

THE USE OF PERSON DEIXIS AS A DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN DONALD TRUMP'S SELECTED POLITICAL SPEECHES

Chika Kate Ojukwu

Abstract

This study critically examines the use of person deixis as a discourse strategy in Donald Trump's selected political speeches: his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2017, and his State of the Union Address on February 4, 2020. Guided by Levinson's (1983) Pragmatic Theory of Deixis, this study set out to identify the person deixis and their referents in Donald Trump's selected political speeches; discuss how these person deixis function as a discourse strategy in selected political speeches and examine how Donald Trump used these personal pronouns: "I," "you," "we," and "they" and their variants to strategically construct group identities, assign roles, convey ideology, and influence audience perception, create inclusion (we/us) and exclusion (they/them). As a linguistic tool, Deixis reveals the interpersonal functions of language by indicating participants' positions relative to the speaker. Using a qualitative, discourse-analytical method, this study finds that Trump's use of deictic pronouns plays a significant rhetorical role in shaping in-group (self) and out-group (other) poles. "We" is used both inclusively to promote unity and institutionally to highlight shared governance; "they" serve to mark opposition and distance; "you" engages and empowers the audience; and "I" asserts authority and personal responsibility, creating a good picture of the politician. These patterns reveal how Trump constructs solidarity, assigns blame, and emphasises leadership through linguistic choices. Ultimately, the study concludes that personal pronouns in political discourse are not merely referential but are potent tools for persuasion, positioning, and ideological framing.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Deixis, Person Deixis, Political Speech, and Donald Trump

Introduction

Politics and language are intricately linked, with language serving as a key vehicle for political expression and control. Language is the most important point of entry into the habits of thought of a people; its role is highlighted in disseminating political ideas and shaping public consciousness. Similarly, Harris notes that language is the primary medium through which political ideas are transmitted to the community Ayeomoni, (2012, 155 qt). A nation's ability to maintain democratic rule and political stability depends mainly on how effectively language conveys ideologies, builds consensus, and transmits power Nweje (2019,1). In this context, language becomes a strategic tool in the hands of politicians—not just for communication but for constructing identities, persuading audiences, and negotiating power. It plays a crucial role in political discourse, serving as the medium through which ideologies are conveyed, group affiliations are reinforced, and public perception is shaped.

Understanding how language functions in such contexts requires attention to pragmatics, the branch of linguistics concerned with language use in context. Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning, or how more is communicated than what is explicitly said. It involves analysing how meaning is constructed based on the interaction between speaker, listener, and situational factors. Levinson (1983), whose theory of Deixis underpins this study, emphasises that pragmatic elements like Deixis are essential in understanding how language constructs social relationships and realities. In political discourse, pragmatics allows us to explore how linguistic choices, especially context-dependent ones, shape interpretation, identity, and power.

One of the most notable linguistic tools employed in political discourse is deictic expressions, particularly personal pronouns such as we, you, they, and I. These context-dependent expressions position the speaker about the audience and other political actors. Their interpretation relies heavily on the speaker's point of view, time, and place of utterance.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a valuable framework for studying how language is used to maintain and challenge power structures. Within this framework, Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, particularly the interpersonal function, provides insight into how speakers express attitudes, establish relationships, and assert authority. Halliday (1970) views language as a means of conveying information and a tool for enacting social roles. Through the interpersonal function, elements such as modality, mood, and pronouns help the speaker position themselves and engage with their audience.

Notably, Pronouns do more than indicate person, number, or gender. They contribute to what can be considered "identity work" as they help speakers construct and perform social roles during interaction. According to traditional grammarians, using pronouns merely means expressing person, number, and gender. However, in political discourse, they must be understood in terms of their interactive function and how they help construct identity. Politicians use them to create positive perceptions of both them and other people. How politicians represent themselves relates to how they go about "being a good politician." This entails presenting oneself in a favourable light, which is achieved by using the pronoun "I." It is not a replacement for a speaker's name but how a speaker addresses himself in conversation. Politicians use the pronoun "we" to identify themselves as members of a specific group of people. "You" are referred to in a general sense that refers to everyone. "They" are employed to locate another Generic "they", and unspecified categorical "they" can be used to

represent others. (Bramley,2002). "us/we" is associated with positive elements and "them/they" with harmful elements. The personal pronoun "I" refers to any of the speaker's interactional and social identities, not just the speaker of the utterance. "They" can be used to distance the speaker from the thing being spoken of (Allan, 2006).

Political speeches frequently use personal pronouns because they can reveal who the speaker is and who he most identifies with. Politicians use pronouns in their speeches, which merits attention because they significantly affect the overall impact. Politicians may discuss their plans for implementing this measure in a variety of ways, using the first-person singular "I" and the first-person plural "we" (Beard, 2000, p. 44). This study examines the usage of person Deixis in two selected speeches by Donald Trump, a former American president.

Given their rhetorical significance, personal pronouns merit critical attention in political discourse. Therefore, this study examines how Donald Trump employs deictic pronouns in two of his major political speeches: his Inaugural Address (2017) and State of the Union Address (2020)—to achieve specific rhetorical goals. The objectives of this study are set out in three points:

1. To identify the person deixis and their referents in Trump's selected Political speeches.
2. To discuss how these persons deixis function as a discourse strategy selected Political speeches.
2. To examine how Trump uses pronouns to create inclusion (we/us) and exclusion (they/them).

