Pronouns as Political Instruments: Constructing Self and Other in Ghanaian Political Discourse

Pronouns as Political Instruments: Constructing Self and Other in Ghanaian Political Discourse

[1*]Richard Ayertey Lawer, [2]Yvette Djabakie Asamoah, [3]Priscilla Ama Dati

[1]Department of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

[2]Department of English, University of Media, Arts and Communication, Ghana

[3]Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Education, Winneba

https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0734-2837

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the pragmatic and ideological functions of personal pronouns in Ghanaian political discourse. Specifically, it investigates how political actors strategically deploy pronouns such as *I, we, you, they,* and *he* to construct political identities, mobilize audiences, and delineate ideological boundaries within Ghana's competitive democratic environment.

Methodology: The study adopts a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis of political speech excerpts reported in major Ghanaian online news platforms, including GhanaWeb, JoyOnline, and CitiNewsroom. Drawing on an integrated analytical framework combining pragmatics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and communication theory, the analysis examines how pronouns function as indexical and relational resources within mediated political communication.

Findings: The findings reveal that personal pronouns operate as multifunctional communicative resources in Ghanaian political rhetoric. The pronoun *we* constructs flexible collective identities that shift between partisan and national frames, while *I* foregrounds leadership ethos, accountability, and moral authority. The pronoun *you* positions citizens as active participants in national development and democratic responsibility. In contrast, *they* and *he* function as ideological boundary markers that construct political opponents as adversaries and personalize political blame.

Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy: The study contributes theoretically by conceptualizing pronouns as semiotic infrastructures that sustain political narratives and ideological positioning in African democratic discourse. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of micro-pragmatic analysis for understanding mediated political speech. Practically, the study highlights how pronoun use shapes public perception and political legitimacy, suggesting the need for greater awareness of linguistic framing in democratic communication. Future research should incorporate multilingual political discourse, corpus-based approaches, and audience reception studies to deepen understanding of how pronominal strategies influence political interpretation and civic engagement.

Keywords: *Political Discourse, Personal Pronouns, Ghanaian Politics, Identity Construction, Ideological Polarization, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

1. Introduction

Political communication is fundamentally a communicative struggle over meaning, identity, and allegiance. Within this struggle, linguistic resources, particularly personal pronouns, function as powerful semiotic tools through which political actors perform alignments, demarcate boundaries, and mobilize audiences. Although pronouns appear grammatically simple, research consistently demonstrates that they index complex interpersonal, ideological, and rhetorical work (Bramley, 2001). Their significance lies not in syntactic form but in pragmatic force: pronouns position speakers, construct imagined publics, and shape how political actors wish to be perceived. As Szabó (2025) argues, personalization in contemporary political rhetoric increasingly relies on pronominal strategies that foreground individual ethos while simultaneously crafting collective identities that resonate with broader publics.

The communicative value of pronouns has been widely acknowledged in political discourse scholarship. Studies across diverse political contexts show that *I*, *we*, *you*, and *they* are strategically deployed to negotiate power, build solidarity, and articulate ideological stances (Ali Akbari & Behnam, 2020; Sanni, 2023; Romadlani, 2024). Through these pronouns, political actors frame themselves as authoritative leaders, mobilize audiences around shared responsibilities, and construct political opponents as threatening or morally deficient. Such practices reflect the hybrid nature of political discourse as simultaneously interpersonal, rhetorical, and ideological. As van Dijk (1998, 2002) observes, pronouns are central to the ideological square that structures positive self-representation and negative other-representation, enabling political actors to organize belonging, affect, and opposition.

In African political communication, and particularly in Ghana, these dynamics assume heightened significance. Ghana's vibrant democratic environment, competitive multiparty system, and media-driven political sphere create fertile conditions for rhetorical maneuvering. Yet despite the country's robust communication landscape, scholarly attention to the micro-level linguistic strategies through which Ghanaian politicians construct political selves and others remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on media participation, readability, and language politics (Fosu, 2014; Obeng, 2020; Abubakar 2022), leaving underexplored the role of everyday linguistic choices in shaping political meaning. Pronoun use, as a relational and persuasive resource, therefore offers a critical lens for examining Ghanaian political communication practices.

This study adopts an integrated communicative framework that brings together identity construction, audience design, and ideological positioning. It treats pronouns not merely as markers of grammatical person but as strategic rhetorical devices through which political actors (1) project leadership ethos and favorable identities, (2) mobilize audiences by crafting inclusive or exclusive collectivities, and (3) delineate political opponents through discursive polarization. This perspective aligns with recent scholarship emphasizing the multifunctionality of pronouns in

political discourse, where personal reference operates as a vehicle for persuasion, relational management, and political action.

Drawing on Ghanaian political speeches published in online news media, the study examines how pronoun choices function as communicative practices through which politicians construct images of themselves, their audiences, and their opponents. Using qualitative pragmatic analysis, the study demonstrates how first-person pronouns (*I*, *we*) articulate personal authority and shared responsibility; how second-person pronouns (*you*) recruit audiences into moral and national projects; and how third-person pronouns (*they*, *he*) construct alterity and political opposition. These strategies reveal the rhetorical sophistication with which Ghanaian politicians shape political narratives and mobilize public sentiment.

By integrating insights from discourse pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, and political communication, this study contributes to broader scholarship on how linguistic choices shape political life in African democracies. More broadly, it underscores the importance of attending to subtle communicative practices through which political actors negotiate legitimacy, forge communal ties, and reproduce ideological boundaries. Pronoun use, though often treated as mundane, emerges here as a central resource in the construction of political realities and public perception.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews literature on pronoun use in political communication, focusing on identity construction, persuasion, and ideological polarization, and identifies gaps in African and Ghanaian scholarship. Section 3 outlines the methodological approach, including data sources and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents the findings, organized around major pronoun categories and their communicative functions. Section 5 discusses the implications of the findings for political communication theory and democratic discourse in Africa. Section 6 concludes with reflections on the study's contributions and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pronouns and identity construction in political discourse

Personal pronouns are central to the discursive construction of political identities because they function as indexical markers through which speakers position themselves, their audiences, and their opponents within shifting configurations of power, solidarity, and conflict. Early scholarship established that pronouns extend beyond referential functions to operate as semiotic resources that mediate identity performance. De Fina (1995), for instance, demonstrated that pronoun choice in political discourse is profoundly relational: speakers deploy *I*, *we*, *you*, and *they* to signal alignments and dissociations that reflect ideological commitments and communicative intentions. This work reframed pronouns as tools of identity work rather than grammatical necessities, foregrounding their role in shaping political selfhood and otherness.

Bramley's (2001) influential analysis further developed this relational perspective by showing that pronouns enable the construction of multiple and sometimes contradictory political identities within a single speech event. Through strategic shifts in personal reference, politicians oscillate between individual and collective selves, positioning themselves as authoritative leaders, collaborative representatives, or oppositional figures depending on contextual demands. Such shifts reveal how pronouns function as mechanisms for managing proximity and distance, crafting legitimacy, and controlling interpretive frames. Bramley argues that pronouns manipulate the boundaries of belonging, constructing self/other distinctions that operate simultaneously as rhetorical resources and ideological tools.

