# PERSON DEIXIS IN USA PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

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APA Citation: Putri, N.A. & Kurniawan, E. (2015). Person deixis in USA presidential campaign speeches. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 3(2), 190-200

Received: 10-08-2014 Accepted: 03-02-2015 Published: 01-06-2015

Abstract: This study investigates the use of person deixis in presidential campaign speeches. This study is important because the use of person deixis in political speeches has been proved by many studies to give significant effects to the audience. The study largely employs a descriptive qualitative method. However, it also employs a simple quantitative method in calculating the number of personal pronouns used in the speeches and their percentages. The data for the study were collected from the transcriptions of six presidential campaign speeches of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the campaign rally in various places across the United States of America in July, September, and November 2012. The results of this study show that the presidential candidates make the best use of pronouns as a way to promote themselves and to attack their opponents. The results also suggest that the use of pronouns in the speeches enables the candidates to construct positive identity and reality, which are favorable to them and make them appear more eligible for the position.

Keywords: person deixis, presidential campaign speeches, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney

### **INTRODUCTION**

During the election year in a country, especially during the time to elect a new president of the country, the candidates for the presidential election will try to campaign in order to introduce as well as to promote themselves to the public. Many ways can be used to do political or election campaign, one of them is through political campaign speeches. Political campaign speeches can be an effective tool to achieve particular goals in an election. In addition, political campaign speeches can also be a way for bridging the gap between the speaker, or in this case the presidential candidates,

and the audience or the electorate. Furthermore, political campaign speeches can also be used to create particular effects, shared feelings, or connections between the speaker and the audience.

The main aim of political campaign speeches is to persuade people to vote for a particular party or a presidential candidate (Beard, 2000, p. 57). To achieve this goal, a politician or a presidential candidate usually tries to create a positive self-image by presenting himself positively and his opponents negatively (Allen, 2007, p. 2). Besides, the way the politician or the candidate refers to the audience can also be a very effective tool

to achieve this goal (Pearce, 2001, cited in Allen, 2007, p. 2). Related to this, a variety of ways can be used by the politician in order to present his identities by referring to himself, his opponents, and his audience. One of the ways is by carefully choosing person deixis that the politician or the candidate will use in their political campaign speeches.

In political campaign speeches, person deixis plays a very important role. It can be used to represent the speaker's identity through the way the speaker refers to himself, his opponent, and his audience. Furthermore, person deixis can also be used to assign any positive aspect to oneself and negative aspect to the other which results in "positive self-presentation" or "the polarization of *us* versus *them*" (Van Dijk, 1995). Therefore, person deixis can be a significant part of the speech and can have persuasive as well as strategic political functions.

Among the researchers who investigated the use of person deixis in political discourse are Allen (2007), Brozin (2010), Gocheco (2012), Inigo-Mora (2013), and Jarjeis (2006). They have found that politicians manipulate their use of person deixis or pronominal choice based on the context and the topic of their speeches, as well as their intentions or goals that they want to achieve through their speeches. The politicians manipulate the use of pronouns to create good effects on the audience, such as to highlight their achievements, to shorten the distance with the audience, to deny or distance themselves from the responsibility for particular political action, and to encourage solidarity.

In understanding utterances, it is important to see the relationship between the language used and the context in which the utterances occur. By

looking at the language used and the context in which utterances occur, people can understand the meaning of a particular utterance when they are communicating with each other. One of the examples which reflects the relationship between language and context is through the phenomenon of deixis. The term 'deixis' comes from the Greek word *deiktikos* which means 'pointing' or 'indicating'. Deixis is one of the most basic things that people do with their utterances (Yule, 1996).

Richards & Schmidt (2002) defines deixis as a term for a word or phrase that enables language users to 'point', refer or relate their utterance to a particular time, place, or person (p. 147). In the same vein, Finnegan (1992) defines deixis as "the marking of the orientation or position of objects and events with respect to certain contextual points of reference" (p. 140). According to those definitions, deixis may be understood as any linguistic form that enables language users to point, refer, relate, or anchor their utterances to a particular time, place, or person.

