GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

ENGLISH

Pronouns, Agency, and References in US State of the Union Speeches

A CDA-Inspired Study

Toni Halmetoja

Abstract

Title: Pronouns, Agency, and References in US State of the Union Speeches: A CDA-Inspired Study

Author: Toni Halmetoja

Supervisor: Joe Trotta

Course: EN2D03, spring 2015, Department of Languages and Literatures, University of Gothenburg

This essay examines the use of pronouns, agency and a few chosen references in US State of the Union addresses. The material consists of a corpus of a total of eight speeches, four of which are from recent presidents Obama and G.W. Bush, and four from presidents of earlier periods, Kennedy and Nixon. The results are compared with respect to political parties, and a sample examination of how the discourse may have changed with time is performed. Drawing on methodology influenced by Fairclough's ideas of Critical Discourse Analysis and Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Theory, the study finds certain patterns in how actors are presented in the material, such as the presentation of fictionalized accounts of individuals in newer speeches, and attempts to explain these as well as expand understanding of what may be important areas to research further.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The language of politics and politicians is always a fruitful subject of study for discourse analysis. Few other genres of discourse provide quite the same plethora of agendas, ideologies, rhetoric and conflicts of interest. Having said that, all forms of discourse certainly have these features; for example, Fairclough claims that every type of discourse "embodies certain ideologies - particular knowledge and beliefs, particular 'positions' for the types of social subject that participate in that practice" (1995: 94). Political discourse includes these as well, to an even higher degree. Van Dijk justifies Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, studies of political discourse by simply observing that the role of political discourse is "the enactment, reproduction, and legitimization of power and dominance" (2001: 360). For a fuller explanation of what CDA entails, see section 4.1.

There is little doubt, then, that political speeches should be analysed in a critical fashion, to strip away the surface layers and see what ideologies they present, and how sociocultural practices influence and are influenced by them. There is relatively little chance of doing this with full objectivity, however, as Van Dijk explains, "Unlike much other scholarship, CDA does not deny but explicitly defines and defends its own socio-political position. That is, CDA is biased – and proud of it" (2003: 96). This is not to say that the present study is unduly subjective, as every effort has been taken to analyse the data objectively regardless of the author's own position, but some bias may have crept into the results due to the nature of the methods used. It should be noted, however that the method used is not one purely based on CDA, but rather a custom one more suited for a limited-variable study such as the present one, heavily inspired by Fairclough and van Leeuwen. For further clarification, see section 5 below.

The kinds of ideologies that CDA seeks to uncover are conveyed in politics through many different ways. For example, in an analysis of the UK's former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's speeches, Wodak and Fairclough found specific uses of pronouns for inclusion and exclusion. The speeches also featured combinations of conservative and liberal discourse, for a populist appeal (1997: 272), though she avoids the word *populist* herself. Studies on how agency is used in various forms of discourse are plentiful. There are, however, few studies that combine the study of agency with the study of pronouns; when studying what actors are presented, studying what role these actors are allocated seems naturally connected to the subject. This combined approach, then, is something I have not been able to find any studies on, at least not within US political discourse. The connection seems natural, however. If

studying the social actors presented, it seems pertinent to also study the processes these actors are involved in, and vice versa, as a process rarely happens without an agent (and when it does, the exclusion itself is significant). Indeed, van Leeuwen mentions the role of both pronouns and agency in his social actor theory. Indetermination is the practice of presenting social actors as groups of anonymous individuals "whose interests do not matter", and is often realized with the pronoun *they* (2009, 283). On agency, van Leeuwen observes that (critical) linguists felt that the encoding of "different patterns of experience" is not done merely with vocabulary – he presents the famous *freedom fighter* vs. *terrorist* example as an illustration – but also through grammatical structures, which construct agency and causality, presenting occurrences in different light depending on who is presented as agent and who as patient (280). Thus, it appears that pronouns and agency and how they are interlinked in political discourse should be studied further, as they certainly can affect what ideologies are constructed within speeches.

This essay examines the speeches of two recent US presidents, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, and takes a shorter look at those of two presidents from earlier periods, John Kennedy and Richard Nixon, in order to observe how social actors are presented in terms of pronouns and agency, as well as a few key recurring terms of reference (*terrorist* and *communist* being the most common), and what manner of portrayal of these actors this creates in political discourse. This is done considering both differences based on party membership (Democrats or Republicans) as well as differences likely based on the period, and the socio-political atmosphere of the times. Certain tendencies and patterns are observed and presented, although they are not entirely conclusive.

2. Aim and Research Question

This essay primarily concerns itself with the usage of pronouns and agency in political speeches, and how these may reflect hidden ideologies, power relations and the inclusion/exclusion of groups. The results are compared between the major political parties of the US, in this case Democrats and Republicans, to see how they are used differently. Obama, for example, is well-known for his inclusive rhetoric, whereas a short survey of G.W. Bush's – henceforward referred to simply as Bush – speeches reveals a more exclusive style of discourse, in which Bush distances groups from their actions. The question, then, is what kind of reality these presidents present in order to accomplish their political tasks; what groups are

given agency, and how does the use of pronouns – or other ways of referring to groups of people – play into this?

The study also performs a diachronic comparison in order to see how rhetoric may have changed; one might, at least initially, suspect that American political rhetoric became more divisive after the terrorist attacks on World Trade Centre. This "us and them" manner of division has been well-documented in post-9/11 speeches (see for example Oddo, 2011), but exactly how different is it compared to previous speeches, and has the rhetoric normalized now, more than thirteen years after the fact? Additionally, the study examines whether or not the parties have diverged or converged; American politics have always been very polarized, but there is no set distance the parties have from each other. Therefore, this study also examines how the discourse has changed with time.

To summarize, the research questions are as follows;

1) Are social actors presented differently in political discourse, with regard to pronouns, references and agency, and why is this the case?
2) Does the presentation of social groups differ between the parties in US politics?
3) Has this presentation changed with time, and if so, why?

The aim, in turn, is to analyse how ideologies could possibly present themselves through the way pronouns and agency are used in political discourse, and whether or not this changes depending on the party and time.

3. Material

The material chosen is the last two State of the Union speeches of Obama (2014 and 2015), Bush (2007 and 2008), Kennedy (1962 and 1963) and Nixon (1972 and 1974), retrieved from The American Presidency Project (http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sou.php). The reason for choosing State of the Union speeches as opposed to other speeches is mainly their general nature and the fact that all presidents (or rather, their respective speechwriters) reliably produce these speeches, since they are mandated by the US constitution. They address the situation of the country, though with a rather broad scope. This is in contrast to specific speeches, such as declarations of war or State of Emergency speeches, which may or may not be produced, depending on the time of presidency. This provides the study with a stable

source of material that can be analysed and compared with other political speeches, which may differ in overall content.

In addition to this, the speeches often present various social groups, either in a positive or negative light, including America itself, and the distinction between these groups is accomplished in a variety of different ways. The speeches are full of ideologies performed through discourse, both obvious and hidden, and provide a fairly neutral ground for presidents to convince people, convincing being another key aspect of CDA. In fact, this is what the speeches appear to do more than simply present the current status; there are many attempts from both the parties to convince the public to lend their good will to the current projects and thus justify them for the general populace.

