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THE INTERPLAY OF “I” AND “WE”: POWER OR SOLIDARITY?

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the interplay between “I” and “we” in two inaugural speeches of the U.S. Presidents Joe Biden (2021) and Donald Trump (2025) to determine whether this combination conveys specific communicative intentions of speakers. While many previous studies have analyzed personal pronouns in isolation, the research gap remains concerning their interaction. Drawing on Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, the study adopted a qualitative approach supported by quantitative methods. The findings indicate that although both presidents presented similar sequences of these two pronouns, their intended meanings were distinct. Biden employed the interplay to construct an intimate presidential figure, whereas Trump used it to assert his authority. The findings also demonstrate that such linguistic elements, which seemed to be purely grammatical, performed subtle and powerful communicative functions.

Keywords: interplay, I, we, Joe Biden, Donald Trump

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SỰ PHỐI HỢP GIỮA “I” VÀ “WE”: QUYỀN LỰC HAY SỰ GẮN KẾT?

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này nhằm khám phá sự phối hợp giữa hai đại từ nhân xưng “I” và “we” trong hai bài diễn văn nhậm chức của Tổng thống Hoa Kỳ Joe Biden (2021) và Donald Trump (2025) để xác định xem sự kết hợp của chúng có thể biểu đạt những mục đích giao tiếp cụ thể của người nói hay không. Trong khi nhiều nghiên cứu trước đây tập trung phân tích chức năng của từng đại từ nhân xưng, khoảng trống vẫn tồn tại ở việc xem xét mối quan hệ qua lại giữa chúng trong diễn ngôn chính trị. Dựa trên khung phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán (CDA) của Fairclough, nghiên cứu lựa chọn đường hướng định tính với sự hỗ trợ của phương pháp định lượng. Kết quả cho thấy mặc dù cả hai tổng thống có sự sắp đặt vị trí giữa hai đại từ này tương đối giống nhau, ý đồ giao tiếp được tạo ra lại hoàn toàn khác biệt. Joe Biden dùng sự kết hợp “I-we” để xây dựng hình ảnh một tổng thống đề cao gắn kết và chia sẻ, trong khi Donald Trump sử dụng nó để khẳng định sức mạnh và quyền uy. Các phát hiện cho thấy những yếu tố ngôn ngữ tưởng chừng chỉ mang tính ngữ pháp thuần túy vẫn có thể thể hiện những ý đồ giao tiếp tinh tế.

Từ khóa: sự phối hợp, “I”, “we”, Joe Biden, Donald Trump

1. Introduction

In their theory of identity construction, Fairclough (2001) and Chilton (2004) state that political discourse constitutes a site where individual and collective identities are constructed through linguistic choices. Accordingly, politicians convey multiple communicative intentions, such as threat, promise, politeness, and persuasion. Speakers employ distinct devices, such as metaphor, repetition, wordplay, creativity, reference, and circumlocution, to achieve their purposes (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023; Almahasees & Mahmoud, 2022; Derki, 2022; Pham, 2017). Even linguistic elements that appear purely grammatical, such as personal pronouns, may carry unexpected pragmatic functions. Specifically, the pronoun “we” in the utterance, “*we are grateful to President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama*” (Trump, 2017), may either signal solidarity and unity with the public or delineate boundaries between the speakers’ group and others.

Political discourse, therefore, is not only a medium of communication but also a strategic instrument for shaping public perception, exercising power, and enhancing a sense of consensus between the speaker and the audience. Consequently, politicians must carefully select their linguistic devices to achieve their intended meanings.

The novelty of this study lies in analyzing the interplay of personal pronouns, specifically the interaction between “I” and “we” and their variants, rather than their use in isolation. It enables the researcher to examine whether their co-occurrence produces particular communicative intentions and, more precisely, whether such intentions construct power or solidarity or both.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach that considers language a form of social practice, which focuses on how power, ideology, and social inequality are represented, maintained, or challenged through discourse (Fairclough, 1989). In the field of CDA, three prominent researchers, Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, have developed three different theoretical approaches.

Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2010) lays the foundation for CDA with his three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, which includes description, interpretation, and explanation. Description focuses on analyzing specific linguistic features in discourse, such as vocabulary, syntax, and cohesion. Interpretation examines how discourse is produced and consumed in specific social contexts, e.g., an inaugural speech. Explanation analyzes the relationship between discourse and social structures; thus, it reveals how language is used to enact power, construct leadership identity, and manipulate the audience's psychology (Fairclough, 2010).

Van Dijk (1993) develops a CDA approach that integrates linguistics, cognitive psychology, and sociology. He emphasizes that discourse is not simply text but also a cognitive process in which the audience construct mental models to comprehend and respond to information. Van Dijk's analysis focuses on how discourse reproduces power and social inequality through the manipulation of the audience's cognition, particularly in areas such as mass media and discriminatory discourse (Van Dijk, 1993).

Wodak (2001) adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which emphasizes the interconnection between discourse and its historical-social context. She argues that discourse is a series of continuous linguistic acts that are recontextualized over time and space. Wodak's method is often applied in comparative discourse studies across periods and in analyses of national identity or populist political discourse (Wodak, 2001).

Although all three approaches offer their own academic value, this study adopts Fairclough's model as the main theoretical framework for its efficiency, depth, and suitability for the research aim, i.e., exploring whether the interplay between "I" and "we" confirms the presidential authority or constructs the rapport between the presidents and their citizens. Furthermore, its capability for multi-level analysis, from the linguistic to social levels, allows the researcher to effectively answer the two research questions in a logical order. Specifically, the first dimension, i.e., textual analysis, enables the researcher to investigate how these linguistic choices were employed in each speech. Accordingly, their occurrences are identified, which answers the first research question and contributes to the second.

Subsequently, the researcher interprets these choices based on the proposed pragmatic functions and the topics in the second dimension, thereby partially addressing the second research question, which regards the pragmatic functions of the interplays. In the final dimension, she explains such linguistic choices based on larger sociocultural contexts, which completes the answer to the last research question.

2.2. Power

Despite the distinct perspectives, the scholars agree that "power" in political discourse is not simply the ability to make decisions or control behavior (Brown & Gilman, 1960), but it is the capability to frame the public perceptions through discourse. Accordingly, political actors must strategically select the use of language, for example, "I" to assert leadership or "we" to

create a sense of consensus. The shifts between pronominal choices, such as from “I” to “we” and vice versa, are able to reconstruct the distribution of responsibility and power (Kazazi, 2025; McHale, 2022; Pham & Ngo, 2023).

2.3. *Solidarity*

In contrast, “solidarity” is understood as a relationship that relies on the similarity of those who “attended the same school or have the same parents or practice the same profession” (Brown & Gilman, 1960). More simply, it is a reciprocal relationship in which individuals are equal and collaborative toward the same goals (Fajar, 2019; Wilk & Molek-Kozakowska, 2024). Accordingly, the linguistic choices, particularly personal pronouns, remain crucial communicative strategies for politicians. For instance, national leaders adopt the pronoun “we” to construct an intimate and cooperative figure. The shifts between “I” and “we” not only signal variations in the agency distribution but also affect the public perceptions of interpersonal alignment, which play a decisive role in establishing the public consensus on political policies.

2.4. *“Interplay”*

In academic dictionaries, “interplay” is defined as “*the way in which two or more things have an effect on each other*”, thereby highlighting the reciprocal and co-constructive relationship among elements (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, n.d.).

In this study, the term “interplay” is employed to describe the dynamic interaction between two personal pronouns, “I” and “we” and their variants in political discourse. In this regard, “interplay” can be considered a form of “combination” or “interaction”; structurally, it is conceptualized as a “dyad”, e.g., “*My fellow Americans, we have to be different than this*” (Biden, 2021).

2.5. *Previous Studies and Research Gap(s)*

It is argued that previous studies on personal pronouns in political discourse have been diverse in both approaches and research aims. First and foremost, in their typical work, Brown and Gilman (1960) signal the significance of linguistic choices, i.e., personal pronouns, in reflecting political and social stances. This perspective is later supported by Maitland and Wilson (1987) in their study.

Subsequently, scholars such as De Fina (1995), Bramley (2001), and Karapetjana (2011) further affirm the role of personal pronouns in conveying political goals and constructing distinct political identities. These linguistic choices may even blur the speaker’s responsibilities when the personal pronoun “you” is used in the speech.

