government. The goals were noble, but it was as if the government did not have actual achievements to recruit, rhetorically, to validate the public's decision to put them into power. In addition, at many crucial points, Swan chose the 'agentless passive', that is, a passive voice clause in which the agent remains unspecified. The opening of his 2009 budget speech, when he was at the height of the actions required to respond to the GFC, he began his speech with an agentless passive: 'The budget is forged in the fire of the most challenging economic conditions since the Great Depression'. Swan's and the government's actions in response to these challenging economic conditions are invisible. Swan continued with another common structure of his speeches, also acutely fashioned for backgrounding responsibility: 'It is a budget that support jobs today by investing in the infrastructure we need for tomorrow'. There are two key actions here, 'supporting jobs' and 'investing in infrastructure'. In Swan's grammar, the government is not the explicit agent of either of them. It is as if Swan was a man who could not, or would not, 'blow his own trumpet', or indeed the collective trumpet of his party. In comparison with Costello's singular and constant narrative, Swan's inability to construct a consistent and coherent account of his party's achievements is even more pronounced.

Conclusion

It is hard not to conclude that compared with Swan, Costello was a superior orator. Yet, as Cicero observed, rhetoric can be used for good or for ill. Costello's narrowing of the measures of good economic management served the political interests of the

Coalition, both in government during the Howard era, and while they were in opposition from 2007 to 2013. Politicians' discourse on economic matters can either open up or constrain debate on how and why Australian governments spend the nation's revenue. Paul Keating has claimed that when he became Treasurer, the press gallery only reported on 'tax cuts, election speculation and leadership changes'. By the end of his tenure, it was reporting 'current account deficit, inflation, monetary policy, you name it' (cited in Megalogenis 2008: 147). The conditions for governing while Costello was Treasurer were extraordinarily propitious, and his message on economic management was partisan, opportunistic and simplistic. Swan, by contrast, managed the GFC, in a government attempting some large-scale reforms, including better school funding, a National Disability Insurance Scheme and a fairer share of profits from Australia's minerals wealth. In addition, Swan's government faced perhaps the most openly hostile media in recent Australian history. Costello may have been a superior orator, but Swan's rhetorical challenge was significantly greater than Costello's. By the later part of his second term, Swan came to see the need for 'a compass' that 'gives a government purpose and direction, even in the stormiest of political seas', a vision to explain to a government's supporters 'what the struggle to stay in power is all about' (Swan 2014: 312). Swan published an article in *The Monthly* on the rise of vested interests in Australia, and gave the John Button lecture under the title of 'Land of Hope and Dreams' (Swan 2012a; 2012b). In these forums, Swan articulated coherent views on the purpose and vision of the Labor government. These ideas began to appear in his last two budget speeches, but it was too little too late.

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Appendix 1

Exordium in Costello’s first speech, using rhetorical unit analysis

RU #	Text segmentation	Rhetorical unit
1	Tonight I announce a programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for families • for small business • for older Australians • for major improvements in health care and, importantly, • a programme to repair the nation’s finances and secure our future 	Reflection EO: habitual CE: interactant
2	This Budget implements the key election commitments of the Coalition and it does so as part of a responsible economic strategy The focus is savings – savings for investment, sustainable growth and real jobs. This Budget turns around failure and sets us on a winning course	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
3	The budget outcome for the past year was a deficit of \$10.3 billion	Recount EO: prior CE: unrestricted
4	If we took no corrective measures it would be \$9.6 billion this year. We would still have an underlying deficit of 2 per cent of GDP even though the economy has had five years of growth. Debt would be increasing and Australia would be dangerously exposed to shifts in the international outlook or sentiment	Conjecture EO: hypothetical CE: unrestricted
5	In periods of growth we must put away savings for the downturns	Reflection EO: habitual CE: interactant
6	But far from saving, the previous Government kept ratcheting up our debts – spending money it didn’t have Our predecessors had Australia on a path of deficit and debt to the next century	Recount EO: prior CE: unrestricted
7	Make no mistake, this path would only make future choices harder, future possibilities bleaker and rob Australians of the future opportunities they deserve	Conjecture EO: hypothetical CE: unrestricted
8	Our Government could not stand back and ignore the problem	Recount EO: prior CE: unrestricted