These are the reasons these speeches were chosen. However, there is at least one aspect that cannot be studied; the fact is that since the US has not had any female presidents, the study cannot take a gender perspective on the differences. There is a theoretical possibility of doing one, however, as speeches are not generally written by the politicians themselves, but rather speechwriters. They, however, adapt their writing to match the image that the president has, meaning that results would likely not be applicable from a gender perspective regardless. Therefore, given the limited scope of this study, such a perspective is not considered here. The same issue applies to other social variables such as age and ethnicity. Again, as the speeches are not typically produced by the presidents themselves, knowing how the age of the writer has affected the speech is difficult. Granted, the speeches may reflect the president's age or ethnicity to meet audience expectations, but these differences would have to be considered manufactured and not genuine. Ultimately, the essay does not consider social variables other than political party membership, for the reasons mentioned.

The selection of speeches does not result in a perfectly equal number of words, but the completeness of speeches is important for this essay, and therefore the full speeches are analysed. The exact numbers of words analysed is 46188, divided amongst presidents as follows:

Table 1 – An Overview of the Speeches

	Democrats				Republicans			
	Obama		Kennedy		Bush		Nixon	
Year	2014	2015	1962	1963	2007	2008	1972	1974
Words	7003	6758	6573	5396	5555	5706	3997	5185
Total	13776		11969		11261		9182	

As illustrated by the table above, Nixon's speeches are the shortest by a fair margin, whereas Obama's are the longest overall. This should not matter, however, as the essay does not take the absolute quantity of the variables into account, but rather a relative one. Given the choice of cutting out parts of these addresses or analysing them as they are, the latter seems to be the more academically sound option.

3.1. The Variables

This study examines a variety of pronouns. However, in order to keep the amount of data at a manageable size, the variables are limited to personal pronouns. The justification is simply that these are the most plentiful, and provide enough data for a study of this scale, while also being highly relevant when it comes to inclusion/exclusion and other such phenomena. Granted, other pronouns, such as demonstratives, would also be interesting to take into account, but this is best left for separate, larger projects, as they are more difficult to analyse. See section 8 for suggestions on further research. The study also considers agency and certain references, but pronouns are the quantifiable variables that provide the context for analysis of agency in this study.

4. Theoretical Background

4.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Previously called Critical Linguistics, CDA is typically concerned with language as it is used in order to enact power, discrimination or inequality, and ideologies. While it is typically accredited to Norman Fairclough, some of the ideas span as far back as before the Second World War (Van Dijk 2001: 352). It is not an objective science, and tends to take a stance in regard to whatever social injustices it seeks to expose. The idea that discourse is influenced by society and culture, and therefore biased, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is a central

one in CDA. Wodak and Meyer identify three essential concepts in CDA; the concept of power, the concept of history, and the concept of ideology (2001: 3). Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-280) offer a somewhat longer list of key tenets, as reproduced below.

1) CDA addresses social problems
2) Power relations are discursive
3) Discourse constitutes society and culture
4) Discourse does ideological work
5) Discourse is historical
6) The link between text and society is mediated
7) Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8) Discourse is a form of social action

Indeed, the key concepts and tenets appear to make it ideal for an analysis of political discourse. Political discourse does have much to do with power, history and ideology, and thus CDA is ideal for revealing any underlying agendas.

Van Leeuwen has a similar summary of what CDA is. According to him, CDA is based on the idea that discourse plays a key role in maintaining inequalities and other such social issues. Van Leeuwen also states that while CDA primarily uses discourse analysis methods, it does not limit itself to any single method in particular, hence the existence of various models (2009: 277). Additionally, CDA also employs critical social theory, work mainly pioneered by Fairclough in connecting CDA to critical social theories influenced by Marx, Gramsci, Foucault and others (Van Leeuwen 2009: 278).

To summarize, CDA could perhaps best be described as a way of analysing the political, social and ideological aspects of language use. Effectively, one attempts to penetrate the surface of discourse to reveal what exactly is implied, what type of world is presupposed, and how the text is angled in terms of ideology. According to Janks, the purpose is to "explain the relationship between language, ideology and power by analysing discourse in its material form" (Janks 1997: 195). As it relates to this essay, given that politics could be argued to be the perfect mixture of these – power relations, ideology, presuppositions and the general acts of inclusion, exclusion and blame relegation – CDA appears to be the natural choice for analysing it.

4.2. Fairclough's Framework

Fairclough's three-part model of discourse analysis (1989, 1995) consists of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. These are then analysed through text analysis, process analysis and social analysis. A short summary of these three dimensions follows below.

- Textual analysis is relatively simple. Here, one analyses the text itself and observes what meanings are expressed in grammar, vocabulary, semantics and so on. The textual analysis also includes constructions of identities as well as representations of social actors and processes.
- Process analysis refers to how the text was produced and received and how this has affected it. This involves asking when and where and text was produced, as well as how other discourse has affected it.
- Social analysis, or the explanation, is the attempt to answer why the discourse takes the form it does. The analysis here is based on cultural aspects, including ideological and political ones, and how the discourse is shaped by them and attempts to also shape them. In other words, this is the final step where the ideologies are hopefully explained.

While Fairclough's model is fairly comprehensive, others go into more detail on how exactly textual analysis could be done, and are equally useful and important for an essay focusing on a few variables, such as the present one. Such examples would include, for example, van Leeuwen's social actor theory, discussed in section 4.3.

4.3. Social Actor Theory

Van Leeuwen's social actor theory is a framework for analysing representations of actors and their actions. The question he seeks to answer is "How can we represent social actors?" (2009: 181) which is an important question for the present study. The relevant elements of how actors are represented are presented below. While there are more processes in van Leeuwen's theory, not all of them appear in the material used by the present study. The full list can be found in Van Leeuwen's article "Critical Discourse Analysis" (2009).

- *Exclusion*. Actors can be excluded entirely, which van Leeuwen classifies as either innocent (reader knowledge is presumed) or problematic (preventing a full understanding of the situation. This can be systemic.

- *Role allocation*. This refers to the activation or passivizing of actors, i.e. whether or not they are the agent or the patient, the doer or the passive party.

- *Generic and specific reference*, the practice of generalizing actors and presenting them as a type or class of people rather than individuals. This, according to van Leeuwen, plays a large role in establishing the "us" and "them" groups, and is of course relevant to this study on pronouns also. Leeuwen's example of this is "non-European immigrants" (Leeuwen 2009:282).

- *Assimilation/Individualization*. Assimilation is the practice of representing social actors as groups (of similar individuals). This, then, can result in stereotyping of very heterogeneous groups. Van Leeuwen distinguishes between *aggregation* and *collectivization*, where the former is characterized by representing groups with definite or indefinite quantifiers (such as "immigrants"), and the latter by representing groups with words that express group identities (such as "community"). The opposite of assimilation is *individualization*, where these social actors are instead represented as individuals.

- *Indetermination and differentiation*. Indetermination occurs when groups are presented as anonymous groups, typically through the use of plural pronouns such as "some" or "they". Differentiation, in turn, is the differentiation of two (similar) groups, again something used to foster an "us" versus "them" mentality.

- *Functionalization and identification.* Functionalization is the presentation of social actors in terms of their activities and actions, such as *interviewer.* Identification, in turns, is representing social actors by major identity categories (such as *child),* their identity as it relates to the speaker, or simply their physical characteristics.

