On the use of the personal pronoun *we* in communities

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The purpose of this paper is to show the existing relationships between the concept of community and the linguistic forms used to convey or even to manipulate it. First of all, the limits and restrictions of any form of community will be defined. Second, one specific form of community will be selected for analysis. The community chosen will be the Parliamentary community, and the linguistic form singled out for study will be the first person plural pronoun "we". We will try to discover any type of relationship between (a) the scope of reference of this personal pronoun and (b) the intentions of the person who uttered it. In this way, we can see whether there is any connection between personal identity (in terms of inclusion/exclusion from a group) and pronominal choice. This could also lead us to the discovery of any possible strategic use of this personal pronoun.

Keywords: pronominal reference, community, parliament, manipulation, personal identity, linguistic forms

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show any possible relationship between the concept of community and the linguistic forms used to express it. According to Brown and Yule (1983), language has two main functions: transactional (i.e. to communicate information) and interactional (i.e. to socialise). Taking this distinction into account, we will try to show to what extent language can mirror the kind of social relationship held among members of a community.

We will start by dealing with two basic issues: community and identity. Are they stable concepts? How can we define a community? Is a community based on a kind of rational will or natural law? Do communities have fixed or

variable limits? In what ways does a speaker's territory of the self relate to the hearer's territory?

Once all these questions have been answered, we will try to study one specific community: the Parliamentary community. First of all, we will explain why we can call it a community and second, we will analyse its use of the pronominal system. The way in which the pronouns are actually used in context can show the kind of social and political relationship between addresser and addressee/s. In fact, the personal pronoun we are going to study will be the first person plural pronoun "we". In this way, we can see whether there is any relationship between the specific political group an MP belongs to and the personal pronominal choice s/he makes.

2.   Community and identity

The concept of community is a difficult one to define, mainly due to its heterogeneous nature and ambiguity. Some authors like Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton (1985), Warren (1978), Wenger (1998) and more recently, Mason (2000), have tried to offer a plausible answer, but they all agree on its difficulty. Mason (2000) described two distinct kinds of community: the "ordinary concept" and the "moralised concept". Whereas the first shows no controversy, the second is more polemical. The "ordinary concept" is the one where there is mutual recognition, i.e. the members of the community recognise each other as members of the group because they share certain values, a way of life, etc. The "moralised concept" includes two more conditions: (a) there must be solidarity between members and (b) no systematic exploitation or injustice. However, these ideas (i.e. solidarity, exploitation and justice) are so abstract and complex that they make this concept a difficult one to define and delimit.

It is also a heterogeneous concept, because we can speak about political, scientific, speech or school communities — just to mention a few. Wardhaugh (1992: 118), when discussing speech communities, explains that we must take into account a broad spectrum of factors, not only linguistic ones: "What we can be sure of is that speakers do use linguistic characteristics to achieve group identity with, and group differentiation from, other speakers, but they use other characteristics as well: social, cultural, political and ethnic, to name a few." So, apart from having different types of communities, there seems to be an ample number of peripheral aspects which define a community.

Given this wide variety of factors, we may wonder: is there something common to all these different types of communities? In 1887, Tonnies stated that both society and community are based on relationships, but whereas the former is based on a rational law and a rational will, the latter is built on a natural law and a natural will. In other words, a community can be defined as a form of relationship in which the participants agree on a kind of a free contract. The specific nature of this contract will determine the type of community that will be constituted. As Tonnies explains, although these relationships will be basically based either on authority or on fellowship, we can also find some cases in which a mixture of them prevails.

However, everything is not so simple, as Maier (1995: 369) warns: "(…) the concept of community is often naively used to designate just about any form of real or imagined association between individuals." This statement leads us to a further question: do communities have fixed or variable limits? The answer depends on our idea of community as a static entity or a dynamic one. My personal view on this issue is highly related to the concept of willingness. We can find different examples that could explain this point:

1. A community whose participants do not accept any new member because it thinks that if they do so, they may lose some of their own identity. This would be a static community.
2. A community that is constantly accepting new members because it thinks that, thanks to this behaviour, it will be enriched. This would be a highly dynamic community.
3. Finally, a school community shows how vague the limits of a community can be. One student, although technically a member of this community, may feel that s/he does not belong to that community because s/he does not share its values.

Hence, we may conclude that another factor to take into account when describing a community is its members' feelings. Only these could show us the real limits of a community.

Closely related to this idea are Batson, Ahmad and Tsang's (2002) motives for community involvement. These are: egoism, altruism, collectivism[1] and principlism. They (2002: 429) explain that:

> "Differentiation is based on identification of a unique ultimate goal for each motive. For egoism, the ultimate goal is to increase one's own welfare; for altruism, it is to increase the welfare of another individual or individuals; for collectivism, to increase the welfare of a group; and for principlism, to uphold one or more moral principles."

The authors point out that these motives are not mutually exclusive and that more than one may be present in a given situation, so they may either conflict or cooperate with another. Additionally, each one has its strengths and weaknesses. Batson, Ahmad and Tsang (2002:434) illustrate them in the following chart (Table 1).

Table 1. Four motives for community involvement

Motive	Ultimate Goal	Strength(s)	Weakness(es)
Egoism	Increase one's own welfare.	Many forms; easily invoked; powerful.	Increased community involvement relates to the motive only as an instrumental means or unintended consequence.
Altruism	Increase the welfare of one or more other individuals.	Powerful; may generalise to group of which other is a member.	May be limited to individuals for whom empathy is felt; increased community involvement relates to the motive only as an instrumental means or unintended consequence.
Collectivism	Increase the welfare of a group or collective.	Powerful: directly focused on common good.	May be limited to ingroup.
Principlism	Uphold some moral principle (e.g. justice).	Directed toward universal and impartial good.	Often seems weak; vulnerable to rationalisation.