(Continued)

Appendix Continued

RU #	Text segmentation	Rhetorical unit
9	Although we did not create it, we will take the responsibility to fix it	Plan EO: future: volitional CE: interactant
10	The measures I announce tonight will reduce the underlying deficit by around \$4 billion this year and \$7.2 billion over two years. These measures will balance the budget over the term of this Parliament	Prediction EO: future: +/- volitional CE: unrestricted
11	These are the net effect on the budget bottom line after the introduction of new policy to meet the Coalition's election commitments. These measures represent a historic turnaround in Commonwealth finances	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
12	In 1997-98, outlays will have fallen around 1.8 per cent of GDP, while revenues will have risen only 0.2 per cent of GDP. The budget repair will be achieved principally through expenditure savings with a contribution from reduced tax expenditures and measures to curb tax avoidance	Prediction EO: future: +/- volitional CE: unrestricted
13	Importantly, Mr Speaker, there is no increase in income tax rates, no increase in the company tax rate, no increase in the wholesale sales tax rates and no lift in the petrol excise. There are measures to tighten eligibility and clamp down on misuse, but the Diesel Fuel Rebate Scheme remains	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
14	Mr Speaker, you don't turn around a nation's finances, a nation's future without making some hard decisions	Generalisation EO: habitual CE: class
15	But if we avoid the hard decisions now they are only going to get harder in the future	Prediction EO: future: +/- volitional CE: unrestricted
16	The tightening measures have to be fairly shared	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
17	We cannot expect those who rely on pensions and allowances – low income earners – to bear the cost	Reflection EO: habitual CE: interactant
18	So we are asking high income earners to make a contribution and business to make its contribution too	Commentary EO: concurrent CE: interactant
19	The measures are balanced, strong and fair	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity

Source: Cloran (1994; 2010).

EO, event orientation; CE, central entity.

Exordium in Swan's first speech, using rhetorical unit analysis

RU #	Rhetorical unit	Rhetorical unit type
1	This Budget is designed to meet the big challenges of the future. It is a Budget that strengthens Australia's economic foundations, and delivers for working families under pressure. It is the responsible Budget our nation needs at this time of international turbulence, and high inflation at home. A Budget carefully designed to fight inflation, and ensure we meet the uncertainties of the future from a position of strength. A Budget with a \$55 billion Working Families Support Package at its very core. A Budget that begins a new era of strategic investment in Australia's future challenges and opportunities. And a Budget that helps plan, finance and secure Australia's long-term national security and defence needs. These are the commitments the Government gave to the Australian people at the election. Mr Speaker, this Budget honours those commitments	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
2	The Government has made sure every single cent of new spending for the coming year has been more than met by savings elsewhere in the Budget Our commitments have been honoured by redirecting spending. Difficult spending cuts have helped fund our Working Families Support Package and our new priorities for the nation	Recount EO: prior CE: unrestricted
3	We are budgeting for a surplus of \$21.7 billion in 2008–09, 1.8 per cent of GDP, the largest budget surplus as a share of GDP in nearly a decade	Commentary EO: concurrent CE: interactant
4	This honours and exceeds the 1.5 per cent target we set in January, without relying on revenue windfalls It is a surplus built on substantial savings of \$33 billion over four years, including \$7 billion in 2008–09 alone And it is a surplus built on disciplined spending, with the lowest real increase in Government spending in nearly a decade; spending growth which is one quarter of the average of the previous four years	Account EO: habitual CE: absent entity
5	Mr Speaker, we need a strong surplus to anchor a strong economy; to do our bit to ease inflationary pressures in the economy; to build a buffer against international turbulence; and so we can fund ongoing long-term investment in the ports, roads, railways, hospitals, universities and vocational education we need, to deliver growth with low inflation into the future	Reflection EO: habitual CE: interactant

Source: Cloran (1994; 2010).

EO, event orientation; CE, central entity.