Recent studies have explored the power of pronouns in persuasion. For instance, personal pronouns “we” and “I” are employed to establish solidarity and evoke empathy from the audience (Lodhi et al., 2018) and present the speaker’s position (Krawrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018). The pronoun shifts may even signal changes in the speaker’s roles in relation to the audience (Pham & Ngo, 2023).

Noteworthy, different authors have distinct findings in terms of power and solidarity. For example, while Ali and Behnam (2020) argue that personal pronouns are basically used to connect people, Nguyen (2021) points to political allies and opponents when referring to “us” and “them”. Addae et al. (2023) indicate that personal pronouns combined with other linguistic choices are able to obscure ideologies.

In short, despite their diverse perspectives on personal pronouns, previous studies show the persuasive role of such linguistic choices in political discourse. However, most of the existing research has explored each of them individually; there are few studies on the interplay of personal pronouns in signaling pragmatic meanings; therefore, they are research gaps that need to be further examined.

2.6. Pragmatic Functions of “I” in Political Discourse

Based on previous studies on the first singular personal pronoun (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Pennycook, 1994; Wilson, 1990), this study proposes a pragmatic framework for this pronoun in political discourse as below.

Figure 1

A Proposed Functional Framework of “I” and Its Variants in Political Discourse



2.7. Pragmatic Functions of “We” in Political Discourse

Drawing on previous studies on the first plural personal pronoun (Fairclough, 1989; Pennycook, 1994; Van Dijk, 2015; Wilson, 1990), this study proposes a pragmatic framework for this pronoun in political discourse as below.

Figure 2

A Proposed Functional Framework of “We” and Its Variants in Political Discourse



3. Aims, Research Objectives and Research Questions

3.1. Aim(s) of the Study

The study aims to explore whether the interplay between the first singular personal pronoun (“I”) and the first plural personal pronoun (“we”) and their variants asserts presidential power or establishes the connection between the speaker (i.e., the president) and the listener(s) (i.e., the citizen(s)).

3.2. Research Objectives

To achieve this overarching aim, the following objectives are formulated:

- 1. To identify the occurrences of the “I-we” dyad in the selected speeches*
- 2. To identify the pragmatic functions of these interplays*

3.3. Research Questions

To fulfill these objectives, the following two questions are proposed in this research:

- 1. How many occurrences of the interplay between “I” and “we” and their variants are found in the two selected speeches?*
- 2. What are the pragmatic functions of these interplays?*

4. Scope of the Study

To begin with, this study consists of two inaugural speeches of the U.S. Presidents Joe Biden (2021) and Donald Trump (2025). Furthermore, the research does not aim to investigate every possible pragmatic function of the interplay between “I” and “we”; rather, it focuses on their pragmatic functions in terms of power and solidarity.

5. Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach supported by quantitative methods, as they were considered appropriate for addressing the two research questions. Specifically, the required data for answering the research questions, which included: (1) the occurrences of the interplay of “I-we” and their variants in the selected speeches; and (2) their pragmatic functions, were basically qualitative in nature, which needed to be described, interpreted, and explained by the researcher.

The numerical data were employed to illustrate and substantiate the qualitative findings rather than adopted for statistical hypothesis testing. In other words, the quantitative results provided only an overview of the distribution of the interplay between these two personal pronouns. Their pragmatic functions revealed themselves only at the stages of interpretation and explanation, through the lens of CDA.

Accordingly, Fairclough’s CDA was selected as the theoretical and analytical framework for this research since it aligned with the qualitative approach and the overarching aim of the study; thus, it enabled the researcher to effectively address the two research questions.

6.2. Data Collection Procedure

6.2.1. Background Information

The study analyzes two inaugural speeches of the U.S. Presidents, specifically the discourse of Biden (2021) and Trump (2025). This choice aims to ensure the modernity of the study. The speeches have reflected the contemporary political language style, which is closely aligned with the current language use; thus, it offers high applicability in diverse aspects of real-life communication and persuades critics more efficiently. Furthermore, each period consisted of crucial historical, political, and social fluctuations that may shape the linguistic choices for each presidential term.