Recent scholarship situates these identity processes within broader trends of personalization in political communication. Szabó (2025), in a study of American presidential nomination speeches, argues that contemporary political rhetoric increasingly foregrounds individual ethos through pronominal strategies. In this context, *I* is used to project leadership, competence, and moral character, while *we* and *they* organize collective identities and boundary-making processes. Personalization thus reconfigures political identity as a communicative performance shaped by strategic pronominal choice rather than mere self-reference.

In African political contexts, pronouns similarly enable the performance of layered identities shaped by history, nationalism, and transnational affiliation. Sanni's (2023) analysis of Barack Obama's speeches to African and Arab audiences demonstrates how pronouns function as anchor points for multiple identity performances. By shifting between *I*, *we*, and *you*, Obama constructs himself as a national leader, global actor, cultural insider, and diplomatic partner. This work highlights how pronouns facilitate audience design processes by allowing political actors to tailor identity projections to culturally diverse publics.

Collectively, these studies establish that pronouns are constitutive of political identity rather than merely reflective of it. They mediate how authority, belonging, solidarity, and opposition are enacted in discourse. For contexts such as Ghana, where political communication is shaped by multiparty competition, mediated visibility, and appeals to communal values, pronoun use offers a particularly salient site for analyzing how political identities are discursively produced and contested. The present study builds on this scholarship by examining how Ghanaian politicians deploy pronouns to construct political selves and others within a dynamic democratic environment.

2.2 Pronouns as tools of power, persuasion, and solidarity

The relationship between language, power, and social structure has long been central to political communication research, and pronouns constitute one of the most salient linguistic resources through which these relationships are negotiated. Brown and Gilman's (2012) work established that pronouns index two fundamental dimensions of social interaction: power, associated with asymmetrical relations, and solidarity, associated with symmetrical or affectively close relations.

Although initially grounded in European linguistic systems, this framework has had enduring relevance for understanding political discourse, revealing how pronoun choice encodes authority, alignment, and relational distance.

Other scholarship challenged static interpretations of power and solidarity by emphasizing their dynamic and interactional nature. Tannen (1993) argued that power and solidarity are not mutually exclusive but often co-constructed in discourse. In political communication, this means that leaders may assert authority while simultaneously invoking collective identification to cultivate trust and legitimacy. Pronouns thus operate as dialogic instruments through which speakers recalibrate relational footing. Shifts between *I* and *we*, for example, signal movement between individualized leadership and shared responsibility, reflecting strategic adjustments to communicative context.

Contemporary research further demonstrates how pronouns contribute to persuasion and leadership credibility. Romadlani's (2024) analysis of Joe Biden's inaugural address shows that oscillations between *I* and *we* function as persuasive strategies that balance leadership ethos with appeals to national unity. While *we* constructs inclusivity and shared purpose, *I* indexes personal commitment and moral responsibility. These findings underscore how pronouns participate in shaping audience perceptions of credibility, accountability, and resolve.

Similarly, Ali Akbari and Behnam (2020) show that pronominal strategies reveal ideological orientations and power dynamics in political discourse. Their study demonstrates that *I* is often used to assert control and decisiveness, whereas *we* functions as a solidarity-building device that invites audiences into a shared moral or ideological frame. The persuasive force of *we* lies in its capacity to collapse the distance between speaker and audience, constructing a unified social entity that legitimizes political claims while constraining dissent.

Across these studies, a consistent pattern emerges: pronouns function as multidimensional persuasive resources. Through *I*, politicians construct leadership ethos; through *we*, they enact solidarity and collective identity; through *you*, they mobilize audiences as moral agents; and through *they*, they articulate ideological contrast. These patterns are vividly present in Ghanaian political discourse, where politicians routinely shift between pronominal forms to negotiate authority, solidarity, and responsibility. The present study extends this scholarship by examining how these persuasive functions operate pragmatically within Ghana's democratic communication environment.

2.3 Ideological positioning and us/them polarization

A defining feature of political discourse is its capacity to encode ideological positions and demarcate symbolic boundaries between social groups. Pronouns play a crucial role in this process by organizing social reality into categories of "us" and "them." Van Dijk's (1998, 2002) ideological square provides a foundational framework for understanding this dynamic, positing that political

ideologies are reproduced discursively through positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Pronouns are central to this process because they implicitly signal group membership and activate cognitive frames that distinguish in-groups from out-groups.

Within this framework, *we* constructs a moral community whose values and interests are positioned as legitimate, while *they* functions as a shorthand for ideological threat or deviance. In political discourse, such pronominal contrasts simplify complex political realities into binary oppositions that facilitate persuasion and mobilization. Van Dijk emphasizes that pronouns operate at both cognitive and discursive levels: they shape mental models of social categories while simultaneously performing rhetorical work in interaction.

Building on this tradition, Shafie et al. (2024) examine the psychosemantics of *us* and *them*, demonstrating how pronouns evoke affective and evaluative responses that align audiences with particular ideological positions. Their analysis shows that *us* is typically associated with unity, trustworthiness, and moral legitimacy, whereas *them* carries negative connotations such as suspicion, incompetence, or danger. Importantly, these meanings are contextually produced through surrounding discourse, highlighting the role of pronouns as ideologically loaded but flexible resources.

Parashari (2024) further illustrates how pronouns function as ideological weapons in political conflict. Through their coordination with evaluative language and epistemic stance, pronouns construct adversaries as irresponsible or morally deficient, intensifying polarization. Such pronominal strategies personalize ideological struggle, framing political conflict as a moral contest between virtuous in-groups and deviant out-groups.

In Ghanaian political discourse, these global patterns manifest clearly. Politicians frequently deploy *we* to invoke party unity or national solidarity, while *they* and *he* are used to delegitimize opponents by attributing incompetence, corruption, or anti-developmental intent. These practices underscore the ideological versatility of pronouns and their central role in structuring political antagonism in multiparty democracies.

2.4 African and Ghanaian political communication studies

Research on African political communication has increasingly emphasized discourse as a site for constructing political authority, national identity, and democratic participation. Studies of African and African-descended political leaders illustrate how pronouns function as key resources for navigating complex sociocultural expectations. Sanni (2023), for example, shows how Barack Obama's strategic use of *I*, *we*, and *you* enables him to perform multiple identities across domestic and international contexts, balancing personal narrative with collective memory and political persuasion. Similarly, analyses of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's speeches reveal how pronouns are used to frame moral authority and national renewal (Adebomi, 2025; Osisanwo, 2017). Through *we*, Buhari evokes collective struggle, while *I* indexes personal resolve and

reformist intent. These strategies reflect broader African rhetorical traditions in which leadership is constructed through communal belonging and moral legitimacy.