Another important and defining characteristic of communities is contrast. One specific community — let us call it X — can be defined just by saying that it does not share community Y's values. As Wardhaugh (1992:120) explains:[2]

"Internally, a community must have a certain social cohesiveness; externally, its members must find themselves cut off from other communities in certain ways. The factors that bring about cohesion and differentiation will vary considerably from occasion to occasion (…) The extension is provided by the insistence that a group or community is defined not only by what it is but by what it is not: the 'cut-off' criterion."

Finally, one example of community that is quite interesting is the ancient "political community".[3] Juviler and Stroschein (1999:436) explain that this is an example of active community in the sense that the members of these

communities "… join in commitments to cooperate toward the attainment of common purposes" and "… have some form of legitimate decision-making authority." However, these political communities differ from other active communities in that their "… legitimate authority, hereafter referred to as the government, makes the most binding and inclusive decisions for a given territory." In order to be a full member of a political community, it is necessary to: (a) be a citizen, (b) have and exercise full equality of rights and obligations, (c) accept the political order, and (d) share a common identity with other citizens.

Why can we state that Members of Parliament constitute a community? If we take into account Batson, Ahmad and Tsang's (2002) four types of motivation for community involvement (egoism, altruism, collectivism and principlism), we can conclude that all of them play an important role in politics. When speaking about collectivism, Batson, Ahmad and Tsang (2002:437) add that "The collective may be one's race, religion, sex, political party, or social class". Depending on the situation and the specific characteristics of the MP, we can say that these four types of motives may either conflict or cooperate with one another. For example, egoism may lead an MP to get involved in business where the ultimate goal is to increase her/his own welfare.[4] In this case, s/he may forget about her/his (a) party's interests (collectivism), (b) citizens' welfare (altruism), or (c) political beliefs (principlism). These motives may also cooperate because if her/his political party is in an advantageous situation,[5] it is highly probable that her/his personal situation (egoism) or the welfare of her/his followers also improves (altruism).

According to Maier (1995:371–2) there are five basic characteristics that define a community. These are:

1. "Communities are forms of organisation of relationships between individuals which do not cover all aspects of life." Apart form being Members of Parliament (MPs), politicians (a) can also belong to other communities (a tennis club, etc.) and (b) have another life outside Parliament (in their neighbourhood, in their homes, etc.)

2. "Community-like relationships are symmetric and asymmetric, and mostly mixed." As we all know, at Parliament, relationships are essentially based on power: first of all, we have to distinguish between the political party that constitutes the Government and the rest of the political parties in the Opposition, and second, even inside the main political party, we have to differentiate between Ministers and Backbenchers.

3. "Admission of new members to the community can be realised to some extent by agreements and contracts, but always involves in addition an

informal learning process." On the one hand, it is clear that MPs are constantly changing (mainly after General Elections); and, on the other hand, it is also obvious that politicians' work does not finish in the Chamber of the House of Commons where formality prevails, it extends beyond it to much laxer scenes where most political affairs are normally negotiated.

4. "A community has no guaranteed stability over time (…) Relative stability, with movements of growth and decadence, therefore depends on relationships that are at least partly connected with other communities or different forms of social organisation." As I said before, mainly after general elections, there are important changes in the Parliamentary community, but an important factor to take into account is that these changes are mainly produced by people outside Parliament: the voters.

5. "The community as a form of organisation provides an identity for the members of the community. This means that the community constitutes a kind of "we", it provides a mirror which furnishes recognisable images of the members for themselves." When speaking about the political community, Juviler and Stroschein (1999: 439) state that: "Clues to stability and inclusiveness of the political community and, therefore, of the political system are to be found in its consensus on identity, purpose, rights and obligations, and peaceful conflict resolution." This is a very interesting idea that can be linguistically tested. What do MPs mean when they use the first personal plural pronoun "we"? Do they only refer to the parliamentary community? Is there just one single identity they adhere to? In order to provide accurate answers to these questions we have to look deeply into the real reasons for being in Parliament. There is one key idea that defines it: argumentation. As Maier (1996: 35) points out: "(…) considerations of identity are central to theories of argumentative discourse." But when talking about the parliamentary community, we cannot speak about "single identities" but rather about "party identities". Maier (1996: 45) also admits the difference and explains: "Identity here means either the structure of the social group, where one party is a group represented by one or more individuals, or the structure of the personality when parties are individual persons."

Additionally, we must keep it clear in our minds that every MP has a dual responsibility because s/he represents (a) her/his political party and (b) her/his constituency. This means that when the interests of the two do not coincide, the MP may face an identity problem. Therefore, in order to shed some light on these issues, we are going to analyse all the different uses of the personal

pronoun "we" and try to discover any relationship with feelings of identity and the search for persuasion.

3. Pronominal selection

Unlike nouns, personal, possessive, and reflexive pronouns have distinctions of person:

– 1st person pronouns: "I, me, my, mine, myself, we, us, our, ours ourselves." Their reference includes the speaker(s)/writer(s) of the message.
– 2nd person pronouns: "you, your, yours, yourself, yourselves." Their reference excludes the speaker(s)/writer(s) of the message, but includes the addressee(s).
– 3rd person pronouns: "he, him, his, himself, she, her, hers, herself, it, its, itself, they, them, their, theirs, themselves." Their reference excludes (a) the speaker(s)/writer(s) and (b) the addressee(s). These pronouns refer to third parties not directly involved in the production or reception of the message.