Specifically, Biden’s speech (2021) was delivered during a series of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a controversial election, and the Capitol riot. Similarly, Trump’s

inauguration (2025) had to face a phase of political instability, the president's second impeachment, and two failed assassination attempts against Trump during the campaign. These sharp divisions forced the two Presidents to deliberately select their linguistic choices to appeal to the public.

6.2.2. Data Collection Procedure

After selecting reputable sources for collecting the two inaugural speeches, which were publicly available in online archives and had been transcribed, the researcher verified the transcripts' reliability and validity from the multiple sources, including the official White House releases and reputable news outlets. Subsequently, she employed the search tool (Ctrl + F) in Microsoft Word to identify all the pronoun "I" and its variants ("me", "my", "mine", "myself"), and the pronoun "we" and its variants ("us", "our", "ours", "ourselves") in each address. She continued to count the occurrences of these two personal pronouns and their variants when they co-occurred and identified the topics in which they appeared based on recurring keywords. The scope of each occurrence was defined as either in the same utterance, operationalized as a complete sentence or independent clause, e.g., "**My** fellow Americans, **we** have to be different than this" (Biden, 2021), or across adjacent utterances within the same paragraph, e.g., "Today, **I** will sign a series of historic executive orders. With these actions, **we** will begin the complete restoration of America" (Trump, 2025).

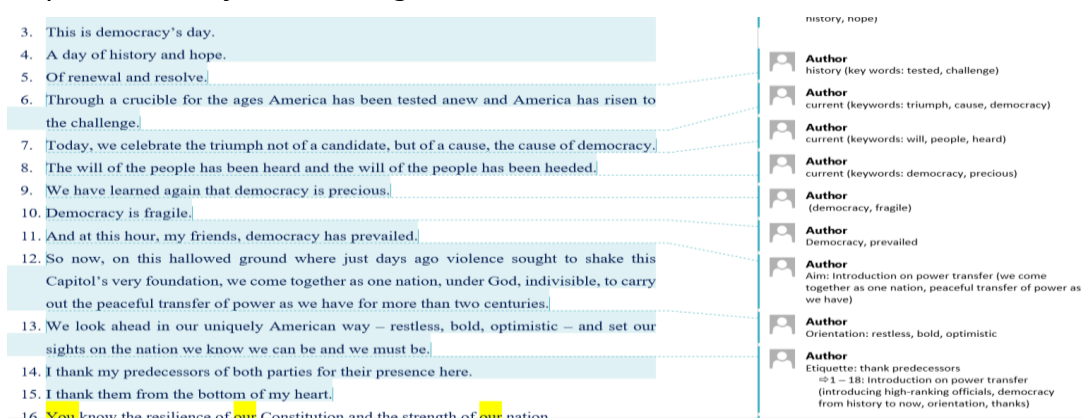
Regarding the coding scheme, the combination of deductive and inductive codes was adopted. The procedure was conducted as follows.

Deductive code

Initially, the aims and research questions were the baseline for the researcher to establish the codes and apply them to her data set. The purpose of this process was to focus and avoid distractions. As mentioned previously, the study aims to identify whether the interplay between "I" and "we" conveyed pragmatic intentions of the Presidents, specifically whether they were power or solidarity or even both. Thus, "power" and "solidarity" were two initial codes the researcher established at this stage.

Inductive code

Subsequently, the inductive coding process was conducted in three steps: (1) line-by-line reading: the researcher carefully examined each line of both speeches; (2) marker identification: segmentation was guided by criteria, including 2.1. keywords, 2.2. core ideas, and 2.3. repetitions; and (3) topic formation: based on the identified markers, she grouped them into subtopics and then into broader topics. These topics functioned as inductive codes, which were derived directly from the data. Subsequently, the inductive codes were mapped onto the deductive categories, i.e., power and solidarity, in the interpretation and explanation dimensions to determine whether the presidents' pragmatic intentions reflected authority or unity, or both.

Figure 3*Illustration for the Line-By-Line Coding*

Accordingly, Biden's speech (2021) was segmented into four main topics with the following keywords (see Appendix for further information).