- *Personalization and impersonalization.* These, as presented by van Leeuwen, refer to either presenting inanimate social actors as human beings, and vice versa, that is, representing humans by qualities. Examples of the former include presenting countries as having certain attributes when they in fact apply to the population, or leaving out the de-facto agent and therefore avoid assigning agency, such as "The bullet killed him".

It is worth noting that these practices can and tend to be combined; for example, referring to a group as *terrorists* or *they* without further details seems to be functionalization, assimilation and even indetermination, all at once. To sum up van Leeuwen's model, then: the way that we represent social actors in discourse can vary depending on what manner of ideology is

presented. Given the nature of political speeches, one can expect most of these features to be present, and while it would certainly be interesting to make a larger-scale study of all features in a large corpus of speeches, this is outside the scope of a study of this size, and it instead focuses on a the key aspects of pronouns, agency and a few notable other phenomena used to refer to social actors. However, the study does utilize this model as far as it applies to the results.

4.5. Pronouns and Other Ways to Refer

One main aspect of pronouns is their ability to *include* or *exclude.* These are best illustrated by the inclusive and exclusive *we*, which for example the United Kingdom's former prime minister Blair was observed using, where the inclusive *we* refers to the people, whereas the exclusive *we* refers to the government (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 133). Other pronouns can, of course, also do this, such as *us* and *them*, where one is almost always inclusive and the other exclusive, though exceptions do of course exist. The pronoun *you* can be used to create a feeling of familiarity between politician and population, whereas *one* can be used for the opposite effect. Van Leeuwen's social actor theory illustrates the ways that groups can be referred to; while pronouns naturally perform a large part of such presentation, it is perhaps more interesting to view them in contrast to other ways of referring.

It is worth noting that this study ventures outside merely pronouns, and also looks a few frequently recurring politically charged "otherizing" examples that have been selectively chosen, such as the *terrorists.* While calling a group "terrorists" is certainly negatively charged, stripping a group of any identity by merely referring to them as *them* can carry a certain negative load by itself, depending on the context. The choice of how a group is presented, then, either performs generic or specific reference with indetermination, or (negative) functionalization, viewing a group strictly from their perceived negative qualities or actions. Of course, this is hardly restricted to simply the notion of terrorists; a political party could call another "them", performing indetermination, i.e. presenting the other side as an anonymous group who all share the same (negative) qualities.

4.6. Agency

Agency refers, in this context, to which parties are presented as the doers and who are presented as the passive party, in turn. There are a variety of ways to accomplish this in discourse, for example: "In one sense of *subject*, one is referring to someone who is under the

12

jurisdiction of a political authority, and hence passive and shaped: but the *subject* of a sentence, for instance, is usually the active one, the 'doer', the one causally implicated in action (Fairclough 1989: 39)." This is the how the word *passive* is used in the present essay.

The key point here is which groups are given agency and which are stripped of theirs. For example, in Bush's speech on 9/11, the terrorists are not given any true agency; America's freedom "came under attack", which entirely avoids mentioning the agent, arguably allocating them a passive role in the sense that the word is used in the present study. America itself, however, is undoubtedly presented as the active party later in the speech, even though this was hardly the case; Bush "implemented our government's emergency response plans", "the search is underway for those who were behind these evil acts", and so on. Even though this particular speech is not analysed in this essay, it is a good illustration of how the actual initiator of the conflict is downplayed and stripped of agency, whereas the in-fact initially passive party, the victim, is presented as the doer of all positive actions, therefore regaining a fragment of the agency and prestige lost by not being proactive enough to stop such attacks.

Van Leeuwen gives a few example of how agency can be manipulated to provide a different interpretation of a situation. Two of them are as follows: "Rhodesian police killed thirteen unarmed Africans" and "Thirteen demonstrators died when police opened fire" (2009: 280). In the first sentence, then, the police are given agency, although in a very negative way; here, they are responsible for directly causing the death of the demonstrators. In sentence two we can observe the difference. Instead of directly causing the deaths, the deaths happened at the same time as the police opened fire. Van Leeuwen calls this representing the police action as "circumstance", rather than cause of death. A third example he gives is an example where all agency has been removed, as well as all involved parties, obscuring nearly everything: "A political clash has led to death and injury" (2009: 281). In this version, absolutely no blame is delegated to anyone, no agency is given, and the entirely situation is presented in a very different light.

It is worth noting that while agency is usually positive – that is, the actors the speaker holds in a favourable light are presented as agents and doers – this is not exclusively the case; occasionally, negative agency can be found in the analysed material. This is fairly rare, but will nonetheless be commented upon when it occurs.

5.   Method

5.1. Framework

The most common model for doing CDA would be that of Fairclough (see section 4.2). The model is as follows; there are three dimensions of discourse that should be analysed; the text itself, the processes of production and reception, and the sociocultural practices that govern these. These are then analysed by text analysis, processing analysis, and social analysis, or more simply put, description, interpretation, and explanation. This forms the basis for this essay's methodology, though in a more limited format, better suited for a limited-variable study such as this one. Secondly, van Leeuwen's framework for analysing how social actors are presented is highly relevant for this study, and is therefore also employed when relevant. Thus, first the occurrences of pronouns and agency were described and analysed according to van Leeuwen's framework, when this was applicable; that is, how the social actors and practices are presented and what techniques are in play in the speeches. After this, the essay attempted to analyse how the processes of production and reception have shaped the message, and finally attempted to explain why the speeches are as they are, as far as our chosen variables are concerned.

It is worth noting that despite the influence from both Fairclough and van Leeuwen, this essay did not follow either framework to the letter. Rather, the methodology used here was a custom one, inspired by both, more suited for analysis of the chosen variables. See figure 1 in section 5.3 for an illustration.

5.2. Corpus Approach

Other than an analysis through CDA-inspired methods, this essay also employed a corpus-based approach. Concordance software was used to analyse the frequencies of various pronouns. These results proved interesting in providing an overview that a strictly qualitative study cannot; they served as the backbone for figures and graphs presented in this study in order to make the differences and patterns more readily observable.

It may be somewhat uncommon to use corpora to analyse discourse, but there are certain precedents. McEnery and Wilson (2001) point out that there is a history of analysing political discourse with corpora through word frequencies and collocations (114). This essay thus used a corpus as a starting point for a discussion of CDA perspectives on the material, and while the study was not corpus-driven, it was certainly corpus-based.

