



### **Linking Words Example: Amanda Vanstone Story**

**“The Prime Minister merely says what she thinks will sound good.**

We all like a bit of flattery. But there is a limit. When it is overdone or done as a matter of course we are forced to recognise the obsequiousness, the falsehood. And then we recognise that we are being played for a fool.

A few months ago, many Australians were surprised at Julia Gillard's swift denunciation of Julian Assange. Innocent until proven guilty seemed a concept far, far away. Without a trial, actually without charges being laid, it seemed the PM had judged the WikiLeaks founder guilty. What was the hurry?

The answer is simple. Like many who have been stridently anti-American in their younger days and come to realise the stupidity of their view, Gillard was feeling the need to overcompensate. The PM was engaged in an almighty suck-up to the United States. She thought that was what they wanted to hear.

The late former Victorian Labor senator John Button, generally a nice guy, once accused the Coalition of "suck-holing" the Chinese. If he were alive today, I wonder what words he would use to describe Gillard's speech to Congress during her visit to the United States in March.

Of course, we want our Prime Minister to be gracious, warm and friendly to our greatest ally and one of our best friends. And personally, I thought her Pollyanna line about seeing the first man land on the moon and thinking the Americans could do anything was not *toooo* bad. She was, after all, a child at the time.

The line following, however, was cringeworthy because she asserted she still believes it today. Anything? Well, at least we know Disneyland lives on. Had the Prime Minister not heard of Vietnam or the cyclone Katrina

response or managing your debt? Bear in mind, this was no after-dinner pleasantries like the much-quoted Menzies use of poetry. You know the one, "I did but see her passing by . . ."

Gillard's wasn't an off-the-cuff, roll-your-own speech. No, hours of preparation went into it. All that was needed to de-grease the greasy hyperbole was a small qualifier. What the Prime Minister should have said is: "But I don't any more - and neither would a lot of Australians. As great as the United States may be, we are not a nation of sycophants."

Yes, just like us the Americans enjoy some flattery, but they are not fools.

Now, in another part of the world, the judgment of some in the media is being called into question. The British tabloid arm of the multinational News Limited group appears to have engaged in illegal and, in the case of murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler, disgusting conduct. More shame on them. If they are guilty they deserve everything they get. And more.

Enter our Prime Minister. She says what she thinks will sound good. She announces that there are "serious questions" to be answered by News Ltd. Maybe there are. But what conduct in Australia has led her to this conclusion? What information is she relying on?

At the same time, another body with multinational operations, namely the Vatican, was on the receiving end of some strong words from the Irish Prime Minister.

He asserted that the Vatican puts its own needs above the need to expose those who prey on children; that abuse was being covered up. It was a simple, clear message in defense of children from a man who has the courage of his convictions. In Ireland, this was no easy, free kick. The papal nuncio was recalled to Rome.

I watched to see if our Prime Minister would again rush in, as she had with News Ltd, and assume that if there is trouble in an organisation in one country we should assume that it is also present to the same degree in any Australian branch. And that serious questions need to be asked.

Hmmm . . . Il silenzio.

Some, indeed many, clergy, and not limited to the Catholic Church, have done terrible and criminal things over a long period. Equally, there are thousands of nuns and priests all over the world who have done nothing but selfless good all their lives. We should not judge all clergy as being the same.

Ditto journalists.

Make no mistake. I know firsthand how low some journalists can sink.

Over the years I have been the recipient of endless bad faith, incompetence and sloppiness from some in the media. Even malice. Heavens above, I have had them in my garage checking out my rubbish.

But the point is that this has been from some in the media. There is absolutely no reason to treat them all as though they are the worst of their kind.

Having said that, there is reason for fair discussion about the quality of our media reporting on political affairs. After all, what we think of the government and individual MPs is affected in part by what the media tell us, and how they tell it. Whether it is by controlling the questions, or a smirk here or a raised eyebrow there, journalists can influence what the public think.

In the quest for drama and headlines, the media treat politics as not much more than a tactical game. I think Australians are sick of it. Yes, we like a bit of spark and biff - but not a constant diet of it. We want and deserve better. What the media say about politics isn't the be-all and end-all of how we vote. Australians have too much common sense to fall for that. They use their own life experience to judge a person or a government.

And, just like the Americans, Australians can tell when you are just saying what you think they want to hear. This is bad news for the Prime Minister."