According to Grundy (2008), there are three fundamental criteria of deixis that are an essential part of every context of people experience: person, place, and time deixis. Person deixis may be understood as any linguistic forms that can be used to identify the participants or other persons involved or mentioned in an interactive situation (Strazny, 2005, p. 260). Place deixis indicates the location of an entity referred to in an utterance relative to a particular point of reference in the context in which that utterance occurs. Time deixis may be understood as "the orientation or position of actions and events in time" (Finnegan, 1992, p. 144). The main focus of this study is person deixis. Therefore, person deixis will be further elaborated in the following section.

Person deixis is most commonly conveyed through personal pronoun. The most basic distinction in person deixis involves the distinction between the speaker, known as the first person (*I*), the addressee, known as the second person (you), and other important participants in the speech situation, neither the speaker nor the hearer, known as the third person (*he, she, it, they*) (Cruse, 2000; Yule, 1996). Pronouns that refer to the speaker or to a group of people that includes the speaker, for example *I* and *we*, are called first person pronoun. Meanwhile, pronouns that refer to the addressee or to a group of people that includes the addressee, for example you, are called second person pronoun. Pronouns which refer to an entity other than the speaker and the addressee, for example pronoun he, she, it, and they, are called third person pronoun.

First person plural pronoun which is represented by pronoun we often times has vague meaning. That's why, most researchers and linguists made a distinction between exclusive we and inclusive we (see O'Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2011; Yule, 1996). Exclusive we is a first person pronoun which does not include the person being spoken or written to (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 190). In contrast, inclusive we is used to refer to the first person plural pronoun

which includes the persons who are being addressed (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 190).

The present study aims to investigate the use of person deixis in the presidential campaign speeches of two presidential candidates for 2012 U.S. presidential election: Barack Obama and Mitt Romney.

### **METHOD**

The study employs a descriptive qualitative method because the nature of this study is to unearth how person deixis is used in presidential campaign speeches and what indications or effects it has on the audience. However, this study also incorporates a simple quantitative method to calculate the number of each type of person deixis and its percentages.

The data for the study were collected from the transcription of six presidential campaign speeches of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney during the campaign rally in various places across the United States of America in July, September, and November 2012. There are three speeches for each candidate. The full texts or the transcriptions of the speeches were downloaded from the website of *The American Presidency Project*, <a href="http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu">http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu</a>. Table 1 below shows the list of the speeches which were investigated in this study:

Table 1
The List of the Speeches

Presidential candidate	Title of the speech	Date	Label
Barack	Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Sandusky, Ohio	July 5, 2012	Speech 1a
Obama	Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Boulder, Colorado	September 2, 2012	Speech 2a
	Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Lima, Ohio	November 2, 2012	Speech 3a
Mitt	Remarks at the NAACP Convention in Houston Texas	July 11, 2012	Speech 1b
Romney	Remarks to the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce	September 17,	Speech 2b
	33 <sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention in Los Angeles, California	2012	
	Remarks in West Allis, Wisconsin: "Real Change From Day	November 2, 2012	Speech 3b
	One"		

Obama and Romney did their campaign rally simultaneously in July until November 2012. Those three speeches are chosen as the samples in this study representing the beginning, middle, and the end of the campaign rally. Those three speeches chosen as the samples are the first speeches which were delivered in each month during the campaign rally.

The data are in the form of person deixis found in the speeches conveyed through the use of pronouns referring to Obama, Romney, and their respective parties. Pronouns that were analyzed in this study are only pronouns indicating

the subject of a sentence. The collected data are then calculated using some elements of quantitative methodology. The calculation includes the numbers of each person deixis and its percentages. Then, each occurrence of person deixis is analyzed in order to see the indications behind its use by the presidential candidates.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Person deixis in Obama's speeches

Table 2 below shows the frequency and the percentage of each type of person deixis found in Obama's presidential campaign speeches.