Quirk et al. (1985:340) summarise the meanings of the three persons in Table 2:[6]

Table 2. Meanings of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person[7]

1st person	+s	+/-h	+/-o
2nd person	-s	+h	+/-o
3rd person	-s	-h	+o

Taking into account the different meanings of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person pronouns, Rees (1983) developed a general scale of pronominal distancing which represented the relationship between distancing strategies and the pronoun system:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I	We	You	One	You	It	She	He	They
		(direct)		(indefinite)				

Distancing from self[8]
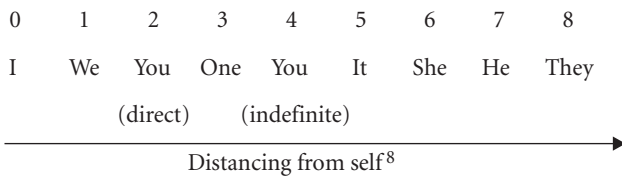
As Maitland and Wilson (1987:504–5) argue, this scale has no normative value and it is useful "… for representing idiosyncratic variation in pronominal

variation. We would predict, for example, that individuals who construe the world in similar ways, that is, have the same ideology and belief system, would exhibit similar patterns of pronominal choice." These authors analysed the speeches of three different political leaders (M. Thatcher,[9] N. Kinnock[10] and M. Foot[11]) and discovered important similarities between Kinnock and Foot and differences between Kinnock/Foot and Thatcher.

According to Fortanet (2004: 46), "In the negotiation of meaning that is always present between the person issuing a message and the person receiving the message one of the key elements is the reference of the personal pronouns." This strategic use of the pronoun system is especially interesting in the case of the first and second person pronouns because of their implications for both participants in the speech event.

3.1 Special uses of "we"

Two of the main uses of the personal pronoun "we" are the exclusive "we" and the inclusive "we". Whereas the first one excludes the hearer (so "we" = "I" + my group), the second includes it (so "we" = "I" + "you"). Exclusive "we" represents a way of distancing, both from the hearer and from what the speaker is saying, and it is normally associated with power. Brown and Levinson (1987: 202) state that:

> "Thus in addition to the widespread use of V pronouns to singular addressees, there is also the widespread phenomenon of 'we' used to indicate 'I' + powerful. Apart from the royal 'we' which most of us don't experience, there is the episcopal 'we' and the business 'we'. There may be two distinct sources here. One is the 'we' that expresses the nature of the 'corporation sole' or the jural accompaniments of high office — 'we' as office and incumbent and predecessors. Then there is also the 'we' of the group, with roots precisely analogous to the second source of 'you' (plural) discussed above: a reminder that I do not stand alone. The business 'we' perhaps attempts to draw on both sources of connotations of power."

Because of this dichotomy, Pennycook (1994: 175) describes this pronoun as a pronoun of "… solidarity and rejection" and "… communality and authority" (ibid.: 176).

Quirk et al. (1985: 350–1) distinguish up to eight different uses of "we". These are:

a. Generic: it is an "enlarged" inclusive "we" which may include the whole human race.

b. Inclusive authorial: it is used in serious writing and seeks to involve the reader in a joint enterprise.
c. Editorial: it is used by a single individual in scientific writing in order to avoid an egoistical "I".
d. Rhetorical: it is used in the collective sense of "the nation", "the party". It may be viewed as a special type of generic "we".
e. To refer to the hearer (= you): it is normally used by doctors when talking to a patient and by teachers when giving instructions to students. It is an inclusive "we" used to sound condescending in the case of doctors and non-authoritative in the case of teachers.
f. To refer to a third person (= s/he): For example one secretary might say to another with reference to their boss: "We're in a bad mood today".
g. Royal: it is virtually obsolete and is used by a monarch.
h. Nonstandard: plural "us" used for the singular "me": "lend us a fiver".

3.2 Territory of information

The vagueness that characterises the first person plural has led Biber et al. (1999) to declare that most of the time, it is the addressee who has to decide who is included in the reference of the pronoun. In this sense, the theory developed by Kamio (1994, 1995, 1997, 2001) is useful. This theory is based on the idea that human beings, like most higher animals, tend to occupy a certain space around them, where they claim their own presence and exclude others. He states that "Our theory is based on the notion of psychological distance between a given piece of information and the speaker/hearer" (1994:68) and adds that "… the speaker's territory of information is a conceptual category which contains information close to the speaker him/herself." (ibid.: 77). In this way, the use of human language would be controlled by the notion of territory. Thus, when an individual considers that some piece of information is inside her/his territory, s/he will use different linguistic strategies than when it is outside. Kamio offers a list that includes information that falls within the speaker's territory of information (1994:77):

a. Information obtained through the speaker's direct experience.
b. Information about persons, facts, and things close to the speaker, including information about the speaker's plans, actions, and behaviour and information about places to which the speaker has a geographical relation.
c. Information embodying detailed knowledge that falls within the speaker's professional or other expertise.