Figure 4*Topic Segmentation in Biden's Speech (2021)*

Main topic/code	Sub-topic	Key words	Lines
Introduction on the transfer of power	_introduction	_Vice President, Leader	1 - 18
	_democracy from history to now	_democracy, history, challenge, triumph, will, people	
	_orientation	_restless, bold, optimistic	
Orientation to unity		American story, all of us, we, more perfect, Union	19 - 23
Call for Unity	_challenges	_Much, challenging, virus, lost, closed, political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism	24 - 36 50 - 52
	_call for unity	_unity, uniting, our (people, nation)	37 - 49
	_vision of unity	_we can, if, when	53 - 67
			132 - 145
			157 - 181
Commitments & action plans		oath, security, liberty, protect the nation, end, uncivil war	146 - 156
			182 - 208

Figure 5*Topic Segmentation in Trump's Speech (2025)*

Main topic/code	Sub-topic	Key words	Lines
Restoration of America's greatness	_restoration of America's greatness	golden age, right now, flourish	1 - 4, 33
	_challenges from previous administration	crisis of trust, corrupt, broken, disrepair, no longer, basic services	5 - 7
	_changes	change, decline, over, liberties/freedom, glorious destiny, no longer, denied, restore, tested, challenged, reclaim, not easy, assassin, saved by God, America great again	8 - 14

_action plans	<i>I will, sign, we will, begin, declare, end, send, direct, restore</i>	15 - 26
_call for action	<i>act, courage, liberate, victory, success, not be deterred, together, disease, children, safe, healthy, wealth, territory, build, stars</i>	27, 29, 30
_call for unity	<i>together, nothing, cannot, no dream</i>	28, 30
_vision	<i>great again, we will</i>	31, 32

The entire coding process was manually reviewed at least twice to ensure internal consistency and reliability.

6.3. Data Analysis and Analytical Framework

As mentioned earlier, Fairclough's CDA was adopted as the analytical framework for the study. However, the textual analysis at the first dimension was adapted to ensure analytical focus and depth in addressing the research questions. Instead of mechanically applying all ten guiding questions proposed by Fairclough, which covered a wide range of linguistic phenomena, the study conducted a targeted descriptive analysis. Specifically, in the textual analysis dimension, after data collection, the researcher described in detail the occurrences of "I-we" dyads and topics in which they appeared. It enabled her to answer the first two research questions and established the foundation for the subsequent research question.

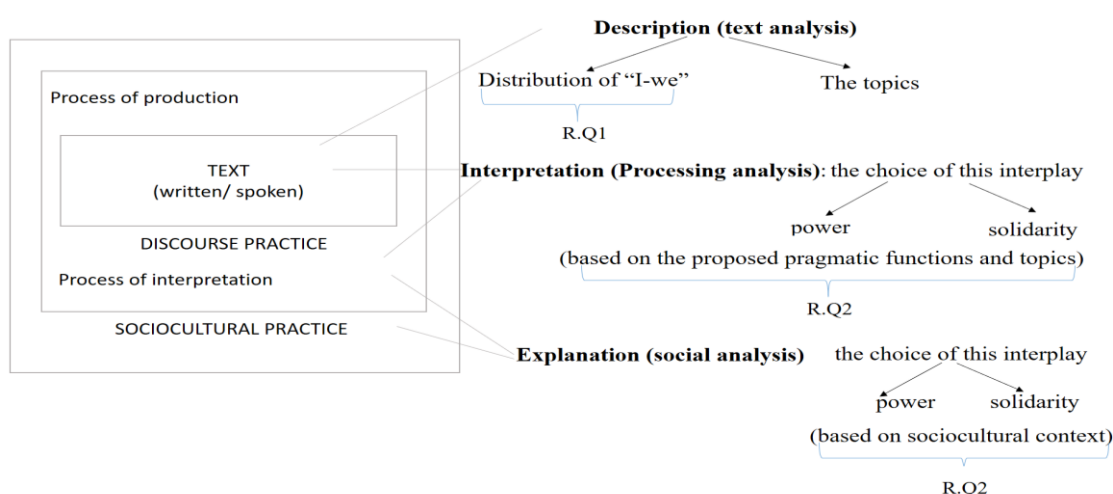
In the discursive analysis dimension, she further interpreted the presidents' communicative intentions when employing the interplay between "I" and "we" in these topics and the reasons why this particular combination was deliberately chosen rather than others. In other words, she determined the conveyed pragmatic meanings to see whether the speakers aimed to assert their power or to construct a close relationship with the people, thereby contributing to the third research question.