Table 2. The frequency and percentage of each type of person deixis found in Obama's speeches

Pronoun	Speech 1	Speech 2	Speech 3	TOTAL
I	97 (55.75%)	66 (35.3%)	70 (44.3%)	233
we	73 (41.95%)	89 (47.6%)	77 (48.7%)	239
they	4 (2.3%)	20 (10.7%)	5 (3.2%)	29
he	0	12 (6.4%)	6 (3.8%)	18
TOTAL	174 (100%)	187 (100%)	158 (100%)	519

From the table, it is shown that Obama mostly uses pronoun we in his speeches even though the frequency of the use of pronoun we is just slightly higher from the frequency of the use of pronoun I. Based on this fact, it may be inferred that Obama uses pronoun I and we in a quite balanced way. Obama uses pronoun *I* and *we* to refer to himself, his family, his party, his campaign team, his administration during his first term as the president of the United States of America, the audience, and the whole nation of the United States of America. On the other hand, Obama uses pronoun they and he to refer to his opponent, Mitt Romney, and his party.

Pronoun *I* mostly collocates with the verb *want* in Obama's speeches. In general, Obama uses pronoun *I* to show his desires to make the country better as the presidential candidate in the election. Obama tries to persuade the audience or

the public that he is eligible to be the president for the second term by showing his sincerity which is implied in the statement of his desires. Here are some examples of the use of pronoun *I* that indicates such meaning.

- 1. It's the reason that I'm running again for President, because I want to keep on fighting for families all across
  America .... (Speech 1a, line 67-69)
- 2. I'm running because I want to make sure that every child gets a high-quality education, and that means I want to hire new teachers in our classrooms, especially in math and science. (Speech 1a, line 124-125)
- 3. And **I** want to give 2 million more people the opportunity to get trained at a community college for jobs .... (Speech 1a, line 125-127)
- 4. And I want to make college more affordable for every young person .... (Speech 1a, line 127-129)

- 5. That's why **I** want to cut the growth of tuition in half over the next 10 years. (Speech 3a, line 125)
- 6. That's why **I** want to recruit 100,000 math and science teachers so our kids don't fall behind the rest of the world. (Speech 3a, line 125-126)
- 7. I want to train 2 million Americans at our community colleges with the skills that businesses are looking for right now. (Speech 3a, line 126-128)

Meanwhile, the domination of the use of pronoun we shows that Obama uses pronoun we with either exclusive or inclusive sense. Obama uses exclusive we, which refers to himself and his administration during his first term as the president of the United States of America, in order to show that he and his administration have done the good deeds in the last four years. By employing exclusive we, Obama wants to highlight his achievements in his first term as the president. It can be seen from the examples below.

- 1. I'm running because the health care law that we passed was the right thing to do. (Speech 1a, line 146)
- 2. And you know what, we fought so hard to make that happen, and now the Supreme Court has ruled. (Speech 1a, line 152)
- 3. We know families aren't going to be better off if we undo Wall Street reform that we fought so hard to pass, and that can prevent another financial crisis. (Speech 2a, line 59-60)
- 4. Governor Romney wants to end the tax credit that **we** created to help families save up to \$10,000 over 4 years on their college tuition. (Speech 2a, line 116-117)
- 5. We fought to pass that law for families like Ryan's. (Speech 2a, line 146)

However, such use of exclusive we as seen in the examples above may also indicate that Obama wants to share

the responsibility of the actions that have been done with his administration during his first term as the president. The use of exclusive we that implies such meaning is mostly found when Obama talks about some actions regarding the health care law and the tax law. Obama uses pronoun we instead of pronoun I when talking about those things because he wants to state that the decisions regarding the health care and the tax were based on a consensus in his administration. He does not want to take the blame by himself if there is anything wrong with these issues because these issues are the issues that have been the debate between Obama and Romney. In addition, these issues are always being the main topics in the speeches of Obama and Romney during the campaign rally, and Romney often uses these issues to attack Obama in his speeches.

Meanwhile, Obama uses pronoun we with inclusive meaning when he wants to refer to and include the audience and the Americans in general in his speeches. In the inclusive sense, pronoun we is mostly used to indicate that there are many things, problems or challenges that should be done and solved, and that the Americans can do, solve or achieve these things if they work together. In this sense, Obama wants to act as the spokesman of America and wants to unite the people to achieve their shared goals. Besides, he also wants to convince the audience that if he is elected president, he and the audience can work together to make the country better. Here are some examples of the use of inclusive we in Obama's speeches.