This idea of territory has also been observed by O'Keeffe (2002) in a study where she explores indices of self-representation and identity in a corpus of Irish radio phone-in data. She explains that:

> "At a broader level, we can say that the participation framework created by the presenter, caller and audience has a stable territory or location … Within the participation framework, there is a shared understanding of this territory or range. This is clearly evidenced in the level of shared knowledge that the speakers can assume when they speak." (2002:94)

Taking into account this theory of information, Kamio (2001) has studied the differences between English and Japanese generic and non-specific uses of personal pronouns. First of all, the author distinguishes between P_2 and D_2, where P_2 refers to a proximal area and D_2 to a distant area to the speaker:

a. General perceived space

$$P_2 \quad\quad D_2$$
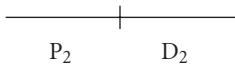
Second, he describes a subarea in P_2 which he calls "the conversational space" (i.e. the speaker and her/his surrounding space):

b.

$$P_2 \quad D_2$$

And finally, he divides this subarea into P_1 and D_1 which represent the speaker's and the hearer's territories respectively:

c. $\quad P_1 \quad\quad D_1$

$$P_2 \quad\quad\quad D_2$$

3.3 Personal deixis in political discourse

There are two main characteristics that define pronouns: (1) they are always political in the sense that they always imply relations of power; and (2) they are always involved in struggles over representation (Pennycook 1994:175). This is the reason why they represent one of the main rhetorical tools used by politicians. As Wilson (1990) and Zupnick (1994) explain, pronouns are far from being categorical; their use depends on their context of production and,

obviously, the speaker's intentions. The scope of reference of pronouns can vary depending on the speaker's purpose, and this turns out to be one of the major tool of persuasion used by politicians. Zupnick (1994: 340) declares that the fact that there are several potential referents for the indexicals "…works to the advantage of political speakers as hearers may choose to include themselves as members of the class of referents, potentially bringing about an adoption or at least cognizance of the speaker's perspective." According to Wilson (1990: 76):

> "With such manipulative possibilities provided by the pronominal system as it operates in context, it is not surprising to find that politicians make use of pronouns to good effect: to indicate, accept, deny or distance themselves from responsibility for political action; to reveal ideological bias; to encourage solidarity; to designate and identify those who are supporters (with us) as well as those who are enemies (against us); and to present specific idiosyncratic aspects of the individual politician's own personality."

For these reasons, we can affirm that there is a close connection between the use of personal pronouns and the expression of communality. Politicians use the pronoun system to indicate their solidarity-inclusion within and, at the same time, their opposition-exclusion from specific ideological groups or political parties. This idea has also been expressed by Maitland and Wilson (1987); they explain that "… differing political parties make use of the same system[12] to express not only their own ideological views, but also their opposition to the ideological views of those others they may disagree with." (Maitland and Wilson 1987: 495)

4. Procedures and analysis

As Gumperz (1982: 209) explains, there are specific contextualisation conventions that are a reflection of the "… prolonged interactive experience by individuals cooperating in institutionalized settings in the pursuit of shared goals in friendship, occupational and similar networks of relations." He adds that although speakers of a language or dialect share the ability to produce grammatical sentences, these contextualisation conventions do vary along different dimensions. Hence, this means that MPs will not only use a common language but will also exhibit some contextualization conventions that they have acquired as a result of their interactive experience as members of a specific community. Taking into account that, as we have already said, pronouns represent one the main rhetorical tools used by politicians, it is quite logical to

affirm that one of these contextualisation conventions must be related to the specific use of the personal pronoun system. Thus, in this analysis, we will try to discover to what extent this contextualisation convention (i.e. the use of the pronoun system) can help us to define and describe this specific type of community. Among all personal pronouns, we have selected the first person plural pronoun "we", because we think that this is the one most closely related to the concept of community (Maier 1995).

From a linguistic point of view, when we analyse any type of discourse we must be more specific and distinguish three terms: speech situation, speech event and speech act. When speaking about communicative events in general, Hymes (1972) differentiates between speech event and speech situation. Whereas speech events refer to activities where the rules for verbal interaction define the event itself, speech situations are related to those situations where speech has a minor, non-defining role. Examples of speech events are: conversations, lectures, discussions, sermons, courtroom trials, interviews, debates or meetings; and examples of speech situations are: sports events, a bike-ride with a friend, going to the movies or demonstrations. In relation to the last one (i.e. speech situations), Duranti (1985: 201) states that: "Of course, there is a lot of variation, and speech can (and, in some cases, must) be used in all of these events, but speech does not define them." In contrast to this position, speech events are recognised as distinct "(…) by virtue of differences in the number of participants who take part in them, as well as through differences in the type and amount of talking expected of the participants. Speech events also have identifiable rules for proper beginning, middles and ends, violations of which are noticed and reportable." (Richards and Schmidt 1983: 119)

Finally, a speech act would be the basic or minimal unit of linguistic communication. As Searle (1969: 16) explains:

> "(…) speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on; and more abstractly, acts such as referring and predicating (…) these acts are in general made possible by and are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements."

Taking all these issues into account, we have selected for our analysis one specific community (the Parliamentary community) in a specific speech situation (the House of Commons), where participants are engaged in a speech event (a political debate) made up of two basic speech acts: asking and answering questions (interactions took place in the so-called "Question Time").

4.1 Method

4.1.1 *Texts*

The texts selected for analysis comprise five different Question Time Sessions that took place at the House of Commons (British Parliament): (1) 1st December 1987; (2) 19th January 1988; (3) 16th February 1988; (4) 15th March 1988; and (5) 19th April 1988. Although Questions can be (1) written or oral and (2) addressed to any Minister or to the Prime Minister, only oral questions addressed to any Minister were studied.