5.3. Summary of Methods

As mentioned before, the study's methodology was inspired by CDA, though it might not perfectly fit into it. A corpus study of the variables in question was first performed, after which the texts were looked at according to van Leeuwen's framework: how are the social actors presented in terms of pronouns chosen, references and agency? While not explicitly discussed, as they are implicit, the processes of production and reception (a political speech, intended to convince, received by the people) were also considered, along with reflections on how the socio-political atmosphere of the times may have affected the speeches. Finally, in the conclusions, an attempt was made to explain why the variables are used as they are.
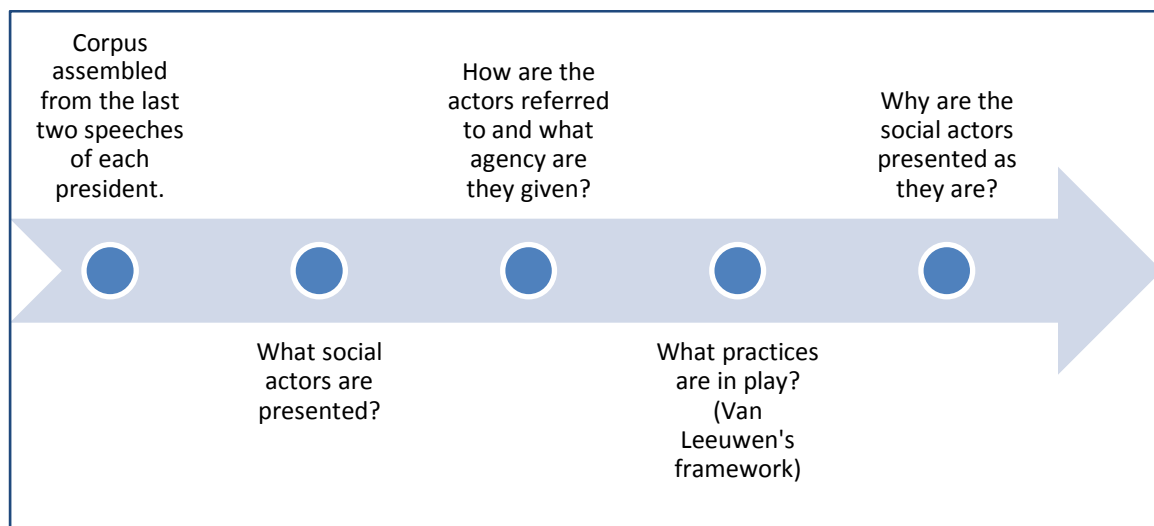

Figure 1 – The methodology employed by this essay.

6. Results and Discussion

In this section, the results are first presented in figures. These are initially commented upon briefly, and then further discussed in section 6.1 for the analysis of Obama's speeches, 6.2 for the analysis of Bush's speeches, 6.3 for the analysis of Kennedy's speeches, and 6.4 for the analysis of Nixon's speeches. The speeches are compared with each other as they are analysed and as is relevant, and finally in section 6.5 the study attempts to answer whether or not there are any distinct differences between the recent State of the Union speeches and the older ones.

Only personal pronouns, as well as the most common other references, are presented here. Additionally, the use of *it* does not, most of the time, refer to any social actors, and is either an "empty it" or refers to *things*, and as such this is not included except for special cases. Additionally, as some pronouns appear but constitute less than 0.01% of the total words, the chart simply reads <0.01% due to graphical limitations.

While the usage of *he, she, him* and *her* is less interesting from an inclusionary/exclusionary point of view, they are nonetheless included here to see what kind of agency is allocated to any social actors presented with these pronouns, as well as to illustrate the modern tendency of presidents giving examples of people who either have benefited or would benefit from their policies.

Finally, when the discussion below mentions passive actors, passivization or the like, this refers to the semantic role of the affected or patient, not the grammatical passive. While this may initially appear to be a diffuse category, it simply means that any affected or inactive actors are considered passive, as opposed to the doers (and possible co-doers) of the processes mentioned.
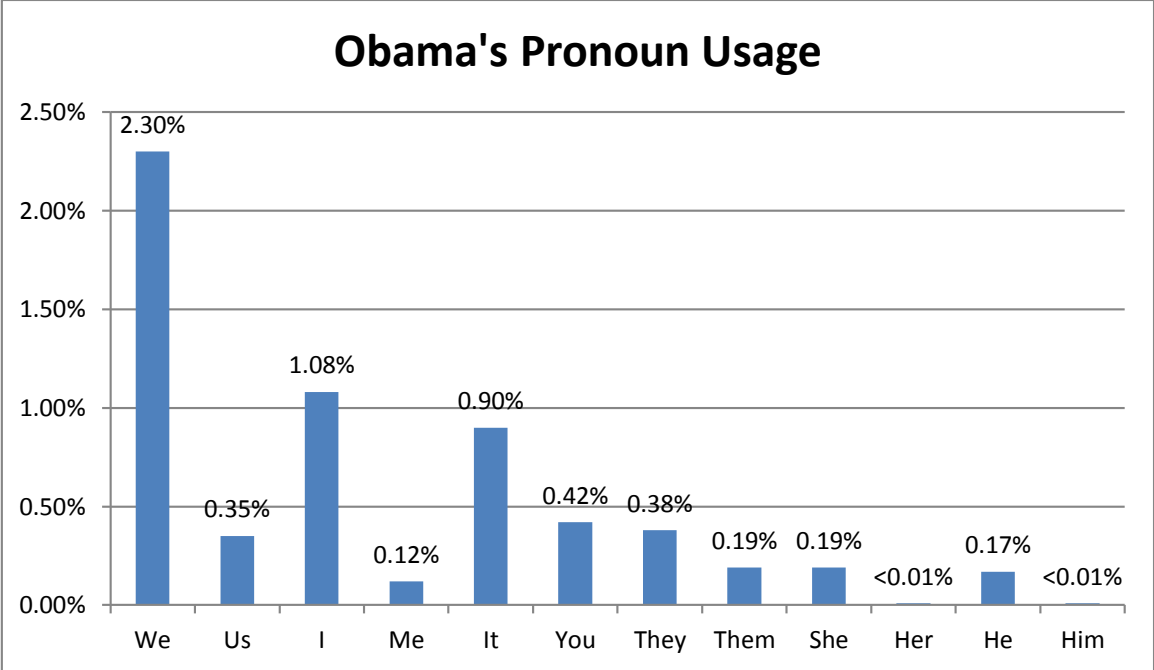
6.1. Obama's Speeches

Figure 2 – Obama's use of pronouns, as percentage of total words.

As illustrated by the above figure, Obama's most commonly used pronoun is, by far, *we*. These proportions are, however, roughly the same for all presidents analysed in this essay; *we, I* and *it* are always the most common. This will be further discussed in section 7, conclusions.

6.1.1. We/us

As illustrated by the above graph, the first person plurals are the most used pronouns in Obama's speeches, and as such the analysis starts with the pronouns *we* and *us,* the former

accounting for 2.3% of all words, and the latter 0.3%. These are both inclusive and exclusive uses; see examples 1 through 5 below.

1. Tonight this Chamber speaks with one voice to the people *we* represent…
2. …how the son of a single mom can be President of the greatest nation on Earth […] Opportunity is who *we* are.
3. Americans understand that some people will earn more money than others, and *we* don't resent those who do…
4. I want *us* to be able to say, yes, *we* did
5. …the trust of the people who sent *us* here.

In example 1, above, the use of *we* is clearly exclusive; it refers to the Chamber, rather than the people. Example 2 refers to the "greatest nation on Earth" (i.e. the United States) as *we*, and is, as such, inclusive. Example 3 is also inclusive, but it has a different use of *we* than example 2, referring to the people of America rather than the country itself. Example 4 is, again, inclusive, and presents the *us* with at least partial agency, with the potential to be the doer. Example 5 is again exclusive, referring to the Democrats. *We,* due to its nature as the grammatical subject, is almost always the doer of actions; there are only a few examples were *we* is allocated the passive role, as in example 6 below.