Within Ghana, scholarship on political communication has largely focused on media participation, political rhetoric, and the communicative infrastructures that shape democratic engagement. Studies such as Fosu (2014) highlight how Ghanaian media platforms facilitate public deliberation and amplify the rhetorical stakes of political speech in a highly mediated political culture. At the same time, discourse-oriented research demonstrates that political communication in Ghana is deeply entangled with questions of power, legitimacy, and civic liberty. Obeng (2020), for example, shows how Ghanaian political actors deploy linguistic and discourse-pragmatic resources, including political pronouns, presupposition, inferencing, and politeness, to challenge authority while seeking protection for both positive and negative liberty. His analysis underscores that micro-linguistic choices are central to how political actors negotiate risk, dissent, and power within Ghana's political ecology. Similarly, Abubakar's (2022) CDA-informed corpus study of NDC and NPP party manifestoes demonstrates how first-person plural pronouns, particularly *we*, function ideologically to express commitment, intention, self-praise, criticism, and constructions of past achievement. Together, these studies (Obeng, 2020; Abubakar, 2022; Fosu, 2014) establish pronoun use as a consequential site for understanding political alignment, credibility, and ideological positioning in Ghanaian political discourse.

Despite this growing body of work, fine-grained empirical analyses of pronouns as micro-pragmatic resources in mediated Ghanaian political speech remain limited. Much existing research prioritizes institutional genres, thematic patterns, or communicative infrastructures, with comparatively less systematic attention to how specific pronoun choices operate moment-to-moment to enact stance, manage audience alignment, and construct relational meaning in public political speech. This gap is particularly striking given the prominence of pronominal strategies in Ghanaian politics. As the present dataset illustrates, Ghanaian politicians frequently deploy *I*, *we*, *you*, *they*, and *he* to manage identity, allocate responsibility, and articulate ideological difference. Yet these interactional and pragmatic dimensions of pronoun use have received limited sustained scholarly attention.

The broader literature establishes that personal pronouns are central to political communication, functioning as markers of identity (De Fina, 1995; Bramley, 2001), instruments of persuasion and leadership ethos (Ali Akbari & Behnam, 2020; Romadlani, 2024), and tools of ideological polarization (van Dijk, 1998, 2002; Shafie et al., 2024; Parashari, 2024). Collectively, these studies underscore the multifunctional nature of pronominal reference and its capacity to shape political realities through the negotiation of belonging, legitimacy, and conflict.

Nevertheless, two conceptual gaps persist. First, much existing research treats identity construction, persuasion, and ideology as analytically distinct domains, overlooking how these processes intersect in political discourse. Pronouns rarely perform a single communicative

function; instead, they simultaneously enact identities, mobilize audiences, and inscribe ideological boundaries. The absence of an integrated framework obscures the full communicative significance of pronominal choice. Second, there remains a shortage of micro-pragmatic analyses of Ghanaian political discourse, particularly in mediated speech contexts where audiences are heterogeneous and rhetorical stakes are intensified. While prior studies offer important foundations (Fosu, 2014; Obeng, 2020; Abubakar, 2022), they do not systematically examine how pronouns function as interactional and ideological resources in situated political communication.

Responding to these gaps, the present study employs an integrated pragmatic and discourse-analytic framework to examine how pronouns simultaneously construct identity, persuade audiences, and articulate ideological boundaries in Ghanaian political discourse. In doing so, it advances understanding of how everyday linguistic choices operate as tools of political action and democratic engagement in African contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis to examine how Ghanaian politicians deploy personal pronouns as communicative acts that construct identities, mobilize audiences, and articulate ideological positions. Pragmatic discourse analysis is particularly well suited for this inquiry because it focuses not only on what language denotes but on what language *does*, the actions it performs and the social meanings it creates. In political communication, where speakers strategically craft utterances to influence public perception, pronouns function as more than grammatical markers; they serve as indexical cues that enact relational positioning, express stance, and frame political realities. A qualitative approach enables close attention to these subtle but consequential interpretive dynamics.

The choice of personal pronouns as the primary analytic focus is grounded in both empirical and theoretical considerations. As demonstrated in the literature, pronouns are powerful pragmatic devices that reveal how speakers position themselves relative to others and how they invoke collectivities, delineate boundaries, or attribute agency. Pronouns carry illocutionary force: *I* can assert leadership or responsibility; *we* can recruit solidarity or diffuse blame; *you* can assign moral duty or construct an imagined audience; *they* can delegitimize opponents or create ideological distance. In this sense, pronouns function as communicative acts that encode political intent and contribute to the rhetorical architecture of speeches. Analyzing pronouns therefore allows the study to uncover the implicit relational and ideological work embedded in political discourse.

Furthermore, a pragmatic perspective foregrounds the contextual and interactional nature of political communication, recognizing that the meaning of pronouns cannot be fully understood apart from the socio-political and situational contexts in which they are deployed. The analysis,

therefore, attends to how pronouns emerge in relation to specific political events, communicative goals, and audience configurations. This methodological orientation aligns with the study's broader aim of revealing how linguistic micro-practices contribute to the construction of political identities and the reproduction of ideological narratives.

3.2 Data source and sampling

The data for this study consist of Ghanaian political speeches as reported in online media outlets, including authoritative digital platforms such as GhanaWeb, JoyOnline, CitiNewsroom, and other reputable news portals that regularly publish direct quotations from political actors. The use of online media as the primary data source reflects both methodological necessity and theoretical relevance. In Ghana's contemporary political landscape, news websites serve as central intermediaries through which political speeches reach the wider public. They archive political communication in a stable, publicly accessible form and therefore offer a rich corpus for analyzing how political discourse is made available, circulated, and interpreted in mediated environments.

Sampling proceeded through a purposive strategy aimed at identifying speech segments that contain direct quotations attributed to Ghanaian political figures. Direct quotations were chosen because they preserve the linguistic integrity of politicians' utterances and allow for reliable analysis of pronominal usage. Only speech excerpts that included explicit pronominal references (*I, we, you, they,* or *he*) and provided sufficient context for pragmatic interpretation were included. This criterion ensures that the dataset reflects authentic communicative acts rather than paraphrased or editorially altered representations of political speech.

The selected excerpts span a range of political actors, including sitting presidents, presidential candidates, party executives, and members of parliament, to capture variation in pronominal strategies across institutional roles and communicative situations. Speeches were drawn from diverse political events such as campaign rallies, press conferences, party meetings, and public addresses. These contexts were chosen because they are central sites of political identity construction and audience engagement, where pronominal choices are especially salient.

Focusing on public, mediated political discourse is analytically significant for several reasons. First, mediated speech amplifies the rhetorical stakes of pronoun use, as utterances are crafted with the awareness that they will be interpreted by multiple, heterogeneous audiences. Second, online media play a crucial role in shaping public discourse in Ghana's democratic environment by circulating political messages, framing political actors, and fostering public debate. Analyzing pronouns in this mediated context therefore provides insight into how political identities and ideological divisions are publicly constructed and disseminated. Finally, the mediated nature of the data ensures transparency and replicability, as the speech excerpts used in the analysis are publicly available and verifiable.

