

**Covid-19 and its Influence on the Political Speeches: A Discourse  
Analysis Study of the Use of Pronouns in Selected Presidential Speeches  
as a Model to Training EFL Postgraduate Students**

**By**

**Assist. Prof.Dr. Ali Sabah Jameel Al-Khayyat**

**Department of English, College of Arts, University of Anbar, Iraq**

**And**

**Assist. Instructor. Maha Majeed Anber**

**Department of English, College of Education for Humanities, University of Anbar,  
Iraq**

## **Abstract**

Although investigating the role of pronouns in formulating specific socio- political ideologies is not new, the influence of the Covid-19 on the leaders, politicians and presidents contributes in creating controversial speeches which are similar in the timing of their issuance, their goals, and their objectivity in introducing the unprecedented crisis of Covid-19. Discourse analysis is required in such study to analyze two political speeches which are chosen arbitrarily, the American president: Trump's speech, and the French president, Macron's speech. Many linguistic strategies are employed in the two speeches, but the concentration of the study will be on the pronouns, especially the personal pronouns *I*, *We*, and *You*. The study is not comparative study as much as it is a way to reveal to what extent the two presidents use the personal pronouns to display the ability or inability to take responsibility for fighting Covid-19 along with spreading a specific ideology adopted by each president.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, pandemic, discourse analysis, presidential language, personal pronouns.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the appearance of Covid-19 "coronavirus disease of 2019", the essence of the presidential language has changed. The virus, to which there is no vaccination until this moment, spreads with incredible quickness between people which result in hundreds of thousands of infected people worldwide. (MphOnline, 2020). Fear is the results of the Covid-19, (Nee Lee, 2020). Therefore, the

language employed by the presidents does not simply convey the information that it overtly indicates. Language is, as asserted by Wodak (2001), a mediator of social dominance and power to reveal the intended hidden ideologies. In political speeches, it is crucial to know who, what is represented, and to whom. (Goffman, 1981:145).

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Due to Covid-19 severity, lockdown and travel restrictions have been put by most of the countries. Addressing people with accurate informative speeches is the Presidents' first responsibility. But, there is a considerable gulf between formal and informal English in the choice of pronoun forms which result in the occurrence of the difficulties of personal pronoun usage. Therefore, exact interpretation of the politician speeches is the expected consequences of such difficulties.

### **1.2. Aim of the Study:**

The aim of the study is revealing president of America: President Trump, and president of France : president Macron awareness of the use of pronouns in addressing their people concerning COVID-19 pandemic, and whether to what extent the presidents' sense of responsibility is sometimes revealed through the use of pronouns through COVID-19 pandemic in particular, and formulating the people's ideas and motivations about COVID-19 pandemic to be corresponding the political status of their countries in general.

### **1.3. Questions of the Study**

To achieve the aim of the study, the researcher set the following questions:

- 1- To what extent do president Trump's, president Macron, use pronouns in their speeches about COVID-19.
- 2- Are President Trump and president Macron aware of the various uses of pronouns and its significant role in creating the wanted ideology.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

Considering the implied meanings of pronouns is crucial in the educational and political institutions. It is a significant necessity for teachers, translators, politicians and linguists to have a satisfying background in the exact use of pronouns other than what is traditionally taught in schools and universities.

### **1.5. Limits of the Study**

1. Out of all presidents who address their people about COVID-19, only two presidents' speeches are chosen arbitrarily
2. The study does not focus on all types of pronouns, but only personal pronouns are under the investigation of the study.

- 1- Because the pandemic has not yet reached its end, the result only how it has affected their speeches at a specific period of time and cannot be generalized for how Covid-19 completely affected the presidents' language.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Previous Studies**

the use of pronouns has also been examined to some extent by Jasim (2013) in which an investigation of the use of in-group and out-group pronouns in the political discourse is made by analyzing one speech by one president in a repeated political event which is a revolution. In this study, two speeches by two different presidents about an unprecedented crisis which is Covid-19 are analyzed. Hasan (2013) concludes the significance of the use of first person pronouns in persuasion, while in this study the core of the attention is the role of every pronoun in creating the wanted ideology since pronouns might imply meanings other than what are traditionally known.