The process is as follows: an MP who wishes to pose a question to a Minister will have to hand it to a Clerk at the Table or to the Table Office ten days before it will be read at the House. During this time, the Minister will prepare her/his answer. So, this means that it will be a well-structured and studied answer, far from what we normally find in real conversations. If the process ended here, there would be little of interest (from a conversationalist analyst's point of view). However, there is a place for spontaneity: if the MP who posed the question is not satisfied with the answer, s/he may add a "supplementary question" not previously included in the Notice Paper. Additionally, if any other MP is still dissatisfied with the answer, s/he can also add another supplementary question. In fact, there can be as many supplementaries as the Speaker considers appropriate. This therefore implies that we can find many instances of spontaneous, natural speaking turns.

One important aspect that is shared by all the selected sessions is the topic. All of them show the debates that preceded the 1988 Education Reform Act. In this way, there is a strong thematic cohesion.

4.1.2 *Procedure*

As mentioned earlier, the personal pronoun that will be analysed is the first person plural pronoun "we".

First of all, we looked for all the forms ("we", "our", "us") and distributed them according to:

a. The scope of reference of the pronoun; that is, whether it was exclusive, inclusive or any other possibility.

b. The political characteristics of (1) the MP who posed the questions and (2) the Minister who answered it. As Wilson (1990:71) explains:

> "In political terms, we would predict, for example, that individuals who construe the world in similar ways, that is, have the same ideology and belief system, would exhibit similar patterns of pronominal choice; and of course,

where individual ideologies differ we might predict different patterns of pronominal choice."

4.2 Results

In Tables 3 and 4 we can see the indexical meanings and the distribution of the three different forms of the first personal plural pronoun. These four indexical meanings are: (a) inclusive, (b) exclusive, (c) generic, and (d) parliamentary community. And all these forms have been analysed in the following contexts: (a) when an MP who belongs to the Party of the Government (MPPG) is posing a question to an MP who is part of the Government (MPG) and the MPG answers the question;[13] (b) when an MP in the Opposition (MPO) asks a question to an MPG; (c) when the MPG answers the question. Both Tables show the same results, but the percentages are different because the calculations take different numbers into account: Table 4 displays more specific percentages than Table 3.

Table 3. Discourse functions of "we/our/us" (I)

	"We/our/us"		**Total**
Inclusive	MPPG to/from MPG	28=**77.8%** of 36	
	MPO to MPG	0=**0%** of 36	
	MPG to MPO	8=**22.2%** of 36	36=**14.6%** of 247
	Total	**36**	
Exclusive	MPPG to/from MPG	59=**44.7%** of 132	
	MPO to MPG	3=**2.3%** of 132	
	MPG to MPO	70=**53%** of 132	132=**53.4%** of 247
	Total	**132**	
Generic	MPPG to/from MPG	19=**39.6%** of 48	
	MPO to MPG	21=**43.7%** of 48	
	MPG to MPO	8=**16.7%** of 48	48=**19.4%** of 247
	Total	**48**	
Parliamentary Community	MPPG to/from MPG	11=**35.5%** of 31	
	MPO to MPG	14=**45.2%** of 31	
	MPG to MPO	7=**19.3%** of 31	31=**12.5%** of 247
	Total	**31**	
	Total		**247=100%**

Table 4. Discourse functions of "we/our/us" (II)

	"We/our/us"	Total	Global
Incl.	MPPG to/from MPG	28=**23.9%** of 117	117
	MPO to MPG	0=**0%** of 38	38
	MPG to MPO	8=**8.7%** of 92	92
	Total	36=**14.5%** of 247	**247**
Excl.	MPPG to/from MPG	59=**50.4%** of 117	117
	MPO to MPG	3=**7.7%** of 38	38
	MPG to MPO	70=**76.1%** of 92	92
	Total	132=**53.4%** of 247	**247**
Gen.	MPPG to/from MPG	19=**16.2%** of 117	117
	MPO to MPG	21=**55.3%** of 38	38
	MPG to MPO	8=**8.7%** of 92	92
	Total	48=**19.4%** of 247	**247**
Par. Com.	MPPG to/from MPG	11=**9.4%** of 117	117
	MPO to MPG	14=**36.8%** of 38	38
	MPG to MPO	6=**6.5%** of 92	92
	Total	31=**12.5%** of 247	**247**

MPPG = Member of Parliament belonging to the Party of the Government
MPG = Member of Parliament and part of the Government
MPO = Member of Parliament of the Opposition Party

5.   Discussion

Depending on the speaker's intention, "we" is the only personal pronoun that can (a) be inclusive and exclusive and (b) claim authority and communality at the same time (Sánchez Macarro 2002 and Pennycook 1994). For this reason, we have taken both the referents and the discourse functions into account in interpreting the results.

5.1 Referents

In the following example we can find two inclusive "we" (second session: 19th January 1988, pages 809–10):

i. **Mr. Harry Greenway**[14]: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was a tragic day for education when Mrs. Shirley Williams, then a member of the Labour Government, got rid of direct-grant schools? Will not the opt-out system restore that principle, not only for bright children, but for a wide educational and social range?

Mr. Baker[15]: I think that many issues will be laid at the door of the right hon. Lady, who was one of my predecessors when a member of the Labour Government. Not only did she destroy the direct-grant schools, but she tried to legislate to destroy the grammar schools. We stopped that in 1980. Grant-maintained schools will not be directly analogous to direct-grant schools, but they will provide a wider variety and choice for parents. That is the choice that *we* want -for comprehensive, grammar, secondary modern, Church and independent schools, and now for city technology colleges and grant-maintained schools as well.

When Mr. Baker utters the sentences "*We* stopped that in 1980" and "That is the choice that *we* want", he is speaking as a representative of a group (the Conservative MPs) which is the Government party. So, he is also including Mr. Harry Greenway in the scope of reference because he belongs to the same political party.