3.3 Analytical framework

The analysis is grounded in an integrated framework that draws from pragmatics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and communication theory, allowing for a multidimensional examination of how pronouns function as communicative, relational, and ideological tools in Ghanaian political discourse. From a pragmatic perspective, the study focuses on indexicality, deixis, and relational positioning. Pronouns are inherently indexical signs that anchor utterances to participants, social identities, and situational contexts. Deictic expressions such as *I*, *we*, *you*, and *they* do not have fixed referents but derive meaning from the interactional environment in which they appear. Their interpretation requires attention to who is speaking, who is being addressed, and what social alignments or oppositions are being invoked. Pragmatics thus provides the analytical tools to understand pronouns as acts of positioning, communicative moves through which politicians align themselves with certain audiences, distance themselves from others, and construct particular relational configurations.

Incorporating CDA, particularly van Dijk's (1998, 2002) concept of the ideological square, enables the study to examine how pronoun use contributes to the reproduction of ideological structures and power relations. The ideological square highlights the systematic ways in which discourse emphasizes the positive attributes of in-groups and the negative attributes of out-groups, while downplaying in-group weaknesses and out-group strengths. Pronouns are central to this process because they implicitly categorize social actors into ideological camps, *we* as the virtuous collective, *they* as the problematic other. CDA thus illuminates how pronominal choices in Ghanaian political speech participate in the construction of moral hierarchies, political antagonisms, and power asymmetries, reinforcing broader discursive patterns of polarization and political contestation.

From the perspective of communication theory, the framework incorporates principles of audience design and identity performance. Audience design posits that speakers adjust their linguistic choices to align with the expectations, identities, and needs of their intended audiences. Pronouns are crucial in this regard because they configure the imagined communicative relationship between speaker and listener. The pronoun *you*, for instance, constructs audiences as accountable agents; *we* creates a shared identity; *I* foregrounds personal ethos; and *they* delineates external groups. Identity performance theory further emphasizes that speakers actively construct social identities through discourse. Political actors use pronouns to perform roles such as leader, national guardian, party representative, or moral authority. By integrating these theoretical strands, the analytical framework captures the multifunctionality of pronoun use as simultaneously relational, ideological, and performative.

3.4 Coding and analytical procedures

The analytical process involved several systematic stages designed to capture the pragmatic and ideological significance of pronoun use in Ghanaian political discourse. First, all speech excerpts were examined for pronominal references, and instances of *I*, *we/us*, *you*, *they/them*, and *he* were extracted. These five categories were selected because they reflect the dominant patterns of pronoun usage present in the data and correspond to the key relational and ideological functions identified in the literature.

Second, the extracted pronouns were subjected to thematic categorization. Pronouns were grouped according to their communicative function as observed in the dataset:

(i) *I* as a marker of leadership, authority, or personal accountability;

(ii) *we/us* as an index of solidarity, collective identity, or shared responsibility;

(iii) *you* as a device for audience engagement, exhortation, or moralization;

(iv) *they/them* as tools for constructing political opposition or ideological distance;

(v) *he* as a mechanism for personalizing critique or attributing blame to political adversaries.

This thematic organization provided a structured lens through which to interpret the relational and ideological work accomplished by each pronominal category.

Third, each pronoun was analyzed through contextualized interpretation, considering the situational conditions, communicative intent, and rhetorical effects associated with its use. Interpretation was guided by four key considerations:

(i) Context — the political event, interlocutors, audience configuration, and socio-political moment in which the pronoun was used;

(ii) Communicative intent — the inferred purpose of the speaker, such as constructing solidarity, delegitimizing opponents, asserting authority, or mobilizing action;

(iii) Rhetorical effect — how the pronoun shapes meaning, influences audience perception, or contributes to the persuasive force of the message;

(iv) Ideological implications — how pronoun use indexes broader political narratives and ideological alignments, consistent with van Dijk's ideological square.

This systematic procedure ensured that the analysis captured both the micro-level pragmatic functions and the macro-level ideological implications of pronoun use.

3.5 Researcher positionality and reflexivity

Given the interpretive nature of qualitative discourse analysis, researcher positionality plays a significant role in shaping analytical outcomes (Kim, 2024). Reflexively acknowledging this

positionality is essential for enhancing the credibility and transparency of the study. As a researcher familiar with Ghanaian political discourse and socio-cultural contexts, my interpretations are informed by insider knowledge of Ghana's political dynamics, linguistic practices, and communicative traditions. This insider perspective enhances the accuracy of contextual interpretation but also introduces the potential for implicit bias (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Goundar, 2025).

To mitigate these concerns, several reflexive strategies were employed. First, interpretations were grounded in explicit textual evidence, with each analytical claim supported by direct excerpts from the data. Second, theoretical triangulation (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021)—drawing from pragmatics, CDA, and communication theory—was used to ensure that findings were not overly shaped by a single interpretive lens. Third, coding decisions were documented and revisited through iterative review to assess consistency and limit the influence of preconceived assumptions. Finally, alternative interpretations were considered during the analysis to challenge and refine emerging insights. Through these reflexive practices, the analysis seeks to balance contextual sensitivity with methodological rigor, providing a trustworthy account of how pronouns function as communicative acts within Ghanaian political speeches.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1 We/Us as tools for solidarity and collective identity

The pronouns *we* and *us* emerge in the dataset as among the most ideologically charged and versatile linguistic resources in Ghanaian political discourse. Rather than functioning as neutral markers of group membership, these pronouns operate as strategic tools through which politicians negotiate inclusion, solidarity, authority, and political identity. Consistent with prior scholarship, *we/us* are deployed to construct social alignments, mobilize publics, and manage ideological boundaries. Three dominant patterns are evident in the data: (1) inclusion and exclusion dynamics, (2) oscillation between party-based and national identity claims, and (3) the strategic widening and narrowing of the referential scope of *we*.

4.1.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Patterns

In Ghanaian political speeches, *we* and *us* are frequently used to construct in-groups whose boundaries shift in response to rhetorical goals. At a New Patriotic Party (NPP) leadership meeting, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo invoked *we* to foreground shared history and collective struggle among party members:

"The last time we met in 2014 in Tamale to select our National Officers, we were in opposition."
"We owe the Council of Elders. We are equally deeply indebted to the National Officers."
"Because of the measures we took…"
"…we achieved an average 8.5% GDP growth rate in the first year."
"…there is every indication that we will repeat that this year."

"We have brought the unsustainable fiscal deficit down from 9.3% in Mahama's last year to 6% in 2017."
"We will get it further down this year."

Here, *we* indexes solidarity, equality, and shared experience, constructing an intimate party-based collective. The pronoun positions the speaker not as a distant authority but as a co-participant in the party's political journey, thereby fostering relational closeness and reinforcing political loyalty. At the same time, *we* implicitly excludes political opponents, delineating a moral and ideological in-group without requiring overt antagonism. Such usage aligns with van Dijk's ideological square, in which *we* is associated with positive self-representation and group legitimacy.