6. *...we* were told our goals were misguided…

In this example, the first person plural pronoun is passive, but passivization of the *we* or *us* in Obama's speeches occurs only a couple of times and is, effectively, insignificant. There is an interesting example contrasting the active *we* and the passive other parties, who are collectivized as *those who have been targeted by terrorism,* see example 7 below.

7. …*we* stand united with people around the world who have been targeted by terrorists…

Here, the active role of *we* is very obvious. The sentence could be phrased otherwise, but instead, the victims of terrorism are passive, whereas the American *we* is the agent. Example 9, below, continues a similar trend in agency.

8. …*we*'ve trained their security forces…

Again, in example 9, *we* is the active party. This role allocation is fairly clear throughout the speech; the American people are the active party. For a more conclusive analysis of agency, however, the use of other pronouns must be examined, but the fact is that given *we* is the most common pronoun used in Obama's speeches, and the fact that it is usually the agent, a pattern can already be observed. However, a look at the objective *us* is required; see the below examples.

9. Citizenship means standing up for the lives that gun violence steals from *us* each day
10. …troops and civilians who risk and lay down their lives to keep *us* free…
11. …verifiable action that convinces *us*…

Us does not appear many times in Obama's speeches, but there are a few examples where the *us* is allocated the passive role. There is a certain rhetoric at play here; gun violence is personified as the actor with the agent role who "steals [lives] from us" in example 10. This appears to be in order to contrast with Obama's suggestion to take the active role and stand up for those lost lives. Example 11 is the other example of a borderline passive *us*, though here *us* certainly includes the "troops and civilians" as part of the American people, and hence ultimately the active party. These examples are very few compared to *we*, which nearly always takes the active role, however.

6.1.2. They/them

Third person plurals do not appear quite as much as the first person plurals do in Obama's speeches. Nearly all of the uses refer to the American people or a specific subset of it, and as such there is no sense of an "us vs them" mentality present. A few examples follow to illustrate this.

12. Nobody got everything *they* wanted
13. *They* need our help right now.
14. Give *them* that chance

In example 12, Obama is talking about how the Democrats and Republicans had to compromise for the new budget. This is presented very neutrally and points out that both sides, not only the Democrats, had to make sacrifices. In example 13, *they* refers to hard-working yet poor Americans, and thus leaving them without agency and in need of help from the Congress seems to be more or less in line with the Democrat agenda. Example 14 expands

further on the same agenda, though the people are portrayed as being able to take the agency if given proper help from the government.

6.1.3. I/me

I, as with *we*, is typically the agent due to its nature as the grammatical subject, and given that that *I* appears far more than the other first person singular pronoun, *me*, this already shows a pattern. However, while Obama does indeed have agency a majority of the time, this is likely not worth much deeper analysis; the concept of State of the Union speeches is, after all, to inform the people of what the president wants to accomplish and what he has already done. Consider examples 15 through 18 below for illustration of how *I* and *me* are used by Obama.

15. That's why *I* directed my administration to work with States…
16. Tonight *I* can announce that…
17. …work with *me* to fix an upside-down Tax Code…
18. If this Congress sends *me* a new sanctions bill now that threatens to derail these talks, *I* will veto it.

Examples 15 and 16, above, are both the archetypical use of *I* in these speeches; the president is clearly shown with agency. This seems like fairly natural usage for the context, as does example 17, where the president's *me* still holds agency. Example 18 is the most interesting one, however. Here, the role allocation is obvious; even if the Congress takes action, the president holds the power to invalidate it. As such, he remains the ultimate doer in the sentence, and the discourse paints him as a powerful, resolute actor.

6.1.4. You

You compromises 0.42% of the total words in Obama's speeches, and is used to address a variety of different actors. The agency varies depending on who is addressed, but several examples are Obama giving stronger or weaker suggestions to organizations, as in examples 19 through 21 below.

19. ...this Congress needs to restore the unemployment insurance *you* just let expire for 1.6 million people.
20. So to every CEO in America, let me repeat: If *you* want somebody who's going to get the job done and done right, hire a veteran.
21. Do what *you* can to raise your employees' wages.

In example 19 above, Obama is directly addressing Congress. The lack of activity here is portrayed, perhaps fairly, as negative for the people, but the example provides a good illustration of how agency is sometimes difficult to analyse. It is clear that Congress deliberately let the insurance expire, and whether this chosen lack of action should be classified as agency or passiveness is a challenging question. Interestingly enough, however, Obama does not take agency here or attempt to order Congress to restore the insurance, instead choosing to attempt to sway the public. Examples 20 and 21 are both suggestions for CEOs and companies to take action, which is portrayed as positive. There is a slight tendency here to suggest that agency is a positive thing in general when it comes to Obama's discourse, whereas lack of agency is negative.

6.1.5. He/she/him/her

The third person singular pronouns (not including *it,* which is discussed in section 6.1.6.) appear a total of 66 times. Almost all of the occurrences of *he* and *she* are from Obama telling stories of various people who may either be real or personifications of various archetypes. Examples 22 and 23 below illustrate this.

22. And like the Army *he* loves, like the America *he* serves, Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg never gives up, and *he* does not quit.
23. *She* waited tables. *He* worked construction.

Both examples 22 and 23 are examples of this style of rhetoric. Obama tells the audience of the struggles these people face. These people are typically portrayed as resolute, hard-working agents, serving to illustrate the points Obama makes as well as, more than likely, to give the audience something to emotionally connect to. Example 22 tells the story of a man wounded in the Afghanistan war, and Obama uses this as an example of how "America has never come easy", whereas the couple from example 23 appears to illustrate the American dream, representing, as Obama says, "the millions who have worked hard and scrimped and sacrificed and retooled" and eventually found success. The occurrences of *him* and *her* are almost always part of these types of stories.

6.1.6. It

The fact that *it* appears a lot in Obama's speeches may be initially misleading; almost all of the time, *it* does not refer to any social actors, but rather policies or merely things. However, there are some exceptions, which are illustrated in examples 24 and 25 below.

20

24. Iran has begun to eliminate its stockpile of higher levels of enriched uranium. *It*'s not installing advanced centrifuges.

25. After 2014, we will support a unified Afghanistan as *it* takes responsibility for its own future.

In example 24, Iran, as the country, is personified. The purpose of this remains somewhat unclear, but Obama's speeches often personify America. This may be a case of exclusion, in that the people of Iran are not mentioned, but rather the country itself, as a singular actor. Example 25 is an example of the same phenomenon of a country presented as an individual. It is worth noting that both countries are given agency here, even though the situation, at least in Iran's case, is very much an action caused by American diplomacy.

6.1.7. Other References

Quite a few elements of van Leeuwen's social actor theory can be found in Obama's speeches. Functionalization and identification especially, are often used when Obama mentions his examples of American people (see section 6.1.5), when these examples are brief; examples 26 and 27 below illustrate this.

26. *An entrepreneur* flipped on the lights in her tech start-up
27. *A man* took the bus home from the graveyard shift

Both example 26 and 27 talk about the "average American", but unlike the longer examples presented in section 6.1.5, Obama uses shorter examples as well, in which case the actors can be functionalized, as in example 26, or identified, as in example 27. Worth noting is that these examples still hold agency, as seems to be typical when Obama exemplifies the people. There are also a fair number of negative associations used, see examples 28 through 30 below.