- But for all the progress we've made, we've still got a long way to go. (Speech 1a, line 81)
- **2.** But we've got to start working on it right now. (Speech 1a, line 87)

- 3. We've got to move on that right now. (Speech 1a, line 87-88)
- **4.** *That's the challenge we face.* (Speech 1a, line 88)
- 5. ..., there are some things we have to do together. (Speech 1a, line 122)
- **6.** We could rebuild our roads, our bridges, our schools, renovate our buildings so that they're more energy efficient, ..... (Speech 1a, line 137-139)
- 7. We've got more good jobs to create. (Speech 2a, line 207)
- **8.** We've got more homegrown energy to generate. (Speech 2a, line 207-208)

In his speeches Obama also talks about his opponent in the 2012 presidential election, Mitt Romney. Obama uses pronoun *they* and *he* to refer to Romney and his party. Obama employs pronoun *they* and *he* to attribute negative things to Romney and his party. Here are some examples of the use of pronoun *they* and *he* found in Obama's speeches.

- 1. They have tried to sell us this tired, trickle-down, you're-on-your-own snake oil before. (Speech 2a, line 65-66)
- 2. They spent millions to try to stop us from reforming health care, .... (Speech 3a, line 176)
- 3. They engineered a strategy of gridlock in Congress, refusing to compromise even on ideas that **they** used to support. (Speech 3a, line 178-179)
- 4. Governor Romney promised that on his first day of office, he's going to sit right

- down and grab a pen and end Obamacare. (Speech 2a, line 140-141)
- 5. Now, what that means is right away, he'd kick nearly 7 million young people off their parent's plan. (Speech 2a, line 143-144))
- 6. **He**'d take hope away from tens of millions of Americans with preexisting conditions by repealing reform. (Speech 2a, line 144-145)
- 7. Yes, **he** hasn't offered a plan for the 33,000 troops who will have come home from this war by the end of this month. (Speech 2a, line 168-169)

Overall, the analysis of person deixis in Obama's speeches has found that pronoun we is the pronoun which is mostly used even though there is only a slight difference in the frequency of the use of pronoun we and I. Obama consistently uses pronoun I, we, they and he throughout all of his speeches in order to show his sincerity by explaining his desires or his future plans if he is elected president, and to attribute positive things to himself and his administration during his first term as well as to attribute negative things to his opponent, Romney and his party.

Person deixis in Romney's speeches

Table 3 below shows the frequency and the percentage of each type of person deixis found in Romney's presidential campaign speeches.

Table 3. The frequency and percentage of each type of person deixis found in Romney's speeches

Pronoun	Speech 1	Speech 2	Speech 3	TOTAL
I	71 (74.7%)	69 (57%)	64 (42.4%)	204
we	19 (20%)	41 (33.9%)	40 (26.5%)	100
they	0	0	1 (0.7%)	1
he	5 (5.3%)	11 (9.1%)	46 (30.4%)	62
TOTAL	95 (100%)	121 (100%)	151 (100%)	367

From the table, it can be seen that pronoun *I* is the pronoun which is mostly used in Romney's presidential

campaign speeches with 204 occurrences. Unlike the slight difference in the frequency of the use of pronoun *I* and *we* 

in Obama's speeches, the frequency of the use of pronoun *I* and *we* in Romney's speeches shows a significant difference. There are 100 occurrences of pronoun *I* in the speeches or only a half of the frequency of pronoun we. Romney uses pronoun *I* and *we* to refer to himself, his campaign team, his administration when he was governor of Massachusetts, the audience, and the whole nation of the United States of America. In addition, Romney also uses pronoun he to refer to his opponent, Barack Obama. There are 62 occurrences of pronoun he which refers to Obama found in the speeches. There is also one occurrence of pronoun they which is also used to refer to Obama and his party.

Romney uses pronoun *I* with two main purposes. First, Romney wants to show what he has done when he was governor of Massachusetts. He wants to attribute positive things to himself by showing that he has done plenty of good deeds when he was governor. Besides, he also wants to highlight his achievements when he was governor in his speeches. By doing so, it may be understood that Romney wants to brag that it is he who has done plenty of good deeds and therefore he wants to emphasize that he will do the same things if he is elected president, and this is related to the second purpose of the use of pronoun *I* which will be explained later. The examples below show the use of pronoun *I* which is used to indicate the good deeds Romney has done when he was governor.