4.1.2 Party-Based versus National Identity Claims

A salient feature of the data is the fluid movement between party-specific and national collectivities constructed through *we*. In some contexts, the pronoun clearly indexes a partisan identity, as in the NPP Chairman's statement:

"Our party became embroiled in a series of unnecessary disputes…"

Here, *we* functions to emphasize internal unity and shared responsibility within the party. In other contexts, however, the same speakers broaden the referential scope of *we* to encompass the national polity. President Akufo-Addo's assertion—*"We could have the fastest growing economy in the world this year…"*—constructs *we* as a national collective, collapsing partisan boundaries and framing economic growth as a shared national achievement. This rhetorical widening serves both persuasive and ideological purposes: it positions the speaker as a national leader rather than a partisan actor and recruits citizens into a collective narrative of progress. Through such shifts, politicians manage multiple identities,—party leader, national figure, statesman—enhancing their rhetorical flexibility and persuasive reach.

4.1.3 Strategic Widening and Narrowing of Referential Scope

The data further reveal deliberate manipulation of the referential scope of *we* to align with shifting political objectives. In some instances, politicians widen *we* to include even ideological opponents, projecting inclusivity and collective responsibility:

"Digging us out of the deep hole the Mahama government plunged our country into was never going to be easy, but we have to do it."

In this utterance, *us* and *our* are rhetorically expanded to encompass the entire nation, despite the explicit reference to an opposing political group. The inclusive *we* frames national challenges as shared burdens, softening ideological divisions. Simultaneously, the narrower *we* ("*we have to do it*") implicitly refers to the governing party or elected officials, signaling responsibility and control within a restricted collective. This oscillation reflects the dual imperatives of political communication: fostering national unity while maintaining partisan differentiation. The referential

elasticity of *we* enables politicians to recalibrate audience identification in real time. When seeking legitimacy and solidarity, *we* expands; when emphasizing competence, authority, or accountability, it narrows. This pragmatic flexibility demonstrates how pronouns function as instruments for reconfiguring social relations and ideological alignments within a single discourse event.

The findings show that *we* and *us* operate as dynamic communicative resources rather than static grammatical forms. By modulating their inclusiveness, Ghanaian politicians construct collective identities that respond to the competing demands of persuasion, responsibility allocation, and ideological positioning. These patterns reinforce the centrality of pronoun use to political meaning-making, revealing how narratives of unity, legitimacy, and national purpose are discursively crafted within Ghana's multiparty democratic context.

4.2 I as a marker of authority, ethos, and leadership

The pronoun *I* occupies a distinctive rhetorical position in political discourse because of its capacity to foreground personal agency, moral responsibility, and leadership ethos. Unlike collective pronouns such as *we* or *us*, which diffuse agency across groups, *I* personalizes action and centers the speaker as an accountable authority figure. Analysis of Ghanaian political speeches shows that *I* functions as a key linguistic resource through which politicians assert credibility, claim responsibility, and differentiate individual leadership identity from collective party or governmental identity. This pattern aligns with established political communication research that identifies *I* as a marker of ethos, authority, and moral positioning (Bramley, 2001; Ali Akbari & Behnam, 2020; Romadlani, 2024).

4.2.1 Personal responsibility claims

A prominent function of *I* in the Ghanaian dataset is its use to signal personal accountability and commitment to public duty. Consistent with Bramley's (2001) observation that politicians deploy *I* to foreground decisiveness and moral fortitude, Ghanaian leaders use first-person singular reference to claim ownership of political promises and ethical commitments. President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, for example, states:

"If I am elected President, I, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, give you my word, I will protect the public purse jealously."
"I will advise the party to work towards discarding that perception…"

Here, the emphatic repetition of *I* functions as rhetorical intensification, reinforcing individual accountability and personal resolve. Rather than dispersing responsibility across a collective, the speaker positions himself as the primary moral agent behind political action. This pattern mirrors findings by Ali Akbari and Behnam (2020), who argue that *I* is frequently mobilized to convey competence, resolve, and ownership of policy decisions. By foregrounding *I* in contexts of public trust, Ghanaian politicians enhance perceived credibility and persuasive force, supporting

Romadlani's (2024) claim that first-person singular pronouns play a central role in constructing leadership ethos.

4.2.2 Moral and Ethical Positioning

Beyond signaling responsibility, *I* is also used to articulate moral authority and ethical positioning. Ghanaian political actors frequently frame themselves as guardians of national values, protectors of democratic norms, or agents of national renewal. In such contexts, *I* activates what Aristotle conceptualizes as ethos, presenting the speaker as morally grounded and trustworthy. Akufo-Addo's pledge to *"protect the public purse,"* for instance, does more than assert accountability; it constructs an ethical identity grounded in stewardship and integrity.

Similarly, in the statement:

"I am the captain of the boat, and I will not allow anybody to rock or capsize it,"

the pronoun *I* constructs a moralized leadership persona characterized by vigilance, control, and protective authority. The "captain" metaphor reinforces personal guardianship over the nation or party, framing leadership as an individual moral responsibility rather than a distributed collective task. This usage aligns with Romadlani's (2024) finding that *I* is frequently employed to establish moral legitimacy in political discourse and with van Dijk's (2002) observation that moral positioning often hinges on positive self-presentation through first-person reference.

4.2.3 Authority and Distancing Functions

While *I* often signals authority and ethical commitment, it can also function as a distancing device, allowing speakers to separate themselves from collective failures or undesirable decisions. Brown and Gilman's (2012) power–solidarity framework helps explain this dual role: *I* indexes hierarchical differentiation, positioning the speaker above or outside certain collective actions. This function becomes visible when politicians shift from *we* to *I* to isolate personal stance or assert unilateral authority.

In the data, alternation between *we* and *I* reflects this dynamic. When the president declares, *"I am the captain of the boat," I* is used not to distribute responsibility but to assert control and decision-making authority. This pattern corresponds to Tannen's (1993) argument that power and solidarity are dynamically negotiated in discourse, with *I* signaling power and *we* signaling solidarity. Such selective deployment of *I* also resonates with van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, whereby political actors emphasize their positive attributes while distancing themselves from collective shortcomings.

Ultimately, *I* emerges as a powerful rhetorical resource in Ghanaian political discourse. Through its strategic deployment, politicians construct authoritative leadership identities, claim moral and administrative responsibility, and selectively distance themselves from collective actions. These patterns reflect broader trends identified in political communication scholarship

while also revealing context-specific nuances of Ghanaian political rhetoric. The pronoun *I* thus enables political actors to choreograph a balanced performance of authority, accountability, and moral legitimacy, key components of persuasive leadership in democratic contexts.

4.3 You in audience alignment and moral mobilization

The second-person pronoun *you* plays a pivotal role in political discourse because of its capacity to directly implicate listeners in the speaker's communicative project. Unlike *I* or *we*, which foreground speaker-centered or collective identities, *you* operates relationally: it positions audiences as morally accountable actors, assigns responsibility, and constructs publics as agents whose actions shape national outcomes. Prior scholarship identifies *you* as a pragmatically flexible form that may function generically, individually, or collectively depending on context (Bramley, 2001; Alavidze, 2017). In Ghanaian political discourse, *you* emerges as a powerful rhetorical device for aligning audiences with political goals, invoking shared obligations, and disciplining or admonishing citizens into action. Three dominant uses are evident: constructing audience responsibility, invoking shared national duty, and deploying pedagogical or admonitory appeals.