Review of Related Literature

The primary aim of reviewing some works is to reveal the gap in previous literature and state how this current study tends to fill the observed gap. As a contribution to the growth of pragmatics and political discourse, this article explores the specific roles of personal

Deixis as a discourse strategy in shaping political communication. It shows how Donald Trump employs deictic pronouns in two of his major political speeches—his Inaugural Address (2017) and State of the Union Address (2020), to achieve specific rhetorical goals. Below are some conducted studies before this study on discourse analysis that have befitted scholarship.

Win (2025) conducts ‘A comparative analysis of Donald Trump’s 2025 Inauguration Speech through various political discourse methods’. By utilising frameworks such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Conversation Analysis (CA), Narrative Analysis, Genre Analysis, Pragmatic Discourse Analysis, and Sociolinguistic Discourse Analysis, the research examines how language in political speeches reflects power structures, ideologies, and social dynamics. This multi-method approach explores rhetorical strategies, audience engagement, narrative construction, and the framing of national identity within the broader context of contemporary political discourse. Additionally, the study considers the implications of Trump’s speech for understanding political communication trends, including the impact of media, non-verbal cues, and multimodal elements. The research concludes by suggesting future directions, such as the role of social media, the influence of non-verbal communication, and the evolution of political rhetoric in the digital age.

Ajayi and Kilani (2024). investigate critical discourse analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s inaugural and Independence Day speeches of 2023.’ The work explores the pragmatic and stylistic elements in the inaugural speech of Nigeria’s newly elected president, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Anchored in the pragma-stylistic framework proposed by Black (2006), the paper analyses specific linguistic features such as speech acts, verb tenses, deictic expressions, and rhetorical tropes employed in the Address. The analysis reveals that in varying degrees, Tinubu utilised four illocutionary acts—namely representatives, expressive, commissives, and directives. Additionally, the speech

deliberately uses different tense forms, including the simple present, present perfect, simple past, simple future, and imperative. These findings suggest that Tinubu strategically used these discursive tools to align his message with the socio-political, socio-economic, and geo-political climate, aiming to (i) rebuild Nigerians' trust and confidence in his leadership, (ii) persuade his audience, and (iii) effectively convey his message for impactful communication.

Romadlani (2024) explores 'Personal pronouns in Biden's inaugural speech: A critical discourse perspective.' This study focuses on using first-person personal pronouns in political discourse, with particular attention to political speeches. It aims to uncover how politicians strategically use the pronouns I and we to serve specific communicative intentions within political contexts. Adopting a critical discourse analysis approach, the research examines these pronouns and their inflectional forms to reveal their functions and underlying purposes, especially in referencing audiences. Such linguistic strategies in political discourse reflect the social and political relationships between the speaker and the referents. The data were drawn from the transcript of President Joe Biden's 2021 inaugural address. Out of 224 first-person personal pronouns identified, I and its variants appeared 63 times (28.1%), while we and its variants occurred 161 times (71.9%). Despite the predominance of the plural form, the use of we in this context did not include Vice President Kamala Harris. Biden employed the singular pronoun I to express gratitude, highlight personal qualities, build a positive self-image, and foster rapport with citizens. Conversely, he used we to promote national unity, collective responsibility, and solidarity in facing shared challenges. This demonstrates that personal pronouns are no longer limited to grammatical analysis; they are powerful tools in shaping socio-political stances, especially in political communication.

Muhammad and Haruna (2023) examine 'Personal Pronouns: A Rhetorical Strategies in Political Speeches.' Their analysis of personal

pronouns as rhetorical strategies in political speeches, particularly as they relate to propaganda during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, addresses the concern that some electorates misinterpret the rhetorical functions of language in political contexts. Anchored in Fairclough's (1995) model and analytical framework, the research adopts a qualitative methodology. Data were collected from political campaign advertisements featured in three major Nigerian newspapers—The Guardian, Premium Times, and Vanguard—published between January and March 2015, a peak period of political campaigning. The study focused on speeches delivered at political rallies by members of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC). Through content analysis, the study explores how personal pronouns function within the discourse to influence public perception. The findings reveal that personal pronouns shape the social dynamics between political speakers and their audience, reflecting varying levels of authority, inclusion, and persuasion. The study concludes that personal pronouns, especially I and we, are instrumental in political communication, serving as tools through which politicians seek to shape, influence, and transform the political views of the electorate.

These works reviewed, though different, are all connected because they are all interested in the relationship between language and society. From the literature reviewed and from the best of my knowledge no research has been done on 'the use of person deixis as discourse strategy in 'Donald Trump's Inaugural speech and 2020 State of the Union Address' and therefore, this study fills a gap.

Theoretical Framework

Deixis

Deixis is a linguistic concept involving words or phrases whose meaning depends on the context, such as time, place, or participants. Originating from the Ancient Greek word *deixis*, it connects language

to context, making communication meaningful. Deictic expressions, such as "I" and "you," etc require contextual knowledge to be fully understood. Several theories have been proposed to explain the use and interpretation of Deixis in discourse, such as Fillmore's theory of Deixis and Bühler's deictic field theory. Also, there is a deictic theory by Anderson and Keenan (1985), which offers cross-linguistic evidence. However, this study focuses specifically on Levinson's (1983) classification and treatment of person deixis. He provides a pragmatic approach to Deixis, stressing its role in communication. Levinson argues that Deixis is inherently context-dependent and crucial for understanding meaning in discourse. Political figures like Donald Trump strategically use deictic pronouns to shape public perception, create in-group and out-group distinctions, and establish authority.