- 1. I promoted math and science excellence in schools, and proposed paying bonuses to our best teachers. (Speech 1b, line 130-131)
- 2. ... I added a science requirement as well. (Speech 1b, line 133)

- 3. And I put in place a merit scholarship for those students who excelled: ... (Speech 1b, line 133-134)
- 4. As Governor, I vetoed the bill blocking charter schools. (Speech 1b, line 149-150)
- 5. So I joined with the Black Legislative Caucus, and their votes helped preserve my veto, ... (Speech 1b,, line 151-152)
- 6. I helped put an Olympics back on track. (Speech 3b, line 45)
- 7. I helped turn my state from deficit to surplus, from job losses to job growth, and from higher taxes to higher takehome pay. (Speech 3b, line 46-47)
- 8. Accomplishing real change is not something I just talk about--it is something I have done. (Speech 3b, line 49-50)

Second, Romney uses pronoun *I* to reveal his future plans if he is elected president. Romney states that he will do the same things as he did when he was governor if he is elected president. In this sense, Romney often uses sentences with the pattern if *I* am elected president..., as president..., and when *I* am elected.... The examples below show the use of pronoun *I* to indicate such meaning.

- 1. As President, I will promote strong families and I will defend traditional marriage. (Speech 1b, line 80)
- 2. As President, I will show the good things that can happen when we have more ... (Speech 1b, line 89-90)
- 3. On Day One, I will begin turning this economy around with a plan for the middle class. (Speech 1b, line 92)
- 4. Should I be elected President, I'll lead as I did when I was governor. (Speech 4, line 163)
- 5. From Day One, I will go to work to help Americans get back to work. (Speech 3b, line 57)
- 6. On Day One, **I** will act to increase the number of leases and permits to drill on federal lands. (Speech 3b, line 59-60)

7. When I am elected, I will work with Republicans and Democrats in Congress. (Speech 3b, line 89)

Just like Obama, Romney also uses pronoun we with either exclusive or inclusive sense. Romney uses pronoun we exclusively to refer to himself and his administration when he was a governor of Massachusetts. Romney uses exclusive we to highlight the achievements when he was governor. Here it can be seen that pronoun we is, again, used to attribute positive things or qualities to the presidential candidate. Here are some examples of the use of exclusive we found in Romney's speeches.

- 1. When I was governor, not only did test scores improve we also narrowed the achievement gap. (Speech 1b, line 137)
- 2. A significant achievement gap between students of different races remained. So we set out to close it. (Speech 1b, line 128-129)
- 3. We balanced our budget in my business and at the Olympics and every year I was in my state. (Speech 2b, line 88-89) Besides to refer to himself and his administration when he was governor,

administration when he was governor, Romney also uses pronoun we exclusively to refer to his campaign team. In this sense, Romney uses pronoun we to ask the audience to stay with him and his campaign team, and to trust them in this campaign. Here are some examples of the use of exclusive we which refers to Romney and his campaign team.

- 1. *We have to make our case to every voter.* (Speech 1b, line 11-12)
- 2. **We** don't count anybody out, and we sure don't make a habit of presuming anyone's support. (Speech 1b, line 12)
- 3. We are so very grateful to you and to people across the country, for all that you have given of yourselves to this campaign. (Speech 3b, line 8-9)
- 4. We thank you, and we ask you to stay at it all the way all the way to victory

- on Tuesday night. (Speech 3b, line 10-11)
- 5. We ask you to look beyond the speeches and the attacks and the ads. (Speech 3b, line 16)

In contrast, Romney uses inclusive we to refer to himself, the audience, and the whole nation of America. Romney uses inclusive we to encourage the audience that together they can make the country better. The examples below show the use of pronoun we to indicate this meaning.