28. We must fight the battles that need to be fought, not those that *terrorists* prefer from us
29. Al Qaida affiliates *and other extremists* take root in different parts of the world.
30. …we are leading a broad coalition […] to degrade and ultimately destroy *this terrorist group*.

Examples 28 and 29 would appear to have elements of assimilation, as well as generic reference, where the actors are represented as generic groups. This is especially the case in example 29, given that Al Quaida is mentioned specifically by name, but the other groups are

merely referenced to as "other extremists". Both of these groups, then, are effectively made anonymous, unique only in their negative attributes. Example 30 is, again, functionalization, though van Leeuwen gives this "value judgement identification" a specific name; *appraisement* (2009, 285). The group Obama refers to (ISIL) is thus negatively appraised a "terrorist group", even though the group in question is unlikely to identify as one.

As a final note on Obama's speeches, it is possible that actors are excluded, as well, but this is difficult to analyse unless one is well-versed in American politics and current situations. See section 8 for further research suggestions related to this.

6.2. Bush's Speeches

The rough patterns of pronoun use are the same for Bush as they are for Obama. Bush, too, uses the pronouns *we* and *us* the most, at 2.2% of his total words being *we* and 0.4% being *us*. The greatest difference lies in his use of the pronouns *I* and *me* at a frequency of 0.6% and 0.04% compared to Obama's 1% and 0.1% total, though all things considered, this also remains a small difference.
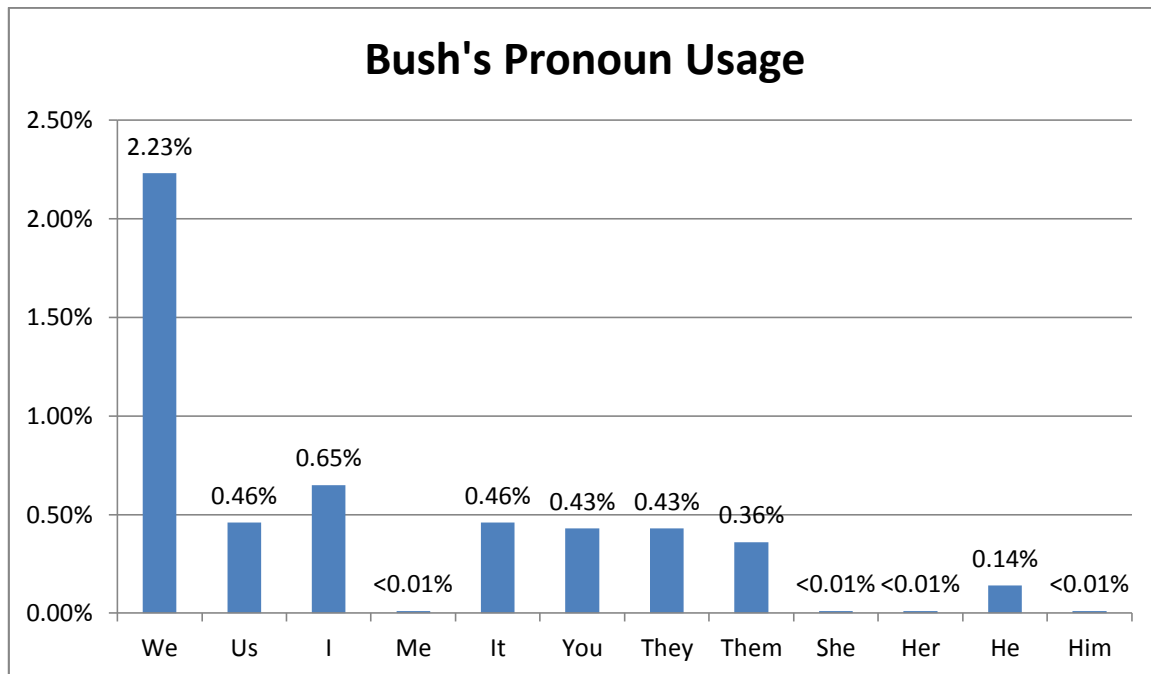
Figure 3 – Bush's use of pronouns, as percentage of total words.

As illustrated by figure 3, above, Bush's use of pronouns is proportionally similar to Obama's, with minor differences. It seems unlikely that any conclusions can be drawn purely from a quantitative analysis of the data itself, however, and a closer analysis on how they are used is required.

6.2.1. We/us

Bush's use of *We* is fairly similar to Obama's. Both the inclusive and exclusive *we* make their appearances here, as in examples 31 and 32 below.

31. First, *we* must balance the Federal budget
32. Five years have come and gone since *we* saw the scenes and felt the sorrow that *the terrorists* can cause

Example 31 is a simple exclusive *we*, referring to the government. Example 32 has more interesting aspects to analyse. The use of *we* is inclusive, clearly including the people as opposed to just the government. *We,* however, has a somewhat passive role here; the terrorists caused sorrow, whereas *we* only saw it, and is thus the affected party, even though it is also active in a mental process. Furthermore, a use of specific reference can be observed here; the audience is expected to know through the current cultural context that the terrorists in question are assumedly Al-Quaida. Bush proceeds to explain how "We stopped an Al Qaida

plot" and "We broke up a Southeast Asian terror cell", returning agency to the *we*. There are a couple examples of the *we* or *us* being truly passive, however, as illustrated by example 33 below.

33. Al Qaida's top commander in Iraq declared that they will not rest until they have attacked *us* here in Washington.

Us is passive here, though given that the message is from the point of view in Al Quaida, this is unremarkable. What is interesting is that the group just previously excluded is now referred to by name. There are, otherwise, few notable uses of *us*. One of them is example 34 below.

34. Let *us* find our resolve and turn events toward victory.

The suggestion in example 34 is to the American people, a request to take action and thus become the agents and doers, and so win the Iraq war. Other than a few cases, the *we* and *us* in Bush's speeches are, like in those of Obama, allocated the role of agents, or at least requested to take that role.

6.2.2. They/them

Bush's use of *they* is fairly distinctive in several cases. When terrorists are mentioned, the groups are almost constantly referred to only as *they*, very much creating the *us* and *them* division. This is not to say they are entirely anonymized – Bush does mention the groups by name occasionally – but they are distinctly separated as a negative "other" group. This is especially true in his 2007 speech; the examples below all illustrate this phenomenon.

35. *They* want to overthrow moderate governments…
36. By killing and terrorizing Americans, *they* want to force our country to retreat…
37. Whatever slogans *they* chant when *they* slaughter the innocent, *they* have the same wicked purposes. *They* want to kill Americans, kill democracy…

Examples 35 through 37 all illustrate the use of *they* in Bush's 2007 speech when mentioning terrorist groups. It could be argued that the groups are reduced into an anonymous "they", as even though Al Quaida is mentioned earlier, Bush is in fact talking about all terrorists (refer to example 37). The 2008 speech does not feature this to the same extent, but there are similar examples, such as the one below.

38. Al Qaida's top commander in Iraq declared that *they* will not rest until *they* have
    attacked us here in Washington.