In the social analysis dimension, the researcher explained why the presidents adopted these communicative purposes based on larger sociocultural contexts, completing the answer to the last research question.

The analytical framework of the current study is illustrated below.

Figure 6

Analytical Framework of the Current Study (Adapted from Fairclough (1992))



7. Findings and Discussion

7.1. The Occurrence of the “I-We” Dyads in the Selected Speech

Table 1

The “I-We” Dyads in Biden’s Inaugural Speech (2021)

Personal pronouns	Personal pronouns	Examples	Paragraph	Topic
I/my/me/ myself	We/us/our/ ourselves	1. “As does President Carter, who I spoke to last night but who cannot be with us today, but whom we salute for his lifetime of service.”	17	Power transfer
		2. “My fellow Americans, we have to be different than this.”	89	Call for Unity
		3. “To all those who did not support us, let me say this: Hear me out as we move forward. Take a measure of me and my heart.”	107	Call for Unity
		4. “My fellow Americans, in the work ahead of us, we will need each other.”	139	Call for Unity
		5. “I believe we must, and I believe we will.”	174	Call for unity
		6. “I will defend our democracy.”	186	Commitments & action plans

Table 1 illustrates the number of occurrences of the combination “I” and “we” in Biden’s 2021 inaugural speech. The table shows that despite appearing only six times, this dyad was scattered in distinct topics, including an introduction on the transfer of power, a call for unity, and commitments and action plans.

Table 2

The “I-We” Dyads in Trump’s Inaugural Speech (2025)

Personal pronouns	Personal pronouns	Examples	Paragraph	Topic
I/my/me/ myself	We/us/our/ ourselves	1. “During every single day of the Trump administration, I will, very simply, put America first. Our sovereignty will be reclaimed.”	3	Restoration of America’s Greatness
		2. “I return to the presidency confident and optimistic that we are at the start of a thrilling new era of national success.”	4	Restoration of America’s Greatness
		3. “Over the past eight years, I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our 250-year history”	10	Changes
		4. “Today, I will sign a series of historic executive orders. With these actions, we will begin the complete restoration of America.”	16	Action plans

5. "I will declare a national emergency at our southern border."		
6. "We will reinstate my remain in Mexico policy."		
7. "And I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country."		
8, 9. "Under the orders I sign today we will ... I will direct our government to use the full."		
10, 11. "As commander in chief, I have no higher responsibility than to defend our country from ... what I am going to do. We will do it."	17	Action plans
12. "And that is why today I will also declare a national energy emergency. We will drill, baby, drill."		
13, 14. "Something I know something about. We will not allow that to happen... Under my leadership, we will restore fair."	22	Action plans
15. "This week, I will also end the government policy ... We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit based."	23	Action plans
16. "And I will sign an order to stop our warriors from ..."		
17. "And, perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into. My proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker and unifier. That's what I want to be."	24	Action plans
18. "I mean, think of this, ... We have been treated very badly from this foolish gift that should have never been made."	26	Action plans

Table 2 presents the occurrences of the same combination in Trump's 2025 inaugural speech. In general, Trump employed this dyad far more frequently than Biden, with a total of 18 instances, which was three times the number used by Biden. These occurrences also fell into different topics, consisting of the restoration of American greatness, changes, and action plans. Nevertheless, this dyad was not as dispersed as Biden's; rather, Trump's uses appeared basically from paragraphs 16 to 26.

Overall, the two tables clearly indicate that even though the two Presidents deployed this interplay in distinct topics and distribution, the sequential arrangement of the dyad was quite consistent in both selected speeches. In most instances, the first singular personal pronoun preceded the first plural. This raises a crucial question of whether the two Presidents shared pragmatic intentions, i.e., asserting authority or enhancing solidarity. The following section provides a more detailed interpretation of this issue.

7.2. The Pragmatic Functions of the Interplay Between “I” and “We”

In this dimension, the researcher focuses on the analysis of linguistic choices, specifically the interplay between “I” and “we” and their variants in the two selected speeches. This interplay seems to be one of Biden’s preferred rhetorical strategies, as it appeared six times in his address.