This study adopts Levinson's (1983) pragmatic theory of Deixis as its primary theoretical framework. Levinson's classification of Deixis into five primary types: person, place, time, discourse, and social Deixis, provides a comprehensive analytical model. However, the focus of this study is specifically on personal Deixis, which deals with the use of personal pronouns as a discourse strategy. Levinson's approach is considered the most appropriate for this research, as it offers a systematic and insightful understanding of how personal pronouns are used to construct meaning, establish relationships, and position the speaker in political discourse. Levinson provides a universal, speaker-centred approach, emphasising Deixis as a fundamental aspect of pragmatics. He further provides a functional explanation of how Deixis works in communication.

Deixis and Context

Deixis is one of the most significant concepts in the study of the relation between discourse and context. The term, derived from the Greek meaning "to show" or "to indicate," refers to elements in language that rely directly on the discourse situation. Deictic expressions are

context-dependent, as their interpretation hinges on the speaker's position in time and space. However, earlier work by Karl Bühler (1934/1990) laid foundational insights into Deixis by distinguishing the deictic field (Zeigfeld) from the symbolic field (Symbolfeld). According to Levinson (1983:54), Deixis involves how language encodes features of the context of utterance and how interpretation depends on that context. Among the five types of Deixis he identifies, this study concentrates on personal Deixis.

Person Deixis

Person deixis refers to the grammatical markers that identify the roles of participants in a speech event—the speaker (first person), the addressee (second person), and others (third person). According to Levinson (1983:62), first-person Deixis refers to the speaker, second-person Deixis to the addressee, and third-person Deixis to other entities. Renkema (1993:77) also supports this, noting that personal pronouns are the primary realisation of person deixis.

First Person Deixis

This refers to pronouns like I, me, we, us, etc., used by the speaker to refer to themselves or to a group they belong to. Levinson (1983:62) states that first person is the grammaticalization of the speaker's reference to themselves.

Personal pronouns

Singular pronouns	Plural pronouns
I	We
Me	Us
Myself	Ourselves
Mine	Our

Second Person Deixis

Second-person deixis refers to the addressee(s), typically marked in English by you, yourself, yourselves, and yours. Levinson (1983:62)

notes that this category encodes the speaker's reference to one or more addressees. Renkema (1993:73) further notes that second-person Deixis can also reflect the speaker's relationship with the hearer.

Third Person Deixis

Third-person deixis refers to people or entities that are neither the speaker nor the addressee. Examples include he, she, it, they, and them. As Gasser explains, third-person pronouns in English are categorised into singular (he, she, it) and plural (they).

Other Deixis Types

While this study emphasises person deixis, Levinson also identifies other types of Deixis: spatial (place), temporal (time), discourse, and social Deixis. Spatial Deixis refers to expressions like this, that, here, and there, while temporal Deixis includes time expressions like yesterday, now, and tomorrow. These are not the focus of this study but form part of Levinson's comprehensive model.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative design to analyse the use of person Deixis in selected political speeches by former U.S. President Donald Trump. The data comprises two speeches by Trump: his Inaugural Address (January 20, 2017) and the 2020 State of the Union Address (February 4, 2020). These texts were purposively selected and printed for accessibility and detailed examination.

The study applies Levinson's theory of person Deixis as the guiding framework. It investigates how pronouns such as I, you, and we etc function within Trump's discourse to establish speaker identity, engage or exclude the audience, and draw ideological lines. The method used is textual analysis within pragmatics and discourse analysis. Excerpts from the speeches are analysed regarding whom the pronouns

refer to, the context of their usage, and the rhetorical or ideological functions they serve.

Presentation of Data and the Results

As we mentioned at the beginning, pronouns play a key role in constructing "self" and "other." In this research, pronouns are not seen as suggested by the traditional grammarians; instead, they must be thought of in the context of interaction in terms of the 'identity work' they accomplish (Bramley, 2001). In this section, the researcher reveals how politicians use pronouns to construct favourable images of 'themselves' and 'others'. This section discussed how the pronouns *I*, *you*, *we*, and *they* are used in the speeches and to whom the president refers when he uses these personal pronouns. It also tends to explore inclusivity and exclusivity of using these person Deixis in the selected speeches.

Identification and Discussion of Person Deixis in Selected Speeches of Donald Trump

A) The use of I and its variants

The pronoun *I* is how a speaker refers to himself in talk and not a substitute for his name. The first-person singular pronoun *I* is used by politicians to represent themselves and convey their opinions, and it makes the speech more subjective. *I* is used to establish rapport with the audience and show a degree of personal involvement, responsibility, and commitment. It encodes a "personal voice" and can be used to separate "self" from "others". Representation of "self" by the politician relates to how a politician represents himself as "being a good politician". This involves showing oneself in a positive light, which is accomplished by using *I* (Bramley2001). Politicians use *I* to express personal qualities they think they have, like being someone with principles, morals, and power and not being afraid to take action when necessary. According to Yule (2006), the co-text surrounding a word

strongly affects what we think the word means. Therefore, politicians infuse positive co-texts around the personal pronoun *I* when addressing themselves to create a good image of themselves in the minds of their audience. Below are examples of how President Trump uses the first-person pronoun *I* in speeches and how he uses it to refer to himself. He often establishes dominance by discrediting his political rivals, portraying them as obstacles to the nation's progress or threats to the public interest. This rhetorical approach casts him as the more capable and patriotic leader.

