



# No 'I' in budget, unless you are Peter Costello

By **MICHELLE GRATTAN**

WHEN it comes to the use of the personal pronoun in budget speeches, Peter Costello beats Wayne Swan hands down.

But Mr Swan has been more likely to talk in billions while Mr Costello tended to deal in millions.

The treasurers have one thing in common, according to a study of the language of the past five budget speeches: they used "tax" only as a noun, never as a verb.

Annabelle Lukin from Macquarie University's linguistics department has done a computer analysis of Costello's last three budget speeches and Swan's first two.

Costello used the word "I" 25 times in 2005, 23 in 2006 and 25 in 2007, projecting himself "personally" through the budget announcements. Swan said "I" only a dozen times in 2008 and 11 in 2009.

Dr Lukin writes that by using "tax" as a noun, "it gets objectified, and therefore becomes separate from the act of taxing".

"We find many instances of

'tax cut/s', and 'no tax on ...' 'tax-free', 'tax deductible', 'tax break', 'tax benefit'. We find no instances of 'tax rise', 'tax hike', or related phrases. Budget speeches have warm happy news about taxes."

The study found "some evidence of a slightly more 'verby' style in Costello's speeches, meaning a tendency towards a more plain, 'unpacked' style". For instance, Costello used "saving" as a verb, as in "we are saving over \$8 billion per annum in interest payments". Swan never says "we are saving", instead saying things like "the savings decisions we have taken will allow us to offset fully our new spending".

Swan says the word "spending" much more than Costello.

"It is sobering to read five speeches in a row, since budgets are full of promises ... On the basis of these speeches, Australia should have: a sustainable world-class health system, jobs for all Australians, no skills shortages, carers who feel their work is recognised and valued, a stabilised Iraq, high-quality education at all levels ..."