To begin with, Biden skillfully introduced President Carter, “*As does President Carter, who **I** spoke to last night but who cannot be with us today, but whom **we** salute for his lifetime of service*”. On the surface, it seems to be a simple personal narrative which presents the intimacy between the speaker, i.e., the president, and the listeners, i.e., the people. However, the narrative shows a deeper purpose. By mentioning a private conversation with a former president, Biden implicitly highlighted his own position, as such interactions were exclusive to those who were in the presidency, thereby constructing Biden’s legitimacy and authority. Crucially, he invited the entire nation to participate in honoring the old president, i.e., Carter. In other words, he shifted his personal manner into a national manner and therefore positioned himself as the one who guided that ritual.

Subsequently, in his appeals for national unity, Biden declared that, “***My** fellow Americans, **we** have to be different than this*” and “***My** fellow Americans, in the work ahead of **us**, **we** will need each other*”. In the first clause, he claimed the American people as his ownership “***my** fellow Americans*”. Nevertheless, in the second clause, he immediately assimilated himself with them to be “we”. This move blurred the boundaries between the leader and the citizens. It implicitly suggested that the challenges ahead were not only his to confront but also a shared concern of the whole nation. Rather than positioning himself outside the group, he stepped into the shared circle of national responsibility with his people.

In addition, the interplay of these two pronouns once again enabled Biden to subtly convey his personal sentiments to create a sense of warmth and closeness. This statement would be considerably weaker if he only uttered, “***We** must and **we** will*” without mentioning “I believe”. The two repetitions of “I believe” appeared to be a strong assertion of the leader’s personal conviction. He was using his ethos and optimism to ignite the collective hope. Immediately after that, Biden reaffirmed that the source of strength is not only from him individually but also from others in collective solidarity, “***I** believe **we** must and **I** believe **we** will*” and “*To all those who did not support **us**, let **me** say this: Hear **me** out as **we** move forward. Take a measure of **me** and **my** heart*” to protect “***our** democracy*”.

Subsequently, he asserted, “***I** will defend **our** democracy*”. This statement was the personal oath, an unbreakable commitment from a commander in chief, demonstrating the highest level of responsibility. Crucially, he uttered “***our***” democracy instead of “***my***” democracy. This pronoun “our” immediately transformed the “democracy” into a shared property and sacred heritage held by all citizens. In other words, Biden constructed an image of a leader who listened, empathized, and unified.

The subsequent President, Trump (2025), employed 18 instances of this “I-we” interplay. Unlike Biden, Trump (2025)’s use of “I” projected that America’s sovereignty would inevitably be restored once he himself placed America first. Right from the beginning, he confirmed that “*During every single day of the Trump administration, **I** will, very simply, put America first. **Our** sovereignty will be reclaimed*”. It seems that the collective achievements were realized thanks to his actions. Trump, thereby, was constructing an image of an authoritative President, who believed in his individual strength.

This image was further illustrated in the following statements (see Table 7.2). In many

instances, Trump even asserted that collective policies had to be legitimated through his personal strength, “**We** will reinstate **my** remain in Mexico policy”. This was one of the most typical illustrations. The agent performing the action was “we”, i.e., the government, but the policy itself was personalized as “my policy”. It means that the president considered “we” only as a device that executed what he desired. Even the collective action of restoring justice was framed “under my leadership”. In other words, “we” would have been either incapable or insufficiently empowered to perform such actions without his leadership. The strength of the collective was thus entirely dependent on his individual presence.

Only after asserting his central and indispensable role did he transition to “**We** will do it”. “We” here functioned as a group who realized the directives of a commander who had predetermined the plans and goals.

In short, unlike Biden’s strategy of securing collective consensus, the interplay between “I” and “we” used by Trump constructed a leadership model that was personalized, centralized, and power-oriented. This raises another question regarding the underlying rationale. We now turn to the subsequent dimension.

In the final dimension, the paper offers an explanatory analysis at the level of social practice. First and foremost, it is necessary to outline the broader sociocultural contexts that may influence the linguistic choices of the two Presidents.