### **2.2. Discourse Analysis and Political Discourse**

When analyzing a text, discourse analysis can be applied. Discourse analysis involves analyzing and studying whole texts (McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006:113). Discourse is the context in which written or spoken texts are created and uttered (Fairclough, 2015:56). In this study, the context is political discourse. Politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behavior and often to control their values. Politicians throughout ages have achieved success through their "skillful use of rhetoric", by which they aim to persuade their audience of the validity of their views, delicate and careful use of elegant and persuasive language. Rhetoric is "the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others; the body of rules to be observed by a speaker or writer in order that he may express himself with eloquence" (Jones and Peccei, 2004:71). Thomas and Wareing (2000:34) see that to control the way people think, and by controlling the discourse one can control how the audience think by using language. In discourse analysis, searching for patterns of language use is customary and in the present work, the patterns which are looked for are the usage of personal pronouns. Personal pronouns which are concentrated on in this study are: *I, We, You*.

### **2.3. The Use of Pronouns**

According to (Wales, 1996), the pronoun could be used as a substitution for a noun or a noun phrase. When looked at as an abstract category, pronouns are categorized as empty signs, but when used in context significant meaning is added to discourse (Fairclough, 2015:140).

in a political speech , pronoun is a device with importance to the persuasiveness of the speech (Beard, 2000).The use of pronouns reveals to what extent the speaker is responsible for his/ her ideas or actions. For instance, while the first person plural pronoun '*we*' add ambiguity in declaring clearly who is responsible for an action or an idea, the status of responsibility will be clear by using the first person singular pronoun '*I*' (Jones &Wareing, 1999: 46).

Charteris-Black, (2005: 4) give a clarification that the use of pronoun '*we*', implies the sharing of interests between speaker and audience.In addition to that,using the pronoun '*we*' is a good sign because it carries an indication of compromised relations with positive solutions ( Beattie, 2011).

Halliday & Hasan, (1976: 53) state that '*we*' is also used to imply "a particular group of individuals with which the speaker wishes to identify himself".Beard,(2000: 24) declares that the sense of inclusion and exclusion will be conveyed to the hearer by the personal pronoun '*we*' "The inclusive '*we*' carries a clear sign to the speaker and the addressee, while in the exclusive '*we*' there is a prominent reference to the speaker and others, but not the addressee, (Fairclough, 2015 :143).

Pennycook announces that the tendency of overusing the exclusive and inclusive *we* in political speeches results in a sense of authority and vagueness (1993:175). A distinguished interpretation of the widespread of using '*we*' in political speech is due to expressing power and authority of the speaker alone excluding the addressees and the non-addressees. Additionally, using '*we*' pronoun enhances the polite communication between the addressee and the speaker since using '*we*' indicates lessening any threat to the hearer's feelings,(Brown and Levinson, 1987:202).

As for the use of pronoun '*you*',Beattie (2011) clarifies that using '*you*' pronoun is a bad sign since it reveals that the relationship is negative and full of disagreement, criticism, justification, and negative attitudes.

### **3. Analysis and Results Discussion**

By analyzing the two speeches, Trump's and Cameron's speeches, quantitatively and qualitatively, the percentages of the results are shown in the following two tables:

**Table (1) the percentages of using personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘We’, ‘You’ by President Trump and President Macron.**

	<b>‘I’</b>	<b>‘we’</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Total</b>
President Trump’	25%	57,2%	17,8%	100%
President Macron,	31,4%	38%	30,6%	100%

