

Choosing ONE of the examples below, how is it best described as talking politically rather than just talking about politics?

Chosen example: 1) A message from the Prime Minister

Communication is embedded in politics as it facilitates the ongoing negotiation of power. According to Bruno Latour, talking politically is different to talking about politics. Talking politically is characterised by a manner of speech, and not limited to political institutions and politicians. As a point of contrast, talking about politics is limited to explicitly political topics, such as parliamentary elections and the passing of legislation. Scott Morrison recently wrote an opinion piece addressing Australia's vaccination targets, which was published in the Herald Sun and the Prime Minister's official website. One may presume Scott Morrison is talking politically in his article because he is the Prime Minister of Australia. Latour's thesis would counteract this presumption, suggesting that Morrison's manner of speech is what defines the article as an example of talking politically. Morrison uses patriotic and inclusive language to encourage the Australian public to be vaccinated. The creation of an Australian public who share a collective will to be vaccinated is a political art. According to research professor Gay Hawkins, "a shared acceptance of a distinct form of address" (2013, p. 539) is what calls publics into existence. In his article, Morrison hopes the Australian public will feel compelled to be vaccinated by his appeals to patriotism and promises of a better future.

According to Latour, a loss of interest in politics can be "heard all over" (2003, p. 143). This loss of interest is likely due to a misunderstanding of how politics is defined. Politics is not exclusive to the 'Capital P' of politics, meaning it is not only related to politicians and political institutions. Anybody can talk politically about any issue, for example, a person can talk politically about what they are planning to cook for dinner. Talking politically is defined by an enunciation regime or a manner of speech. In Morrison's article, Morrison compares vaccination targets to the recent Tokyo Olympic Games. Morrison refers to the COVID-19 Delta strain as the "game changer" (2021, para. 15) and tells the Australian public "our gold medal run" (2021, para. 23) to hit our vaccination targets is well underway. He is talking politically, but he is not talking about other politicians or elections. Latour defines this manner of speech as a curved line or indirect form of speech (2003, p. 144), and outlines how it is often viewed as disappointing by others. The "truisms, cliches, handshakes, half-truths, half-lies, windy words..." (2003, p.144) that politicians use are often seen as unnecessary. There is a popular opinion that a more direct and straight line approach to

speech would allow a goal to be achieved more quickly. This argument suggests that our vaccination target could be reached more quickly if Morrison had changed his enunciation regime to a straight line form of communication. Instead of comparing Australia's vaccination targets to the Olympics, Morrison could have outlined how 70% to 80% of Australians need to be vaccinated to ease Covid restrictions. Despite criticisms of this indirect form of speech, Latour declares political talk "only appears curved because it is judged in relation to the straight" (2003, p. 149). Latour encourages us to view political talk as its own entity, a means to mobilise people and achieve a political outcome.

To study political talk, Latour (2003, p. 146) says "we need to abandon the idea of the guaranteed existence of groups." Societal groups are constantly being reformed and changed, and politics supports the existence of these groups. Hawkins says, "Publics aren't there waiting to be communicated with they are engaged or called into being" (2013, p. 85). In an effort to call the Australian public into action, Morrison appeals to their sense of patriotism by comparing the vaccination target with winning an Olympic gold medal. Morrison makes assumptions about his audience members to ensure his message is well received. This measurement of audiences is central to political activities, according to Hawkins (2013, p. 83). Morrison considers the prior knowledge of his audience members, taking into account slumping Newpoll numbers and allegations that he was avoiding responsibility for the slow vaccine rollout. Morrison combats these allegations by taking "responsibility for the early setbacks in our vaccination programme" (2021, para. 12), whilst also taking "responsibility for getting them fixed" (2021, para. 12). This fails to address his earlier position that the vaccine rollout was "not a race....It's not a competition". Morrison repeatedly used this mantra throughout the year, including in an interview in July with Laura Tingle on the 7:30 report (ABC, 2021). According to Hawkins, public interest is "constructed and performed as an always contingent event" (2013, p. 91). Therefore, Morrison's change in tact was perhaps reflective of the impact of the new highly infectious Delta strain, and his comparison of vaccination targets to the Olympic Games was to make his piece relevant to current public interest. Latour describes questioning why politicians change their mind frequently as "absurd" (2013, p. 145). According to Latour, a change in policy is part of political talk's entity, to reflect an ongoing negotiation of power and the formation and deformation of societal groups.

Talking politically is a cultural art, and when used effectively, it has the ability to spark great political change. Talking about politics is a different use of language, reserved for conversations about Parliamentary elections or legislation. Scott Morrison's article is an example of political talk, as he attempts to persuade a nation that getting vaccinated will deliver a better future for all.

References

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