And one example of exclusive "we" is (fourth session: 15th March 1988, page 978):

ii. **Mr. Skinner**[16]: Does the Secretary of State recall that a few years ago the Tory Government decided to meddle with student grants and the net result was that literally thousands of students, many from middle-class families, came to Westminster to protest? They blocked Westminster bridge, without any provocation from people such as myself, and the net result was that the Tory Government had to back off. Is he aware that if he starts the process again, not only will those students come down to Westminster to lobby, but they will carry out the same exercise and *we* on the Opposition Benches will support them to the hill?

Mr. Baker[17]: I am glad to see the hon. Gentleman putting himself at the head of a middle-class march. The proposals upon which *we* are working in the review of student support will bear particularly upon the parental contribution and one of the advantages of loans is that they may substantially reduce the contribution that parents have to make.

In this case, when Mr. Baker says "*we* are working in the review of student support", he is also speaking as a representative of the Government party, but now he is excluding the addressee, because Mr. Skinner does not belong to the Conservative Party. Mr. Baker is speaking as the representative of a political group who has the power to make decisions because it is the Government party.

Taking into account the theory developed by Kamio[18] (1994, 1995, 2001), we could say that whereas P_2 (i.e. the conversational space: the speaker and her/his surrounding space) would correspond to inclusive "we", P_1 (i.e. the speaker's territory) would stand for exclusive "we".

Apart from these two types of "we", we must include two more "we_s": the generic "we" and the parliamentary "we". Whereas the first refers to a kind of patriotic "we" that embraces all British people, the second restricts the reference to the parliamentary community. In the following example we can find two generic "we" (fifth session: 19th April 1988, page 661):

> iii. **Mr. Pike**[19]: Is it not a fact that the Department's own inspectors have said that sub-standard buildings often have an adverse effect on the working conditions and education of *our* children? Is it not a fact also that the Department's own survey showed that £2 billion is needed by 1991 to put *our* schools in accessible order? When will the Government tackle this problem and put it right?
>
> **Mr. Dunn**[20]: I may point out to the hon. Gentleman that £319 million was allocated for capital works in schools in 1988–89 -26 per cent. more than in 1987–88. Taking account of capital receipts and other flexibilities, authorities' total national spending power in 1988–89 was £3.6 billion, which should enable many to start getting to grips with the problems to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

In Mr. Pike's speech, "our children" and "our schools" refer to all British children and schools.

We can find two parliamentary community "we" in (fifth session: 19th April 1988, page 670):

> iv. **Mr. Win Griffiths**[21]: *Like the Minister*, we appreciate the need for this campaign to be successful, but can the hon. Lady assure *us* that the national curriculum will not be introduced until local authorities have confirmed with the Government that there are sufficient qualified teachers to teach all subjects in the national curriculum?

When Mr. Win Griffiths says "*we* appreciate" and "can the hon. Lady assure *us*", he is speaking in the name of the whole parliamentary community because (a) it is logical to think that any member of the parliamentary community appreciates something which is positive and (b) when an MPG is required to explain something, s/he has to take the whole parliamentary community into consideration.

If we add these two new uses to the diagram offered by Kamio (2001), we can establish the following correspondences:

d.

P_1 D_1

P_2 D_2

P_3
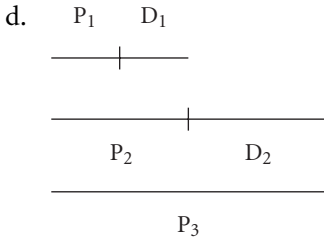
P_1 = Exclusive "we"
P_2 = Inclusive "we"
P_3 = Parliamentary community "we"

P_3 would be a proximal area that would comprise a larger area than the one covered by P_2 ("conversational space"), because it would include more individuals, not just the speaker and her/his direct addressee(s).

Finally, we would have to add a kind of distant area (D_3) that would go beyond the general perceived space and comprise a whole country:

e.

P_1 D_1

P_2 D_2
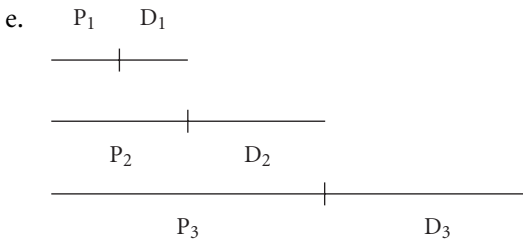
P_3 D_3

$P_3 + D_3 =$ generic "we"

5.2 Discourse functions

As Pennycook (1994: 176) claims, whenever anyone claims the right to speak for a larger group "… there is always this double assumption of authority and communality." When analysing the main discourse functions of these four different types of "we", we discovered that they could be grouped under two main headings: (a) power and distance; and (b) identity, community and persuasion.

5.2.1 *Power and distance*

As R. Lakoff (1990: 13) affirms, "Language drives politics and determines the success of political machinations. Language is the initiator and interpreter of power relations. Politics is language." In a speech delivered by Neil Kinnock in

1984,[22] the pronoun "we" was directly linked to the word power twenty-four times (Maitland and Wilson 1987).