4.3.1 Constructing audience responsibility

A central function of *you* in the dataset is its use to construct audiences as responsible agents whose decisions directly affect national trajectories. This aligns with Sanni's (2023) observation that *you* is a potent identity-positioning device capable of transforming listeners from passive observers into active participants in political processes. In the data, audiences are repeatedly framed as collective moral actors whose choices carry national consequences. Consider the following statements addressed to senior high school students:

"You have a big responsibility, to make sure that this free senior high school concept comes to stay and all Ghanaians buy into it."
"You are the pioneers, don't let the school down and shame all those people who didn't want you to have the free senior high school."

Here, *you* does more than address a group; it attributes responsibility for the success of a national policy to the audience. The pronoun constructs listeners as custodians of a public initiative, legitimizing the speaker's authority while simultaneously empowering and burdening the audience. This pattern reflects Ali Akbari and Behnam's (2020) argument that pronouns function as tools for distributing moral agency and responsibility in political communication. By framing audiences as decisive actors, politicians cultivate a participatory ethos that transforms policy from a distant governmental project into a shared civic undertaking, echoing Romadlani's (2024) findings on audience mobilization through second-person reference.

4.3.2 Invoking shared national duty

A second salient function of *you* involves invoking shared national duty, whereby citizens are cast as active contributors to democratic governance, economic development, national security, and intergenerational progress. In this role, *you* functions as an interpellative device that recruits audiences into the moral and ideological universe of the speaker. Consistent with van Dijk's (2002) framework, political discourse positions citizens not as passive recipients of state action but as ideological participants whose obligations derive from national membership. The dataset provides multiple instances of this pattern. In one case, *you* guides listeners through cognitive engagement with national economic realities:

"Then you think about the statistics that say we have to invest some $6 billion every year for the next ten years simply to make up our infrastructure deficit."

Here, *you* collapses the distance between macroeconomic discourse and individual cognition, prompting what Sanni (2023) describes as "collective introspection," where citizens are encouraged to internalize national challenges as personal concerns. Similarly, democratic participation is framed as a civic obligation:

"As citizens of this Republic, you must hold all of us in public office accountable, for it is through your vigilance that you safeguard the democracy we have worked so hard to build."

In this formulation, *you* positions the public as guardians of democratic integrity, reinforcing civic virtue and national unity.

Comparable constructions appear in discourses of economic responsibility:

"If Ghana is to overcome the challenges before us, you must continue to support local industries, because your choices every day determine whether our economy stands strong or falters."

Here, *you* distributes economic responsibility across the citizenry, framing development as a shared burden, a pattern consistent with Sanni's (2023) observations on African political rhetoric. The same logic applies to national security in this statement:

"In these uncertain times, you have a duty to report suspicious activities in your communities, for you are the first line of defense in protecting our nation."

Across these contexts, *you* interpellates audiences as moral subjects—democratic watchdogs, economic partners, security collaborators—whose individual actions acquire national significance. The co-occurrence of *you* with evaluative and moral language amplifies its mobilizing force, transforming listeners into indispensable actors within national projects.

4.3.3 Pedagogical and admonitory uses

A third pattern involves the pedagogical or admonitory deployment of *you*, where political speakers adopt a didactic stance, positioning themselves as moral guides or mentors. In such

instances, *you* is used to instruct, caution, or discipline audiences, particularly young citizens. For example, a Minister for Education states:

"As the future leaders of this country, you must take your studies seriously, for you will inherit the task of steering Ghana toward prosperity and justice."

This utterance frames young citizens as moral agents whose future responsibilities justify present discipline, exemplifying what Tannen (1993) describes as relational positioning through moralized narratives of obligation. A similar pattern appears in Akufo-Addo's admonition:

"You are the pioneers, don't let the school down and shame all those people who didn't want you to have the free senior high school."

Here, *you* performs multiple functions simultaneously: it elevates the audience as historical agents ("pioneers"), imposes moral obligation, and constructs an ideological contrast with opponents. This layered usage aligns with van Dijk's ideological square and resonates with Shafie et al.'s (2024) psychosemantic findings on the emotionally activating and morally implicating force of second-person reference.

Across the dataset, *you* emerges as a versatile and affectively charged pronoun that enables Ghanaian politicians to align audiences, allocate responsibility, and mobilize moral action. Through its strategic deployment, listeners are constructed as accountable citizens, active participants in national development, and subjects of political instruction. While these patterns reflect broader trends in political communication, they also reveal context-specific features of Ghanaian discourse, where *you* is central to framing citizens as co-producers of the political and moral order.

4.4 They/Them as ideological boundary markers

The pronouns *they* and *them* constitute some of the most ideologically charged resources in political discourse. Unlike *we* and *you*, which often facilitate solidarity and mobilization, *they* indexes alterity, distance, and threat. In Ghanaian political communication, *they* functions as a key discursive instrument through which politicians delineate ideological boundaries, construct adversaries, and reinforce partisan divisions. This pattern reflects broader findings in political discourse scholarship, which identify *they* as central to the production of "otherness" and negative out-group representation (van Dijk, 1998, 2002; Shafie et al., 2024; Parashari, 2024). Three dominant functions emerge in the data: oppositional and negative representation, delegitimization of political opponents, and the contrast between neutral and adversarial uses.

4.4.1 Oppositional and negative representation

In Ghanaian political rhetoric, *they* frequently operates as a shorthand for constructing a contrastive out-group whose actions and values are framed as incompatible with national progress. This usage aligns with van Dijk's (1998) ideological square, which emphasizes positive in-group

representation alongside negative other-presentation. The data contains multiple instances where *they* is used to attribute incompetence, mismanagement, or wrongdoing to political opponents. For example, a finance minister in the NPP government states:

"Digging us out of the deep hole the Mahama government plunged our country into was never going to be easy…"

Although *they* is not overtly expressed, the pronoun is implicitly activated, assigning responsibility for national decline to the previous administration. In more explicit constructions, political actors directly attribute negative agency to opponents:

"They ran the economy into the ground, leaving behind an unprecedented deficit…"
"They squandered public resources and turned state institutions into tools for personal enrichment."
"They abandoned critical social programs, forcing hardworking citizens to endure hardship."

Across these examples, *they* marks political opponents as agents of economic collapse, moral corruption, and administrative neglect. Through such oppositional constructions, political conflict is framed as a moral dichotomy—*we* as reformers and custodians of progress, *they* as architects of disorder. This pattern aligns with Shafie et al.'s (2024) psychosemantic findings that *they* frequently carries affective and evaluative weight, activating distrust and moral disapproval among audiences.