Excerpt 1: Today, I declare allegiance to all Americans. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 2: *I* will fight for you with every breath in my body and never let you down. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 3: *I* am thrilled to report tonight that our economy is the best it has ever been. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address-Appendix B

Excerpt 4: *I* say to the people of our great country and the members of Congress before *me*. The state of our union is stronger than ever before. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address-Appendix B

Excerpt 5: From the instant *I* took office, *I* moved rapidly to revive the United States economy- slashing many job-killing regulations, enacting historic and record-setting tax cuts and fighting for fair and reciprocal trade agreements. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address.

In the first example, the speaker uses *I* to show his personal involvement, responsibility and commitment. He uses the first person singular *I* to refer to himself; he speaks for himself, which means that he has not been forced by anyone to take this oath of loyalty to his nation. In example (2), just like the first one, the speaker refers to

himself using the first-person pronoun/ Deixis *I*. He presents himself as a strong and courageous man who will fight for the people and protect them. The fight could be a human rights fight or war. Trump might not necessarily go to war, but as a man whose authority will be conferred, he can fight for the people by training and buying arms and ammunition for the army. Using the pronoun, *I* show that he can influence the armed forces and protect citizens' rights whenever needed. Trump used a blunt, declarative style in his speeches. By deploying this direct and strong assertions like "I will fight for you...", etc., he creates a positive image of a decisive and authoritative leader who is not confused but rather is in control of the nation.

In examples (3) and (4), Trump uses *I* to show a degree of personal involvement. He represents himself alone. He is thrilled because he succeeded by playing an important role as president. Trump's desire/eagerness to report to Congress and the country the success attained so far is seen in the above sentences. Example (5) shows how Trump uses *I* to encode personal voice and give information about what he did immediately after becoming the United States president. As it is used above, Trump moved to revive the United States economy. This way, he is taking credit for the work done so far without mentioning whether he got help from others in reviving the state's economy. Using *I* show he was the only one who made the achievements.

Excerpt 6: Since *my* election, we have created 7 million new jobs, 5 million more than government experts projected during the previous administration. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 7: Under *my* administration, 7 million Americans have come off of food stamps, and 10 million people have been lifted off of welfare. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 8: In just 3 years of *my* administration, 3.5 million working-age people have joined the workforce. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 9: Six days ago, *I* replaced NAFTA and signed the brand-new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) into law. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 10: Tonight, *I* ask Congress to support our students and back *my* plan to offer vocational and technical education in every single high school in America. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

In examples (6), (7) and (8) above, Trump uses the pronoun *my* to give himself accolades for numerous achievements. This insinuates that it is only during his administration that the notable great heights above have been achieved in such a short period. He gives himself the whole glory except in example (6), where he acknowledges the help of others. This "other" helped him create the 7 million new jobs, which is a part of him; therefore, they have become inclusive. This is one of the ways politicians present themselves as "good politicians". Trump presents himself in a positive light, and he accomplished it using *my*. In example (9), *I* show the power Trump has as a president. He can replace NAFTA and legally sign the brand new USMCA as the head. This shows that as a leader, Trump knows what suits his citizens and what is not good for them. According to him, unfair trade is the biggest reason why Trump decided to run for the presidency. He promised the American people to replace the disastrous NAFTA trade deal and has kept his promise. *I* am used to establishing a rapport with the audience and also used to take credit for the job done. If anything happens, it is clear where the blame lies. In (10), the speaker uses *I* to show that he is a single individual who cannot work alone but needs backup from Congress in order to carry out his plan. He asks Congress to support their student and his plan to improve the educational system.

Excerpt 11: *I* have also made an ironclad pledge to American families: We will always protect patients with pre-existing conditions. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address-Appendix B

Excerpt 12: Get a bill to *my* desk, and *I* will sign it into law immediately. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address-Appendix B

Excerpt 13: *I* was recently proud to sign the law providing new parents in the federal workforce paid family leave, serving as a model for the rest of the country. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address-Appendix B

Example (11) shows how *I* can be used to show authority and take credit for work. Trump presents himself as a good president who makes good and independent decisions, when necessary, without fear. He created a sense of inequality by making decisions on his own, and this suggests that others are inferior to him. In examples (12) and (13), *I* is used to encode a personal voice and also used to separate "self" from "other". It is used to show the speaker's superiority and the power bestowed on him to sign bills into law and new laws.

B) The use of *you* and its variants

According to conventional categorisation, you are classified as second person singular *you* and second person plural *you*; it does not account for generic *you*. Lerner (1996) notes that the singular *you* provide a way to refer to the addressee of the speaker and is used for addressing a singular recipient, while the plural *you* is used for addressing multiple recipients (Bramley, 128). One characteristic of *you* is that the listener is always included regardless of whether *you* is singular, plural or generic. Studies on "talk-in-interaction" show that generic *you* give way for the speaker to talk about everyone. *You* is

integrally implicated in speaker involvement and has a "built-in-defence" because the speaker is talking about people in general and is thus a valuable resource for the speaker to construct an action or situation as typical.