- 1. Let me note, if we do those five things, if we take advantage of our energy resources in full and we fix our schools and we open more trade and we cut the deficit and we truly champion small business, our economy is going to come roaring back. (Speech 2b, line 142-144)
- 2. We can do better than this lackluster economy. (Speech 2b, line 144)
- 3. We can create 12 million jobs and rising take-home pay again. (Speech 2b, line 144-145)
- 4. Together, we will put the nation on track to a balanced budget, .... (Speech 3b, line 91-93)
- 5. *We can do anything*. (Speech 3b, line 142)
- 6. Four more days and we can get to work rebuilding our country,.... (Speech 3b, line 153-154)

Romney also refers to his opponent, Barack Obama, in his speeches by using pronoun *he*. When using pronoun *he*, Romney attributes negative things or aspects to his opponent, Obama. Romney associates pronoun *he* that refers to Obama with some negative things, such as the 'bad' things Obama did and the promises that Obama could not fulfill during his first term as the president. The use of pronoun *he* to attribute negative things to Obama is mostly found in the third sample of the speech of Mitt Romney which was delivered in

November 2, 2012. It may be understood as one of the ways for Romney to attack his opponent and to convince the audience to vote for him since the speech was delivered just four days away from the election. Here are some examples of the use of pronoun *he* which is used to serve this purpose.

- He said he was going to cut the federal deficit by half; then he doubled it. (Speech 3b, line 23)
- 2. **He** did not; rather, **he** raided \$716 billion from Medicare for his vaunted Obamacare. (Speech 3b, line 27-28)
- 3. **He** has not met on the economy, or on the budget, or on jobs, with either the Republican leader of the House or the Senate since July. (Speech 3b, line 31-32)
- 4. *Instead of bridging the divide, he has made it wider.* (Speech 3b, line 33)
- 5. In part, it is because **he** has never led, never worked across the aisle, never truly understood how jobs are created in the economy. (Speech 3b, line 34-35)
- 6. **He** will send billions more dollars to his favorite solar and wind companies. (Speech 3b, line 95)
- 7. **He**'s offering excuses, I've got a plan. (Speech 3b, line 148)

The analysis of person deixis in Romney's speeches has shown that Romney mostly uses pronoun *I* in his speeches. Romney uses pronoun *I* to attribute positive things by highlighting the good deeds and achievements that he has done when he was governor of Massachusetts. He also uses pronoun *we* as a way to attribute positive things to himself and his administration when he was governor. Romney also makes the best use of pronoun *they* and *he* as a way to attack his opponent and to attribute negative things to him.

Comparison of Obama's and Romney's speeches

From the analysis of person deixis in the speeches of Obama and Romney, it can be seen that the most noticeable difference lies on the type of person deixis which is mostly used in the speeches. Obama mostly uses pronoun we, while Romney mostly uses pronoun I. This is related to the different ways of highlighting their achievements and revealing their plans to the audience.

In highlighting his achievements, Obama uses exclusive we which refers to Obama and his administration during his first term as the president. He does not claim that the achievements and the good deeds that have been done are the results of his works alone. He attributes the good and positive things not only to himself but also to his administration in his first term. This also indicates that Obama strategically uses pronoun we in order to spread the responsibility of the works that have been done. He wants to share the responsibility if something goes wrong with the decisions or the works that have been done with his administration.

In revealing his plans, Obama mostly uses inclusive we which includes the audience and the whole nation of America. He wants to encourage the audience to work with him to make the country better. This use of inclusive we may make the audience feel that they can contribute to making their country a better place. It may also make the audience feel that Obama appreciates their contribution to make the country better. Therefore, Obama may get more respect and sympathy from the audience and the whole nation of America, and this may contribute to Obama's victory in the election.

In contrast, Romney mostly uses pronoun *I* to highlight the achievements that he has done when he was governor of Massachusetts. Romney wants to claim the achievements as the results of his works alone. He also wants to attributes positive things only for himself. In addition, Romney also uses pronoun I to reveal his future plans if he is elected president. In this sense, Romney uses pronoun *I* to state that he will work to make the country better if he is elected president. It makes him appear as if he did not need the help of the audience or the whole nation to make the country better. The domination of the use of pronoun *I* in Romney's speeches makes Romney appear as an egotistic politician, who only thinks about himself.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that the presidential candidates make the best use of pronouns as a way to promote themselves and to attack their opponents. This study also shows how pronouns enable the candidates to construct positive identity and reality favorable to them and make them appear more eligible for the position. In addition, the use of person deixis can also be used to reveal the candidates' attitude towards particular issues. Furthermore, the way the candidates shift the use of pronouns according to the context in which they are used may serve as a way to appeal to various audiences and helps their ability to persuade the audience to vote for them.

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