4.4.2 Delegitimizing political opponents

Beyond negative representation, *they* is strategically deployed to delegitimize political opponents by undermining their competence, intentions, and moral standing. This function corresponds with Parashari's (2024) notion of the weaponization of reference, whereby pronouns operate as ideological instruments used to discredit adversaries and moralize political contestation. In the dataset, *they* is used not merely to denote opposition groups but to portray them as fundamentally unfit to govern:

"*They have shown time and again that they are not capable of managing the affairs of this nation.*"
"*They cannot claim to care about the ordinary Ghanaian when they spent years enriching themselves at the expense of the people.*"
"*They fought every meaningful reform we introduced.*"

These utterances attribute incompetence, corruption, and obstructionism to the out-group, positioning opponents as barriers to national development. In more condensed formulations such as *"They plunged the nation into crisis"* or *"They did not want you to enjoy free SHS"*—*they* functions as a carrier of broad moral indictment. Through repeated negative attribution, political opponents are discursively constructed as threats to citizens' welfare and national stability.

Importantly, *they* here is not merely referential but performative. By framing opponents as morally deficient and administratively irresponsible, the pronoun transforms political rivalry into moral conflict, implicitly elevating the speaker's own group as the legitimate guardian of national interest. This dynamic closely aligns with van Dijk's (2002) ideological square, in which negative other-presentation serves to legitimize in-group authority and political dominance.

4.4.3 Neutral versus adversarial uses

While *they* is predominantly adversarial in the dataset, it is important to distinguish this usage from neutral reference. In some contexts, *they* simply indexes absent third parties such as institutions, committees, or foreign actors without evaluative intent, as in:

"They met with the committee to discuss the budget."

Such neutral uses are deictic and informational. By contrast, adversarial uses dominate Ghanaian political discourse and are characterized by implicit judgment and ideological framing, as in:

"They say we cannot fix the country…"

Here, *they* constructs unnamed opponents as cynical detractors, reinforcing ideological distance. Tannen's (1993) framework of relational positioning helps explain this distinction: when *they* marks antagonism, it performs ideological work; when it merely identifies absent actors, it remains non-evaluative.

Observably, *they/them* functions as a powerful ideological boundary marker in Ghanaian political discourse. Through its strategic deployment, politicians construct opponents as morally deficient, administratively incompetent, or obstructive to national progress. These patterns align with key theoretical perspectives in political discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1998, 2002; Shafie et al., 2024; Parashari, 2024) and demonstrate how pronominal choices help organize political reality into polarized categories of "us" and "them," shaping public perceptions of legitimacy, authority, and national destiny.

4.5 He in personalizing political attack and opposition

While plural pronouns such as *they* typically construct collective adversaries, the singular pronoun *he* performs a distinct rhetorical function by personalizing political opposition. Through *he*, political actors isolate a specific individual, often an opposition leader, as the embodiment of political failure, ideological deviation, or moral irresponsibility. This personalization intensifies political attack by localizing blame in a recognizable figure, making critique more concrete, memorable, and emotionally resonant. Such usage reflects what Fairclough (2003) and Wodak (2015) describe as the individualization of political conflict, whereby systemic or party-level shortcomings are rhetorically condensed into the persona of a single adversary.

4.5.1 Singular Adversary Construction

In the dataset, *he* is frequently deployed to construct a singular political antagonist who symbolically represents the failures of an opposing party. This pattern is particularly evident in references to former President John Mahama, who is framed as the principal agent of economic decline or policy mismanagement. For example:

"Digging us out of the deep hole he plunged our country into was never going to be easy."

Here, *he* functions as a linguistic spotlight, directing attention toward a single individual as the source of national difficulty. This strategy aligns with van Dijk's (1998) observation that political actors often reduce complex institutional processes to individual agency in order to sharpen ideological contrast. By centering blame on one identifiable figure, speakers construct a simplified moral narrative: *we* as reformers versus *he* as the agent of decline. Such singularization also enhances cognitive accessibility. As Shafie et al. (2024) note, audiences tend to process narratives involving identifiable individuals more readily than those involving abstract collectives. The use of *he* therefore intensifies the persuasive impact of political messaging by transforming diffuse institutional critique into a personalized ideological confrontation.

4.5.2 Attaching blame and reinforcing moral failure

Beyond identifying an adversary, *he* carries strong evaluative force, serving as a vehicle for attributing blame and reinforcing narratives of moral or administrative failure. In Ghanaian political rhetoric, *he* frequently co-occurs with verbs of mismanagement or neglect, as illustrated by statements such as:

"He left the economy in shambles."
"He refused to invest in the nation's youth."

In these constructions, *he* operates as a discursive container for ideologically consequential actions, amplifying negative other-presentation in line with van Dijk's (2002) ideological square. The pronoun concentrates responsibility, allowing political actors to portray opposition leadership as inherently incompetent or irresponsible.

The moralizing function of *he* becomes especially salient when intentionality is implied, as in *"He did not want you to enjoy free SHS."* This formulation extends beyond policy disagreement to moral condemnation, attributing deliberate disregard for citizens' welfare to the opposition leader. Such personalization reflects broader theories of political blame attribution, whereby complex structural issues are simplified through individualized narratives that facilitate public judgment and emotional engagement (Wodak, 2015). It also aligns with Tannen's (1993) framework of relational positioning, in which linguistic choices encode relationships of power, culpability, and moral hierarchy.

In effect, *he* functions as a potent rhetorical resource in Ghanaian political discourse by enabling speakers to personalize ideological conflict and intensify political opposition. Through singular adversary construction and targeted blame attribution, politicians condense complex critiques into focused narratives centered on identifiable individuals. This strategic deployment heightens emotional resonance, sharpens partisan contrast, and reinforces moral distinctions between competing political identities, underscoring the central role of pronouns in structuring political meaning and persuasion.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that pronoun use in Ghanaian political discourse is profoundly multifunctional, operating simultaneously across identity construction, persuasion, and ideological positioning. This aligns with long-standing discourse scholarship showing that political meaning is often structured through subtle grammatical choices, particularly pronouns that organize social relations and interpretive frames (Bramley, 2001; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1998, 2002; Wodak, 2015). In the Ghanaian context, pronouns function not merely as referential devices but as semiotic resources through which political actors project leadership identities, mobilize publics, and position opponents within broader ideological struggles.

Consistent with interactional pragmatics and political communication research, pronouns enact overlapping communicative functions rather than discrete tasks. The inclusive pronoun *we* exemplifies flexible collectivization (De Fina, 1995; Mah-e-Rab & Tahir, 2025), shifting between partisan, governmental, and national referents to construct solidarity and delineate in-groups. The singular *I* reflects the personalization of politics (Garzia, 2011), enabling leaders to foreground ethos, moral credibility, and decisive agency while selectively distancing themselves from institutional failure. The second-person *you*, in line with Kukla (2018) and Sanni (2023), functions as an interpellative resource that positions citizens as morally accountable actors, rendering political participation both personal and obligatory.