Moreover, Trump frequently engages his audience through second-person pronouns such as "you" and "your." This strategy fosters a sense of personal involvement and makes the speech feel more intimate as if he is speaking directly to each listener. Statements like "*Your* voice, *your* hopes and dreams will define *your* American destiny" suggest that the audience plays a vital role in achieving the collective goals he envisions. He also appeals to the emotions and thoughts of his audience by acknowledging their struggles, proposing solutions, and urging them to take meaningful action.

Some examples of how *you* is used in the speeches are as follows:

Excerpt 14: That all changes starting right here and right now because this moment is *your* moment. It belongs to *you*. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 15: This is *your* day. This is *your* celebration. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 16: Everyone is listening to *you* now. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 17: So, to all Americans in every city near and far, small and large, from mountain to mountain, from ocean to ocean- hear these words- *you* will never be ignored again. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 18: *Your* voice, *your* hopes and dreams will define *your* American destiny. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

The inaugural speech is directed to all of the citizens of America, and a number of *you* who participated in the speech refer to

everyone listening or watching. Trump uses *you* and *your* in examples (14) and (15) to include the people of the United States in the new government. *You* is used in a generic sense, meaning it is a way for the speaker to talk about everyone. *You* is used to assure the people that the new administration is for them because they are not just transferring power from one administration to the other but from Washington DC and giving it back to the people. Examples (16) and (17) use *you* to refer to the forgotten men and women of the United States of America. The time when they were not listened to and ignored is over. In (16), *you* is not used in a generic sense, instead *you* is used to refer to a particular set of people. In (17), *you* are used in a generic sense because all Americans are included. His ability to use *you* in these contexts means that the nation exists to serve its citizens. In (18), *your* is still used to refer to Americans. It is used as a generic pronoun. If the people's voices are not heard, the government might not know their hopes and dreams.

Excerpt 19: *Your* courage, goodness and love will forever guide us along the way. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)- Appendix A

Excerpt 20: I stand before *you* to share the results. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 21: I am thrilled to report to *you* tonight that our economy is the best it has ever been. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 22: I can proudly announce tonight that an opportunity scholarship is going to *you*, and *you* will soon be heading to school of *your* choice. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 23: To those watching at home tonight, I want *you* to know: we will never let socialism destroy American healthcare. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

In example (19), *your* is still used to refer to Americans. It is used as a generic pronoun. The above example shows that the government cannot do without the people, and the people play a crucial role in the government's running. In (20) and (21), *you* is used to refer to the Congress. *You*, in the examples, show that whom the speaker wants to report to is the congress members. *You* are not used to address everyone in the country but to the Congress alone during the annual presentation of the State of the Union address. *Your* in (22) is not a generic *you* or used to refer to Congress. Instead, it is used to address a single recipient. It is *you* in its singular form. The person referred to is Janiyah Davis, a fourth grader from Philadelphia. She is among countless American children trapped in failing government schools. In (23), *you* refers to the American citizens who are watching from home. It is used in a plural form but not as a generic *you*.

Excerpt 24: If forcing American taxpayers to provide unlimited free healthcare to illegal aliens sounds fair to *you*, then stand with the radical left. However, if *you* think we should defend American patients and seniors, stand with me... Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 26: Our message to the terrorists is clear: *You* will never escape American justice. If *you* attack our citizens, *you* will forfeit *your* life. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

In example (24) *you* is used for the Congress. The pronoun *you*, although it is used to refer to Congress, is realised in two forms. *You* used for the members who support free healthcare for illegal aliens, and *you* used for congress members who think they should defend American patients and seniors. Example (25) uses *you* for immigrants in the American southern border. *You* is not used in a generic sense in this context, it is used to refer to a specific people, the immigrants. In

this case, it is not unclear who the president is referring to. *You* in example (26) is used for Qasem Soleimani, a terrorist responsible for killing an American army staff, sergeant Christopher Hake. *You* is used to refer to one recipient.

C) The use of Inclusive Pronoun: *we* and its variants

We is said to have a varied distribution of referents ranging from *we* (self-one other) to *we* (self +humanity). *We* are a marker of category membership used to indicate institutional identity, i.e., the speaker speaks as a representative of or on behalf of others/institutions. The use of *we* enables the speaker to achieve different effects like separating "us from them", by so doing, the speaker will be able to present the group which he belongs positively and the other group negatively. When a politician uses *we*, he does not speak of himself, instead, he speaks as a representative of his political party or an institution. *We* is used to construct a group which refers to the people including the speaker. The speaker takes on the participation status of someone speaking on behalf of the people. *Our* implies ownership by every member and it indicates affiliation between the speaker and the people (Bramley 2001). *We* help share the responsibility, especially when the decisions are tricky, when the news is uncertain. Disadvantage is that the individual does not gain so much credit when things go well (Beard 2000).