Looking at the figures (Table 3), the first outstanding feature is that the type of "we" mostly used is the exclusive "we": 53.4% against only 14.6% (inclusive), 19.4% (generic) or 12.5% (parliamentary community). As mentioned earlier, this is highly connected to one of Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness strategies: to impersonalise S and H avoiding the pronouns "I" and "you". Thus, it can be said that in the House of Commons: (a) it is preferable to keep a distance between speaker and hearer; and (b) Members of Parliament favour an "I + power" form. Another interesting feature is that the speakers who employ this type of "we" a higher number of times are the Members of Parliament who are part of the Government (MPG) (when answering a question posed by a member of Parliament who is in the Opposition (MPO)): 76.1% (Table 4). One straightforward explanation of these results is the fact that these MPGs are the ones who have the power because they represent the Government. Additionally, this asymmetry in power relations is also reflected in the fact that the one who answers the question is in a more powerful position, since s/he is the "holder of knowledge".

In relation to MPPG and MPG behaviours, the first issue that strikes us is the high number of exclusive "we$_s$" (76.1% when talking to an MPO and 50.4% when addressing to another member of the same political group; Table 4). This has an easy answer: they have the power because they belong to the Government party, so it is obvious that they prefer the "I + power" exclusive "we". When they are answering a question posed by an MPO, the number is higher (76.1%) because it has a triple finality: (1) to remind the MPO that they are in a much more powerful position, (2) to underscore the fact that they belong to a different community with different values, and (3) to show that this is a highly cohesive community whose members all belong to the same political party.[23]

5.2.2 *Identity, community and persuasion*

As Zupnik (1994: 340) explains, "… first person plural deictic pronouns may fulfill a powerful persuasive function since they have the potential to encode group memberships and identifications: speakers may index different groups as included in the scope of the pronoun 'we' while excluding others" (Seidel 1975; Connor-Linton 1988; Fairclough 1989; Wilson 1990).

In relation to the inclusive "we", the percentages show that these were used mostly among members of the same party (in fact, the party of the Government: 23.9%, Table 4); and it is very interesting to note that not even one of these

inclusive "we$_s$" was found when an MPO asked an MPG a question (0%, Table 4). Finally, we found many coincidences when studying the generic and the parliamentary community "we": those who mostly preferred these options were MPOs posing questions to MPGs (55.3% and 36.8%, Table 4). However, can we say that this is a strategic behaviour? Is it a mere coincidence that members from different parties used this personal pronoun in a different way?

In relation to the MPOs asking questions of MPGs, the order of preference would be as follows (Table 4): (1st) generic "we" (55.3%); (2nd) parliamentary community "we" (36.8%); and (3rd) exclusive "we" (7.7%). This behaviour can be easily explained if we take into consideration the so-called "Classifying Processes". As Villegas (1989:30) explains:

> *"No es raro que una vez que un sujeto ha sido adscrito a una categoría ideológico-política, puedan ganarse expectativas para patrones considerados apropiados, aceptados o consecuentes. Tampoco es raro que la persona objeto de la clasificación experimente consecuencias derivadas de ésta, tanto en el plano afectivo-emocional como en el plano estrictamente conductual."*[24]

Thus, an MPG will consider the fact that an MPO does not use an inclusive "we" and instead, s/he employs an exclusive "we" to be "appropriate". As Brow and Gilman explain (1960:273), "Behavior norms are practices consistent within a group. So long as the choice of a pronoun is recognized as normal for a group, its interpretation is simply the membership of the speaker in that group." MPGs are absolutely excluded from the reference group or ideological-political category of MPOs. The classifying processes are even more solid when speaking about political parties than when observing ordinary conversations; it will be almost impossible for an MP from the Opposition to feel that s/he belongs to the same ideological-political category as an MPG or an MPPG (a Member of Parliament who belongs to the party of the Government). We can therefore state that in avoiding the use of inclusive "we" and preferring the exclusive "we", the MPO is underscoring her/his differences with her/his rival. At the same time, however, s/he is consolidating her/his relationships with all the British people and the rest of the parliamentary community, thanks to her/his overwhelming use of the generic and parliamentary community "we". Her/his main purpose is to get as many people as possible to agree with her/his opinion, and this will be easier if the listener feels that s/he is in the same ideological-political category. Obviously, this would be extremely difficult with an MPG or an MPPG, but what about all those citizens and the rest of the parliamentary community who have not yet formed a very solid opinion on the

issue? According to Sánchez Macarro (2002: 120), "In any event, the interpretation of each personal pronoun has to take into account the speaker's intention and the hearer's perception, and both participants' awareness of the public nature of the talk." This is supported by the fact that, as Biffen (1996: 43) explains: "This [Question Time] is arguably one of its [Commoners'] best-known activities, since it occupies prime time, is widely reported in the press and often makes the early evening radio and television news bulletins." This would explain why the type of "we" preferred by the Opposition is the generic "we": they know that they are being watched and listened to by the whole country. As Maier (1996: 36) states: "In order to reach common discursive ground, the parties must adopt a kind of idealized identity involving a certain schematization and simplification", and this unique identity will be easier to reach with citizens who do not represent any opposition political party, that is with people whose reference groups are less neatly defined. Thus, the MPO is exploiting her/his listener's feelings because s/he is trying to promote (1) a social identity; (2) a historical, political, racial or ethnic identification; and (3) a defence of the nation and social groups' interests. According to Roiz (1994), there are six general rules and procedures in persuasion: (1) to exploit feelings; (2) to simplify; (3) to exaggerate and distort information; (4) to repeat ideas; (5) to exploit psychological contagion; and (6) to support pre-existing attitudes. Taking the first rule into account, we may conclude that the MPO's behaviour is a persuasive one that could be summarised in the following way: first, s/he avoids the use of the inclusive "we" and favours the exclusive "we" because s/he is trying to distance her/himself from her/his hearer, and, second, s/he prefers the parliamentary community and generic "we". This behaviour has one explanation: s/he is trying to convince only those whose ideological-political categories are loosely defined, because s/he knows that s/he will have a better chance of changing their beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. At the same time, citizens who do not support the Government party see that the MPO is clearly distancing himself from the Government's policies and emphasising that s/he does not share the Government's values. Thus, we can be assured that the target of the MPO's strategies is the audience and not her/his face-to-face addressee.