Adversarial pronouns *they* and *he* reproduce ideological polarization by constructing political "others," personalizing blame, and moralizing contestation. These patterns align with van Dijk's (1998, 2002) ideological square, Shafie et al.'s (2024) psychosemantic analysis of opposition, and Parashari's (2024) notion of the weaponization of reference. In Ghanaian political rhetoric, such strategies transform ideological disagreement into moral judgment, framing political conflict in emotionally resonant and cognitively accessible terms.

Taken together, these patterns show that identity work, persuasion, and ideology are interwoven layers of political meaning-making rather than sequential processes. As scholars of political discourse argue, meaning emerges through the coordinated deployment of relational, epistemic, and ideological markers (Chilton, 2004; van Leeuwen, 2008). This integration is evident in utterances such as *"They plunged the nation into crisis, and we must fix it,"* where pronoun

choice simultaneously constructs opposing identities, mobilizes collective responsibility, and reinforces a binary ideological narrative. Such usage reflects the fluidity of identity performance in African political rhetoric (Sanni, 2023).

Within Ghanaian political communication, pronouns function as coordination devices that allow speakers to address multiple audiences simultaneously. *We/us* delineates political community (Fairclough, 2003), *I* enables the performance of leadership (Garzia, 2011), *you* activates moral accountability (Bell, 1984; Tannen, 1993), and *they/he* reinforce ideological antagonism (van Dijk, 1998, 2002). Through these strategies, politicians manage alignment and distance, claim achievement and assign blame, and project authority while calling for collective action, processes central to the discursive construction of political legitimacy (Wodak, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This study examined the pragmatic and ideological functions of personal pronouns in Ghanaian political discourse, demonstrating that pronominal choice is a central mechanism through which political actors construct identities, mobilize publics, and articulate ideological divisions. The analysis showed that *we* constructs collective identities across partisan and national contexts; *I* functions as a marker of leadership ethos and moral authority; *you* interpellates citizens into roles of shared national responsibility; and *they* and *he* operate as ideological boundary markers that personalize and intensify political opposition. These findings underscore the multifunctional capacity of pronouns to coordinate identity, persuasion, and ideology within Ghana's competitive democratic environment.

6.1 Recommendations and Unique Contributions to Theory, Practice and Policy

From a theoretical perspective, the study expands existing scholarship on political discourse by demonstrating that pronouns should be understood not merely as grammatical markers but as strategic communicative resources that structure ideological narratives and political identities in democratic contexts, particularly within African political communication. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of linguistic awareness in political communication. Political actors, journalists, and communication professionals should recognize how subtle pronominal choices influence public perception, frame political responsibility, and shape narratives of legitimacy and opposition. From a policy perspective, the study underscores the value of promoting responsible and reflective political communication practices within democratic systems. Awareness of how pronouns contribute to ideological polarization may help encourage more constructive political discourse that emphasizes collective responsibility and civic engagement.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the research, authorship, or publication of this article. The study was conducted independently, and no external party influenced the analysis, interpretation, or conclusions presented.
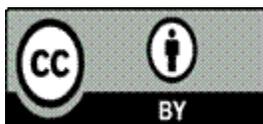
Funding Statement

References

Abubakar, I. (2022). *The Pronoun 'We' and Ideological Commitment: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of the Manifestoes of the two Major Ghanaian Political Parties* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Coast).

Adebomi, O. O. (2025). A digito-linguistic analysis of the 2019 Democracy Day speech of former Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari. *African Identities*, *23*(3), 737-755.

Ali Akbari Hamed, L., & Behnam, B. (2020). Linguistic Devices of Identity Representation in English Political Discourse with a Focus on Personal Pronouns: Power and Solidarity. *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, *13*(26), 205-229.

Alavidze, M. (2017). The use of pronouns in political discourse. *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 9(4), 349-356. http://www.universitypublications.net/ijas/0904/html/R6ME325.xml

Bans-Akutey, A., & Tiimub, B. M. (2021). Triangulation in research. *Academia Letters*, *2*(3392), 1-7.

Bell, A. (1984). Language style as audience design. *Language in society*, *13*(2), 145-204.

Bramley, N. R. (2001). *Pronouns of politics: the use of pronouns in the construction of 'self' and 'other' in political interviews* (thesis). Canberra: Australian National University.

Brown, R., & Gilman, A. (2012). The pronouns of power and solidarity. In *Readings in the Sociology of Language* (pp. 252-275). De Gruyter Mouton.

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

De Fina, A. (1995). Pronominal choice, identity, and solidarity in political discourse. *Text & Talk, 15*(3), 379–410.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.

Fosu, M. (2014). *The press and political participation: Newspapers and the politics of linguistic exclusion and inclusion in Ghana* (Doctoral dissertation), University of Leeds.

Garzia, D. (2011). The personalization of politics in Western democracies: Causes and consequences on leader–follower relationships. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *22*(4), 697-709.

Goundar, P. R. (2025). Researcher Positionality: ways to include it in a qualitative research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *24*, 16094069251321251.

Jacobson, D., & Mustafa, N. (2019). Social identity map: A reflexivity tool for practicing explicit positionality in critical qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, *18*, 1609406919870075.

Kim, S. (2024). Intersectional positionalities across gender, race, ethnicity and immigrant status in qualitative interviews. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *37*(6), 1687-1703.

Kukla, R. (2018). Slurs, interpellation, and ideology. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *56*, 7-32.

Mah-e-Rab, H., & Tahir, S. (2025). An analysis of self-reflective pronouns in political speeches: a case study of pakistan. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, *8*(1), 1270-1280.

Obeng, S. G. (2020). Grammatical pragmatics: Language, power and liberty in Ghanaian political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, *31*(1), 85-105.

Osisanwo, A. (2017). I belong to everybody yet to nobody: pragmatic acts in President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, *3*(4), 297-320.

Parashari, N. K. (2024). Language, Power and Politics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Speeches. *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, *12*(1), 349–352. https://doi.org/10.35629/9467-1201349352

Romadlani, M. M. I. (2024). Personal Pronouns in Biden's Inaugural Speech: A Critical Discourse Perspective. *Journal of Language and Literature*, *24*(1), 252-262.

Sanni, O. (2023). Exploring Multiple Identities in Barack Obama's Speeches to the African and Arab Audience. *Applied Linguistics Papers*, *4/2023*(27), 46–60. https://doi.org/10.32612/uw.25449354.2023.4.pp.46-60

Shafie, R. S., Adna, W. H., Suppiah, P. C., & Yassin, Y. M. (2024). Psychosemantics of "Us" and "Them" in social media warfare. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, *16*(2), 65-81.

Szabó, L. P. (2025). Making a cardinal point: The conceptualization of east and west in Hungarian public discourse. *Metaphor and symbol*, *40*(2), 140-152.

Tannen, D., 1993. The relativity of linguistic strategies: rethinking power and solidarity in gender and dominance. In: Deborah Tannen (Eds.), *Gender and Conversational Interaction*. Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford.

van Dijk T.A. (1998). *What is political discourse analysis? Political linguistics Amsterdam*: Benjamins

Van Dijk, T. A. (2002). Political discourse and political cognition. In *Politics as text and talk: Analytic approaches to political discourse* (pp. 203-237). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford university press.

Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.