Excerpt 27: We the citizens of America have now joined a great national effort to rebuild *our* country and restore its promise for all *our* people. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 28: We will face challenges, *we* will confront hardships, but *we* will get the job done. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 29: Today's ceremony, however, has very special meaning because today **we** are not merely transferring power from one administration to another- but transferring it from Washington DC and giving it back to you people. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 30: **We** are one nation, and their pain is **our** pain, their dreams are **our** dreams; **we** share one nation, one home and one glorious destiny. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 31: **We** have made other countries rich while the wealth, strength and confidence of **our** country has dissipated over the horizon. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

In examples (27) and (28), the speaker uses **we** and its variant **our** to construct a group which refers to the people including himself. Trump uses **we** and its variant to express his identity as one who is affiliated with the citizens of America as a whole and not with a particular group of people. In example (27), **we** and **our** are used by the speaker to tell the American citizens that they own the country together and rebuilding it and restoring the promise of the people will be achieved together. Example (28) is related to (27) because the speaker still talked about togetherness, facing hardships and challenges together and getting the job done together. In example (29), Trump also construct a group which refers to the people and himself but in this one, the people involved are not the whole citizens of America but a particular group. This is a group of people in the country that it is their work to transfer power from one administration to another. **We** is not used in a generic sense, it is used to refer to the government wielding the power of the country. Trump assures the citizens that power will now be transferred from Washington DC back to the people. This is to say that power belongs to this people. It is used as a marker of category membership. Example (30) and (31), **we** is used in a generic sense. In

(30), the use of generic **we** create unity and cohesiveness among the Americans. Trump could have easily used 'you' to exclude himself, but instead, he used **we** to show that they all share in the plights of their children/young ones because they share one nation, one home, and one glorious destiny. Trump takes on the participation status of someone speaking on behalf of the people. He uses **we and our** in (30) and (31) to imply ownership by every member, which shows affiliation with the people.

Excerpt 32: For many decades, **we** have enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidised the armies of other countries, while allowing the sad depletion of **our** own military. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 33: **We** will bring back our jobs, **we** will bring back our borders, **we** will bring back **our** wealth, **we** will bring back **our** dreams. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 34: **We** will follow two simple rules- buy America and hire America. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 35: **We** will reinforce old alliances and form new ones, and until the world is against radical Islamic terrorism, **we** will eradicate it from the face of the earth. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Example (32) also uses **we** to speak on behalf of the people. Trump uses **we** to separate ourselves from others. The 'self' here are the American citizens to which he belongs, while 'other' refers to the countries they have enriched and helped in different ways at the expense of America. In examples (33), (34) and (35), Trump uses **we** to refer to the whole American citizens, which means that **we** is used in generic sense. The use of **we** is vital because it digs deep into the audience's psychology. Trump listed many things that will be achieved

together; it is not clear how these things will be achieved, the people that will be among them, or how they will be shared amongst them; the main thing is that these things will be achieved. The use of **we** by Trump helped to share the responsibility. Example (34) shows that all Americans need to do is always put their nation first. In example (35), Trump uses **we** to achieve the effect of separating "self" from "other", the "self" which he belongs and the other which is presented negatively. The other in example (35) are the radical Islamic terrorists.

Excerpt 36: In just three short years, **we** have shattered the mentality of American decline and rejected the downsizing of American's destiny. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 37: This second chance at life is possible because **we** passed Landmark Criminal Justice Reform into law. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 38: **We** are doing numbers that no one would have thought possible just 3 years ago. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 39: **We** must always remember that our job is to put America first. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

As we have mentioned before, the State of the Union address is a speech the president gives to Congress at the beginning of every year. The first-person plural **we** used in the first three examples refers to the president and the Congress. It is used to show that the above-mentioned achievements were made by Congress and not by the president alone. In this context, Trump's use of **we** helped to share responsibility. By using **we**, he wanted to show that the achievements were only done because the Congress and he had worked hard together. **We** is used to create unity within the Congress. In examples (39) and (40), the use of **we** is tricky. The speech is indeed addressed to the Congress, but citizens are watching from home and at some point, the

people might be included. In (39), *we* can refer to the speaker + the Congress or the speaker + the Congress + the people. If it is the former, they are reminded to always put America first.

D) The use of Exclusive Pronouns: *they* and its variants

Exclusive pronouns "they," "them," and "their" are used to mark opposition, blame, or distance from certain groups, often political opponents, foreign entities, or immigrants. This "othering" strategy delineates a clear boundary between the in-group (the American people) and the out-group (political elites, foreign powers, or ideological enemies).

Politicians use *they* and its variants to construct the other, i.e., distinguishing "self" from "other", generic *they* and unspecified categorical *they*. The use of *they* as a specific 'other' can be presented in three contexts: **oppositional, affiliative and neutral**. In an affiliative context, the speaker makes a positive evaluation of *they* in order to create an affiliation between himself and the group referred to by *they*. But in a disaffiliative (oppositional) context, the speaker makes a negative evaluation of *they* and the reason is to disaffiliate himself from the group referred to by *they*. In the neutral context, the speaker does not evaluate *they* positively or negatively. Generic *they* is used to obscure gender. This is used to talk about a person without disclosing his/her identity, not being specific about particular people (Bramley 2001).