However, what about those exclusive "we$_s$" (50.4%) used among members of the same political party: the Government party? The following words from a former MP (Biffen 1996: x) demonstrate this in a very interesting way: "Enjoyment of Parliament must be matched by affection for your constituency. It is no accident that *Hansard* records Members' names alongside their constituencies and makes absolutely no reference to party political affiliation."

This means that sometimes the Government's interests do not coincide with the constituency's interests and that the MPG will have to make a choice: fidelity to her/his constituency or to her/his political colleagues. The consequence of this dilemma will be the use of an exclusive "we" where the MPG detaches her/himself from her/his political party interests and strengthens her/his links with her/his constituency. Here is an example taken from the fifth session (19th April 1988, page 671):

> v.   **Mr. Cran**[25]: In the light of that answer, does my hon. Friend agree that it is indeed a strange decision by the University Grants Committee to recommend the closure of the geology department at the University of Hull, precisely because of the amount of help it gives to industry, attested to by the fact that Yorkshire and Humberside CBI has written to say exactly that? Can my hon. Friend find some inventive way of giving a signal to the UGC that it has taken a wrong decision?
>
> **Mr. Jackson**[26]: The basic purpose of the subject rationalisation exercises that are being undertaken by the UGC is to strengthen provision nationally for teaching and research. We wish to strengthen it academically by concentrating on centres of excellence, and financially by deploying *our* resources in the most clearly targeted way. In such a process there will always be gainers and losers, and the losers will always dispute the criteria. Under the constitutional arrangements in this area the criteria are for the UGC to determine. With regard to regional interests, one of the half dozen major earth sciences centres projected by UGC will be in Leeds, which is not far away.

In contrast to what happened when analysing MPOs behaviour, the second type of "we" used most often was the inclusive one. As mentioned earlier, this group — the Government group — has a more consolidated internal cohesiveness than MPs in the Opposition benches. It will be evident that if they want to pass a law, they will have to support the formation of a highly cohesive "bloc" that would be difficult to fight against.

6.   Conclusion

The main goal of this paper has been to show the close links between the concept of community and the linguistic realisations of a strategic behaviour. For this purpose, the context chosen for analysis has been the House of Commons (British Parliament). In this specific scenario, the speaker and the hearer's

territories mix in an approaching-distancing relationship, depending on the politician's purpose. One of the linguistic means used to achieve this love/hate connection has been the first person pronoun "we". This pronoun has embodied four different types of references: (1) exclusive (I + my political group), (2) inclusive (I + you), (3) parliamentary community (I + parliamentary community), and (4) generic (I + all British people). In this study, therefore, we have found a dynamic concept of community in which the scope of reference changes depending on the speaker's intentions. The politician knows that s/he can do this and so s/he "plays" with her/his hearer's feelings of inclusion/exclusion in order to win the battle.

Notes

1. This distinction between individualist and collectivist motives is also present in Mason (2000), who makes a distinction between individualist and collectivist accounts.

2. Following Gumperz (1971) and Bloomfield (1933).

3. This concept goes back to Plato's "The Republic" (427–347 BCE) and Aristotle's "The Politics" of 384–322 BCE.

4. Unfortunately, this is not surprising.

5. For this purpose, s/he will do as much as possible to improve her/his party colleagues' situation (collectivism) and defend her/his political beliefs (principlism).

6. "s" stands for "the originator(s) of the message"; "h" stands for "the addressee(s) of the message; and "o" stands for "any other referent(s) excluded from the definitions of s and h."

7. The meanings of the singular pronouns are limited to the boxes with thick borders, while the meanings of the plural pronouns may include also the boxes with thin borders.

8. 0 and 8 represent any selectional choice closest and furthest from the self.

9. Conservative Party leader.

10. Labour Party leader.

11. Labour Party leader.

12. They refer to the pronoun system.

13. That is, this question-and-answer exchange takes place between two colleagues of the same party.

14. He is an MPPG (a Member of Parliament who belongs to the Party of the Government: Conservative Party).

15. He is an MPG (a Member of Parliament who is part of the Government: Conservative Party).

16. He is an MPO (a Member of Parliament who is in the Opposition: the Labour Party).

17. He is an MPG (a Member of Parliament who is part of the Government: Conservative Party).

18. Previously explained.

19. He is an MPO (a Member of Parliament who is in the Opposition: the Labour Party).

20. He is an MPG (a Member of Parliament who is part of the Government: Conservative Party).

21. He is an MPO (a Member of Parliament who is in the Opposition: the Labour Party).

22. Leader of the Labour Party (1987 and 1992).

23. Let us remember that the Opposition is made up of different political parties, so this is far from being a cohesive group.

24. Tentative translation: "It is not rare that when an individual has already been assigned to an ideological-political category, s/he is expected to follow certain standards that will be considered appropriate, accepted or consistent. It is not rare either that the individual being classified experiences consequences from this at both levels, the affective-emotional and the behavioural".

25. He is an MPPG (a Member of Parliament who belongs to the Party of the Government: Conservative Party).

26. He is an MPG (a Member of Parliament who is part of the Government: Conservative Party).

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