The year 2020 witnessed a period in which the United States had to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, with fatalities reaching an alarming number. The health care crisis and economic downturn shaped a discursive practice in which Biden’s inaugural speech was expected to fulfil multiple functions, such as the restoration of public trust and national unity. Thus, the interplay between “I” and “we” was adopted to construct a sense of shared identity and collaboration.

The pronoun “we” not only naturalized his political goals into national aspirations but also implicitly positioned those who did not belong to this “we” as standing outside the boundaries of national solidarity. Nevertheless, in order to reinforce the effectiveness of such appeals, the speaker, i.e., the president, needed to establish his personal legitimacy by complementing the use of the pronoun “I”. His statement, “**I** will defend **our** democracy”, may appear simple on the surface but conveys a profound degree of personal commitment. This pronoun “I” was an assertion of commitment rather than an assertion of power. In other words, he positioned himself as an assistant of the citizens instead of an imposing leader. This linguistic choice was also a clear demonstration of Democracy’s ideology, which considered the government as an active and essential device to address social issues.

Regarding Trump (2025), the United States entered a period of profound instabilities; for instance, Trump faced the second impeachment, was convicted on 34 felony counts related to the “hush money”, and had two failed assassination attempts (Samuels, 2025). The context necessitated that Trump employ specific strategies in his inaugural speech in order to persuade the people to listen to him, trust him and believe in his promise to “make America great again”. This was presented clearly through his interplay of “I-we”.

Typically, it can be observed in Trump’s series of statements in which he introduced policy directions using the combination “I will”, strategically placed before another combination “we will”. The deliberate sequencing not only turned his personal will into the collective will but also positioned “I” as the decision maker, whereas “we” were those who either executed or benefited from these actions, thereby constructing the more powerful authority of the president (“I”) than the government (“we”) when “I” preceded “we”. It means that Trump positioned himself not only as a national leader but also as the singular figure

possessing the power to initiate change.

In short, the linguistic choices of the presidents were diverse; they were employed to convey distinct communicative and political intentions. It was the intimate “I” of Biden (2021), which aligned with Lodhi et al.’s findings (2018). It also was the powerful “I” of Trump (2025), which was consistent with the theory of Brown and Gilman (1960) and findings of Maitland and Wilson (1987). However, the previous studies only presented the individual use of personal pronouns instead of their interplay, specifically the combination of “I” and “we”.

Furthermore, the study also reflected the linguistic choices, i.e., the personal pronouns, whether used individually or reciprocally, were far from arbitrary or grammatical. Instead, they played crucial pragmatic functions in appealing and persuading the audience.

8. Conclusion

The study has elucidated the interplay between the personal pronouns “I” and “we” in the two inaugural speeches of Biden (2021) and Trump (2025) and suggested that their combination could convey the distinct communicative purposes of each political actor. Unlike most of the previous studies examining the functions of each personal pronoun in isolation, this study approached them as a whole, contributing to bridging the research gaps in political discourse analysis.

Theoretically, the paper confirmed that the interplay of personal pronouns was not an arbitrary choice. They were deliberate linguistic devices which enabled the Presidents to convey their pragmatic functions. This dynamic interaction between these linguistic choices reveals how power was not statically asserted but discursively negotiated. Such findings contribute to critical discourse analysis by offering a more complex understanding of how such linguistic features participate in social practice.

Practically, the study has made valuable contributions to English language teaching, such as Critical discourse analysis, Pragmatics and Public speaking. Accordingly, the instructors may apply the pragmatic effects of personal pronouns and modal verbs in isolation and combination to guide learners appropriately.

Drawing on the analytical framework of Fairclough’s CDA and a qualitative approach supported by quantitative data, the findings indicate that despite the convergence on arranging the positions of “I” and “we”, the communicative intentions of the selected Presidents differed substantially. Biden employed the “I-we” dyad to construct a presidential image of enhancing solidarity. In contrast, Trump adopted this interplay to reinforce a powerful and decisive presidential figure.

These findings emphasize that even seemingly purely grammatical linguistic elements were deployed as a device of authority and unity in political discourse. It suggests new directions for future studies to focus more on the interplay of linguistic choices in different communicative contexts.

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APPENDIX

Selected U.S. Presidential Inaugural Speeches