Excerpt 40: *Their* triumphs have not been little to celebrate for struggling families across America today. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Excerpt 41: *They* respect what we have done because, quite frankly, *they* could never believe what *they* were able to get away with what *they* were doing year after year. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 42: This is what is happening in California and other states. Systems are totally out of control, costing taxpayers vast and unaffordable amounts of money. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 43: The state of California passed an outrageous law declaring *their* whole state to be a sanctuary for criminal illegal immigrants- with catastrophic results. Trump's 2020 State of the Union Address- Appendix B

Excerpt 44: And whether a child is born in the sprawl of Detroit or the windswept plains of Nebraska, *they* look at the same night sky, and dream the same, and *they* are infused with the breath by the same almighty creator. Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech (2017)-Appendix A

Example (40) shows how *they* refer to a specific other. *They* refer to Washington elites who disregarded ordinary American families and their sufferings. Trump makes a negative evaluation of *them*, and the reason is to disaffiliate himself from the group referred by *them*. He aims to draw a clear distinction between them and take his stand. Trump presents the other as a selfish set of people who have reaped the rewards of government while the people (everyday Americans) have borne the cost, implying betrayal and neglect. This is because Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth, making them harmful to the national interest.

They are also used in example (41) to refer to a specific other. The third person pronoun *they* refers to the Chinese that have been taking advantage of the United States. It is used to separate self from other. The speaker uses *they* in an oppositional context where the speaker makes a negative evaluation of *they* like in example (41) and reasons being to show he is not part of the group. Example (42) uses *their*, which is a variant of they, to refer to California and other states not mentioned. A negative image of them is created. Example (43) uses *their* in a neutral context i.e the speaker's evaluation of *they* is just on

the bad decisions California and other states have made which resulted to the crisis they are undergoing currently; *they* is not presented positively or negatively. It features language that undermines his opponents by casting them as either incompetent or detrimental to the nation's well-being. This kind of framing discredits alternative viewpoints and strengthens his political stance by positioning his leadership as the more capable and patriotic choice. This strategy portrays critics not simply as rivals but as obstacles to national progress and unity. In example (44), *they* is used in a generic sense. Generic *they* is used to obscure the gender of the referent (Muhlhausler & Harre, 1990); a strategy deployed by politicians to present a person without disclosing their gender or identity.

Discussion

This research explores how person deixis, which, according to Renkema (1993), is realized with personal pronouns. It has been used as a discourse strategy and has also contributed to the development of pragmatics. The study illustrates how Donald Trump employed person deixis, a discourse strategy that incorporates personal pronouns, in his 2017 inaugural speech and 2020 state of the union address to project a positive image of himself, include and exclude specific individuals, and secure the full support of his audience.

By studying the personal pronouns, *I*, *you*, *we* and *they* (including their variants), the researcher has been able to discuss how the personal pronouns are used in the speeches and identify the participants referred to in these speeches by using such pronouns. For instance, excerpts 1-13 revealed how Trump consistently uses the first-person singular pronoun *I* to assert personal responsibility, claim achievements, and project authority. His speeches reflect a deliberate personalization of political actions, such as "*I* will fight for *you*" and "*I* hurried to revive the United States economy", which portray him as a proactive, decisive, and hands-on leader. *I* establishes rapport with the

audience and imbues the speeches with emotional intensity and commitment. Furthermore, the use of *my*, as in “*my* administration” or “*my* election,” reinforces ownership and positions Trump as the central figure behind national progress. However, this strategy also has rhetorical risks. Overuse of *I* can frame Trump as self-aggrandizing or overly individualistic, distancing him from collaborative governance.

Secondly, examples 14-26 show how the second-person pronoun *you* (and its variant) establishes inclusivity and creates a dialogue between Trump and his audience. By addressing the American people directly, e.g., “This moment is *your* moment” or “*You* will never be ignored again, Trump presents himself as an ally and advocates for the ordinary citizen. Using *you* personalizes the speech and invites listeners to feel seen and valued, effectively bridging the distance between speaker and audience. In some instances, *you* is used generically to refer to all Americans, while in others, it is directed explicitly at groups like Congress or viewers at home. This flexibility allows Trump to shift between a broad national appeal and targeted messaging, enhancing the rhetorical impact of his addresses. Moreover, the juxtaposition of *I* and *you* in several excerpts, such as “*I* will fight for *you*” or “*I* stand before *you* to share the results,” reinforces a narrative of leadership and service. Trump casts himself as the agent of action (*I*) working for the people (*you*), strengthening his appeal as a people-focused leader. This strategy fosters a sense of personal involvement and makes the speech feel more intimate, as if he is speaking directly to each listener.

Most notably, the way Trump includes and excludes some groups is something that this study revealed in examples 27-39. Trump also employs a rhetorical strategy to separate society into two camps: those aligned with his vision—such as his followers or so-called “true Americans”—and “those who challenge it, such as political opponents, the media, or foreign adversaries. This polarization method reinforces his leadership by strengthening ties with his supporters and portraying

his actions as essential for safeguarding the country against "outsider" threats. Using personal pronouns like "we," "our," and "us," Trump cultivates a feeling of unity, shared purpose, and collective action with his listeners. Sometimes, "we" indicates a specific group (e.g., the government, Congress), showing shared responsibility and avoiding self-glorification. He frequently uses "we" in a generic sense to foster a sense of shared identity. This inclusive language encourages the audience to see themselves as part of his political agenda. Statements such as "We will rebuild this nation" or "Our greatest days are ahead of us" are crafted to align the speaker with the people, promoting the idea of collective effort.