Bush uses, as in example 38, *they* repeatedly referring to terrorists, though in this particular case Al Quaida is singled out specifically. It is worth noting that the terrorists are given the agent role in both speeches, which means that agency is not necessarily a positive thing in the discourse; here, America is clearly the (potential) passive victim, in stark contrast to the rest of these speeches, where the US holds a distinctive agency. This is likely in order to garner sympathy from the listeners. This otherization, anonymization and the negative value judgements exhibited here could likely be argued to be characteristic of post-9/11 political discourse.

6.2.3. I/me

There does not seem to be any great difference between Obama and Bush when it comes to the first person singular pronouns. The usage is similar, if somewhat proportionally different, given that Bush almost never uses *me* in his speeches. A few examples of this are reproduced below.

39. *I* will issue an Executive order…
40. *I* ask you to support a new $300 million program…
41. ...if any bill raises taxes reaches my desk [sic], I will veto it.
42. So this time, if you send *me* an appropriations bill that does not cut the number and
    cost of earmarks in half, *I'll* send it back to you with my veto.

These examples are more or less similar to what can be found in Obama's speeches; Bush takes agency and presents himself as an active president. There is little hedging used here; everything Bush says is presented as certain. This includes, especially, example 42, which additionally is the same format as Obama would later use; see example 18. Both presidents use a similar "If this happens, I *will* veto it" almost-threatening phrasing, which likely enforces the image of the president as someone who knows what should be done, and someone who will do it despite other opinions.

6.2.4. You

The use of *you* In Bush's speeches is more or less as is to be expected, though the *you* addressed tends to be specific subgroups, such as Congress, the Chamber, and army veterans.

A few uses appear to be addressed to the general public, and a few are a generic "you" used in the same sense as "one". Examples of each use are reproduced below.

43. That means if *you* don't act by Friday, our ability to track terrorist threats would be weakened…
44. Many in this Chamber understand that America must not fail in Iraq, because *you* understand that the consequences of failure would be grievous and far-reaching.
45. In the past year, *you* have done everything we've asked of *you* and more.
46. I wish I could report to *you* that the dangers have ended.
47. *You* see this spirit often if *you* know where to look…

In example 43, Bush addresses Congress. It is worth noting that there is a contrasting of *you* and *us* here, in the form of *our*. Lack of agency and doing is portrayed as something that will lead to negative consequences for the nation, in order to pressure Congress to act as Bush wishes, and perhaps more likely, to convince the people that negative results in this area would not be Bush's fault. Example 44 is addressed to the Chamber, or at least part of it, namely the "many" that agree with Bush's statement. Example 45 is, in turn, directed to army veterans, who are also allocated an active role here. Example 46 is likely addressed to the general public, though it is somewhat difficult to determine; in any case, the *you* here has no agency. Finally, example 47 is a "general you", that is, used for illustration purposes as "one" might be in British political discourse. Ultimately, Bush's use of *you* is fairly similar to Obama's.

6.2.5. He/she/him/her

Interestingly enough, a majority of Bush's uses of *he* and *she* are from examples similar to those used by Obama (see section 6.1.5). That is, possibly fictionalized stories of American citizens who supposedly did something specific that Bush uses to exemplify and justify his policies. One example of these is reproduced below; the amount of text is greater than before to fully illustrate how these examples are used.

48. With seconds to act, Wesley jumped onto the tracks, pulled the man into the space between the rails, and held *him* as the train passed right above their heads. *He* insists he's not a hero. *He* says: "We got guys and girls overseas dying for us to have our

freedoms. We have got to show each other some love." There is something wonderful about a country that produces a brave and humble man like Wesley Autrey.

Example 48 illustrates perfectly how these examples are used. The situation may or may not have happened, or may have happened in a different way, but the citation that is accredited to him is, I would claim, a thinly veiled attempt to justify America's then on-going conflicts, initiated by Bush. Regardless of whether these examples are real or not, the choice of which occurrences to include about is clearly motivated by the political courses of the president holding the speech. While there are other uses of these pronouns in Bush's speeches, they are very few in number.

6.2.6. It
There are only few interesting uses of *it* in Bush's speeches, i.e. cases where it refers to a social actor. Both of these examples are personification

49. …the No Child Left Behind Act is a bipartisan achievement. *It* is succeeding…
50. This atrocity, directed at a Muslim house of prayer, was designed to provoke retaliation from Iraqi Shia, and *it* succeeded.

In example 49, the act is personified. In example 50, the atrocity (the bombing of a mosque) is personified, and assigned negative agency. Certainly this type of construction is common in more forms of discourse, and it does not appear to be more common in these speeches. Regardless, it is worth noting how actions are personified in political discourse.

6.2.7. Other References
While there are, of course, many references to various groups in Bush's speeches, as expected in any political discourse, the most characteristic one is the ubiquitous *terrorists*. This is, additionally, a fair point of comparison to Obama's, as both presidents use the word multiple times, referring to roughly the same actors. A few examples of groups referred to as terrorists are reproduced below.

51. To protect America, we need to know who *the terrorists* are talking to, what they are saying, and what they're planning.
52. In Iraq, *the terrorists* and extremists are fighting to deny a proud people their liberty
53. *The terrorists* oppose every principle of humanity and decency that we hold dear.

54. In the mind of *the terrorists*, this war began well before September the 11th and will not end until their radical vision is fulfilled.

55. Every success against *the terrorists* is a reminder of the shoreless ambitions of this enemy.

All of these examples (51-55) seem to effectively anonymize large groups of social actors. This could also likely be categorized as *assimilation* or *functionalization*, given that every group is merged into a monolithic "the terrorists", with specific reference, even though such groups and their goals certainly vary. This, as van Leeuwen notes on these practices, does tend to create the "us and them" groups; "the terrorists", or *them*, "who stand for everything negative (explicitly expressed in example 53) and oppose the good *us*.

6.3. Kennedy's Speeches

This shorter analysis of Kennedy's (and Nixon's) speeches is not meant to be a full-scale comparison to Obama's (and Bush's) speeches, but rather a sampling of how discourse may have changed with time. Below is a chart illustrating Kennedy's use of pronouns, frequency-wise.
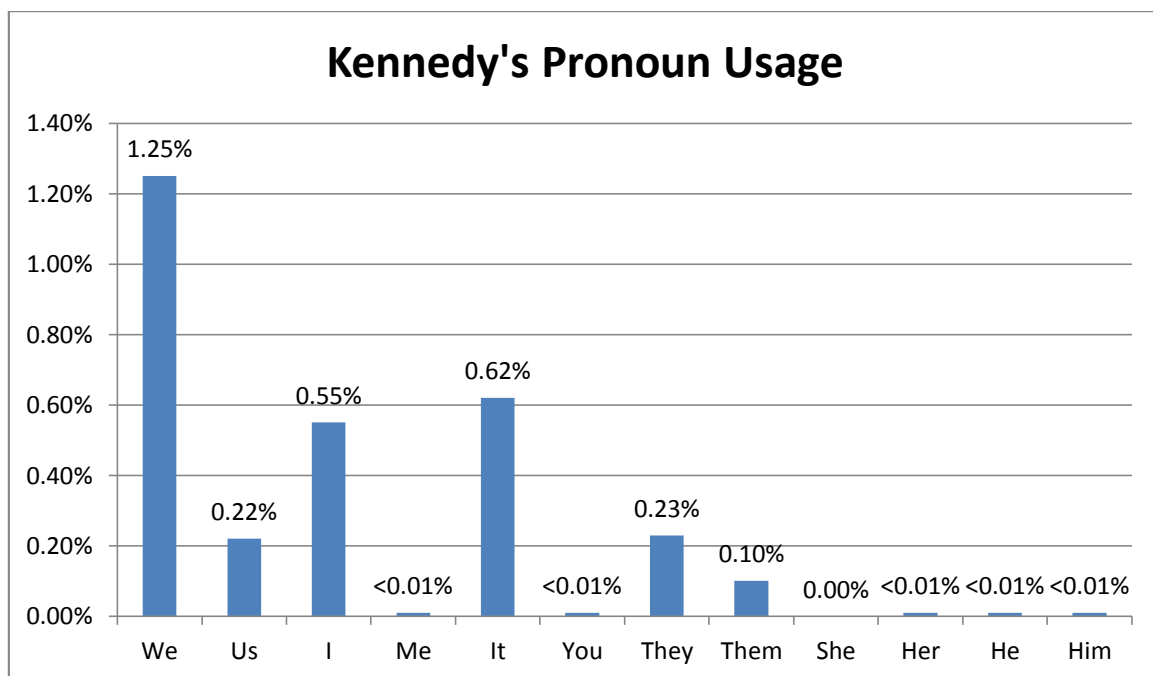