**Table (2) the percentages of using inclusive and exclusive ‘We’ by President Trump and President Macron.**

	<b>Inclusive ‘we’</b>	<b>Exclusive ‘we’</b>
President Trump’	37,5%	62,5%
President Macron,	59,6%	40,4%

- The president of France has the lion’s share in using pronoun ‘you’, with (30,6%) percentage, while the American president’s use of pronoun ‘you’ does not exceed (17,8%). Mr. Trump’s ‘you’ pronouns imply justification meanings. Such as:

*Every community faces different risks and it is critical for you to follow the guidelines of your local officials who are working closely with our federal health experts — and they are the best. (President Trump’s Speech March 11, 2020)*

- But there are many ‘you’ pronouns in the French’s president revealing hidden criticism. Such as

*Up until that point, for some of you the epidemic was maybe a distant notion; it has become an immediate and pressing reality ”(President M. Emmanuel Macron, 16 March 2020).*

- President Trump uses ‘I’ pronoun, which is less than those of president Macron, is a declaration that holds him fully responsible for the welfare and protection of his people during Covid-19.

*“I have decided to take several strong but necessary actions to protect the health and wellbeing of all Americans”.*(President Trump’s Speech March 11, 2020)

- Most of President of France’s use of pronoun “I” carries gratitude to his people, blame for violating conditions of lockdown, and to expressions of his own feelings and attitudes about the situation.

*“I’ve therefore decided that, as of tomorrow, taxis and hotels can be made available for them”*(President M. Emmanuel Macron, 16 March 2020)

*“I am appealing to your sense of responsibility and solidarity”.*”(President M. Emmanuel Macron, 16 March 2020).

- ‘We’ pronoun is used largely by President Trump. He has the largest percentage in using exclusive ‘we’,
- While inclusive ‘we’ is used widely by president Macron with (59,6% ) percentage,, exclusive ‘we’ seems the best choice of the American president with percentage of (62,5% ).
- In Macron’s speech, a hidden denunciation of some people’s indifference of COVID-19 might be reduced via using exclusive ‘we’ But in Trump’s speech exclusive ‘we’ involved reassuring people and enhancing their confidence in their government as in :

*“We also saw people gathering in parks, packed markets, restaurants and bars which did not respect the instructions to close.”*(President M. Emmanuel Macron, 16 March 2020)

*“We will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens and we will ultimately and expeditiously defeat this virus”.*(President Trump’s Speech March 11, 2020)

- As for inclusive ‘we’ by president Trump, it shows high confidence and sincere encouragement for his people, while some orders and instructions is softened by using inclusive ‘we’ by president Macron as in:

*This is not a financial crisis; this is just a temporary moment of time that we will overcome together as a nation and as a world. .(President Trump’s Speech March 11, 2020)*

*We must show solidarity and a sense of responsibility. President M. Emmanuel Macron, 16 March 2020).*

- Through the context, it is easy to distinguish between the exclusive ‘we’ and the ‘we’ which stands for (I+ powerful) which is used exclusively by Trump as in :

*“We declared a public health emergency and issued the highest level of travel warning on other countries as the virus spread its horrible infection”.*

*.(President Trump’s Speech March 11, 2020)*

- In the French president’s speech, the oscillation between using ‘You’ pronoun which implies criticism and negative attitudes, and the use of inclusive ‘we’ which signify unity, might be an indication of weakness and surrender in creating the wanted attitudes to create the specific ideology.
- President Trump is stable in his way of using exclusive ‘we’ which implies domination and power. There is no hesitation or inconsistency in his views. Confidence and power characterizes his speech in undeniable way. Any aggressiveness in his speech is not directed towards his people as the French president did, the implied enemy is clear in his speech which *China* in addition to Covid- 19.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- Covid-19 creates political speeches in which there is no chance for giving misleading information or for agitating masses.

- In the declaration of Covid-19, objectivity distinguishes the political speeches regardless of the economic, political and social situations of the country.
- No president can address his people in a way that does not coincide with his country's economic, political and social reality.

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