On the other hand, in excerpts 40-44, Trump uses the exclusive pronoun "they" to portray other groups as threats to the nation's unity or stability. This strategy undermines alternative viewpoints and strengthens his political stance by positioning his leadership as the more capable and patriotic choice. Trump uses "they" in an oppositional context to construct a negative image of out-groups such as political elites, foreign governments, and liberal states like California. In some cases, "they" is used neutrally, simply referencing others without strong evaluation, while in others, it is generic, obscuring gender or identity for rhetorical flexibility. The strategic use of "they" helps delineate the boundaries between Trump's in-group (ordinary Americans) and the out-group (elites or others), reinforcing ideological separation and blame. Trump's rhetoric often includes language that undermines his opponents by casting them as either incompetent or detrimental to the well-being of the nation. One prominent area where inclusion and exclusion are noticeable in Trump's rhetoric is his references to immigrants and minorities. Using personal pronouns that include or exclude allows for the examination of how these groups are portrayed, either as dangers to national stability or contributors to the American project.

Conclusion

The aim of this study to critically examine the use of deictic pronouns as a discourse strategy in Donald Trump's selected political speeches—his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2017, and his State of the Union Address to the 116th Congress on February 4, 2020—was achieved by discussing how the personal pronouns *I*, *you*, *we* and *they* (including its variants) are used in the selected speeches and also how they can identify the participants referred to in these speeches by using these pronouns. Guided by Levinson's (1983) pragmatic theory of Deixis, the study explores how personal pronouns "*I*," "you," "we," and "they"—and their variants—are strategically deployed by Trump as a strategic rhetorical tool to construct group identities, assign roles, convey ideologies, persuade audiences, and influence their perception. In his speeches, the shifting use of "*I*", "*you*", "*we*", and "*they*" reveal a dynamic interplay of inclusion and exclusion. While "*we*" foster unity and collective resolve, "*they*" help construct an external threat or internal enemy. "*I*" affirms personal leadership, while "*you*" empower and connect with the audience. Altogether, these deixis markers are central to the ideological framing of Trump's political discourse, reinforcing his populist stance, constructing in-groups and out-groups, and appealing to collective national sentiment. The results from this study do not just show how the pronouns indicate who the speaker identifies with; they possess the rhetorical ability to include and exclude the audience and distinguish between "self" and "other". However, they show that who the speaker refers to when using personal pronouns depends on the context. The pronouns appeared in the speeches except for the first-person singular *I*, which can only refer to "self" but cannot refer to an "other".

References

- Ajayi, A. B., & Kilani, C. D. (2024). A critical discourse analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural and Independence

- Day speeches in 2023. *Journal of Political Discourse Studies*, 15(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jpds.2024.01502>
- Allan, K. (2006). *Contemporary social and sociological theory: Visualising social worlds*. Pine Forge Press.
- Anderson, S.R, & Keenan E.,L., (1985) .Deixis. In Tage T. Shopen (ED.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description: Vol. 3. Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon* (pp.259-308). Cambridge University Press
- Ayeomoni, M.O. (2012). The Languages in Nigeria socio-political Domains: Features and Functions. *English Language Teaching*. Vol.5(10).
- Beard, A. (2000) *The Language of Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Bramley, N. (2001). Pronouns of Politics: The Use of Pronouns in the Construction of 'Self' and 'Other' in Political Interviews.
- Bühler, K. (1990). *Theory of language* (Original work published 1934). John Benjamins.
- Davidse, k. and Simion-Vandenbergan, A. *Introduction: The Realisation of Interpersonal Meaning, word,59:1-2,3-23, Doi:10.1080/00437956.2008.11432579.*
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1970). Functional diversity in language is seen from a consideration of modality and mood in English. *Foundations of Language*, 6(3), 322–361.
- Hakansson, J. (2012). The Use of Personal Pronouns in Political Speeches: A Comparative Study of the Pronominal Choices of Two American Presidents. *Linnaeus University: School of Language and Literature*.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam Webster Dictionaries [online] www.merriam-webster.com>dictionary>pronoun

- Muhammad Isa, S., & Haruna, H. H. (2023). Personal pronouns: A rhetorical strategy in political speeches. *DUJEL: Dutsin-Ma Journal of English and Literature*, 7(2), 274-288.
- Nwaeje, B.I. (2019). *Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2018 Nigerian Vice-Presidential Election Debate*. University of Nigeria Nsukka. Department of English and Literary Studies.
- Pennycook, A. (1994). The Politics of Pronouns. *ELT Journal*.
- Renkema, J. (2004). *Introduction to Discourse Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.
- Roger, R. (2004). *Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Romadlani, M. M. I. (2024). Personal pronouns in Biden's inaugural speech: A critical discourse perspective. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 24(1), 254-261. <https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v24i1.6330>
- Sholichah, A. (2008). A Discourse Analysis on the Deixis used in 'Indonesia this Morning' News Program of Metro TV Newsbite. *The State Islamic University of Malang, English Letter and Language Department*.
- White House. (2017, January 20). The inaugural Address [Press release]. Trump White House Archives. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>
- White House. (2020, February 4). Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union address [Press release]. Trump White House Archives. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-state-union-address-3/>
- Win, J. D. (2025). A comparative analysis of Donald Trump's 2025 inauguration speech through various political discourse methods. *Journal of Political Communication*, 12(1), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jpc.2025.01234>

- Wodak, R. and Meyer, R. (2001). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage Publications.
- Young, L. & Harrison, C. (2004). *Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis: Studies in Social Change*. London: Continuum.
- Yule, G (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.