Figure 4 – Kennedy's use of pronouns, as percentage of total words.

As the above chart shows, Kennedy uses pronouns altogether less than either Obama or Bush. However, the proportions are still fairly similar; *we, I,* and *it* are the most used. This seems to

be a trend in political discourse, or perhaps human speech in general. However, the fact that all pronouns are used proportionally less is interesting, and will be discussed further in section 7, conclusions.

6.3.1. We/us

As with the two more recent presidents, Kennedy uses *we* a fair amount, both inclusive in the sense of America as a whole, and exclusive, as in the government that Kennedy himself is part of. As with the more recent presidents, the *we* has agency, or at least the potential of it, e.g. "we need to do this". *Us* is barely present at all in Kennedy's speeches. A few examples of how Kennedy uses *we* are given below.

56. *We* must continue to support farm income
57. If *we* do not plan today […] our children and their children will be poorer in every sense of the word.
58. *We* can welcome diversity--the Communists cannot.

Example 56 is the typical use of *we* in Kennedy's speeches. This kind of structure repeats itself fairly often, that is, Kennedy claims that the US must do something. This is further illustrated in example 57, where the lack of agency or action is once again portrayed as something negative. It may be worth studying this phenomenon further; while agency is mostly portrayed as good, with a few key exceptions, the question is whether the lack of agency is portrayed as something that will inevitably lead to negative consequences. Finally, example 58 presents the speech's *we* as the opposite of "the communists", a reference that appears in examples 68 through 70, similar to Bush's "the terrorists". It is worth noting that agency is here allocated to *we*, and taken away from *the communists.*

6.3.2. They/them

There are fewer examples of these pronouns in Kennedy's speeches than the others, but the examples are interesting in how roles are allocated.

59. Our working men and women, instead of being forced to beg for help from public charity once *they* are old and ill…
60. *They* were shocked by the Soviets' sudden and secret attempt to transform Cuba into a nuclear striking base

61. Wherever nations are willing to help themselves, we stand ready to help *them* build new bulwarks of freedom.
62. I believe that the abandonment of the mentally ill and the mentally retarded to the grim mercy of custodial institutions too often inflicts on *them* and on their families a needless cruelty

Example 59 appears to present two types of agency, one being forced, and the other Kennedy's alternative solution. Thus, the current, or hypothetical agency is negative, whereas what Kennedy himself suggests (the people contributing towards their own social security) is positive. In example 60, *they* refers to developing nations, but the agency is instead allocated to the Soviets, again in a negative way. Example 61 is more reminiscent of the more recent speeches; here the *we* is the doer, and while the nations Kennedy mentions hold some agency, America itself holds the majority of the agency here, "standing ready to help them". Finally, example 62 features a typical passive *them*; the mentally ill are here, perhaps rightfully, portrayed as the passive victims, to garner support and sympathy.

6.3.3. I/me

There are almost no occurrences of *me* in Kennedy's speeches. The results for *I,* however, are fairly similar more recent presidents. The examples below illustrate some of the uses.

63. *I* assumed the office of President of the United States.
64. *I* have travelled not only across our own land…
65. Again *I* would counsel caution.
66. *I* urge action to aid medical and dental colleges…

Examples 63 and 64 are fairly simple; these types of usage are in the majority, as with more recent presidents; Kennedy is the doer. It is in examples 65 and 66 that a difference to newer presidents can be seen; in 65, the modal verb *would*, which does not occur even once in Obama's and Bush's speeches, and in example 66 the word *urge* both present Kennedy with somewhat less absolute agency and authority, being worded as suggestions rather than outright orders. These examples are, however, few in number, and therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions here.

6.3.4. You

There are very few uses of *you* present in Kennedy's speeches, and it is unlikely that any real patterns could be observed with such a small sample size. The singular noteworthy thing is in fact the *lack* of *you.* Kennedy does not address the people and Congress directly as often as Obama and Bush do.

6.3.5. He/she/him/her

As with *you¸* these pronouns do not appear frequently enough to properly analyse. This may indicate that the practice of using "average Americans" as examples (see sections 6.1.5. and 6.2.5.) could be a newer tendency in American political discourse, as such examples are not used by Kennedy.

6.3.6. It

The use of *it* is roughly similar in character to the more recent presidents, and is mostly used to personalize social policies and occurrences, giving them agency. As this has been discussed in the previous sections on *it,* and does not seem to be any different here, only one example will be provided here.

> 67. Today *it* is feeding one out of every four school age children in Latin America an extra food ration from our farm surplus.

In example 67, Kennedy is talking about the Alliance for Progress, a program for economic growth in the Americas as a whole. This program, then, is given agency in phrases such as the one above

6.3.7. Other References

Similar to "terrorists" in the more recent president's speeches, in Kennedy's speeches the main "other" group appears to be *the communists.* This is very close to how Bush and Obama speak of "terrorists" as a monolithic, anonymous entity. The examples below illustrate this *otherization.*

> 68. Some may choose forms and ways that we would not choose for ourselves--but it is not for us that they are choosing. We can welcome diversity--*the Communists* cannot. For we offer a world of choice--they offer the world of coercion.
> 69. … *the Communists* are still relying on ancient doctrines and dogmas.

70. … but events in Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe teach us never to write off any nation as lost to *the Communists.*

Examples 68 through 70 are perhaps even more extreme than Bush's and Obama's examples. While they would reference specific organizations occasionally, Kennedy seems to portray "the communists" as an entirely homogenous, evil mass. It is also worth noting that *the communists* are not given much agency here, other than of the negative kind, as seen in examples 68 and 69. It would, then, appear that the "other" group here is portrayed as dangerous but passive and inferior to the "us" group.

6.4. Nixon's Speeches

As with Kennedy's speeches, this analysis is somewhat more concise, and should be considered more of a sampling to contrast to the newer presidents' speeches than an in-depth study of Nixon's discourse.
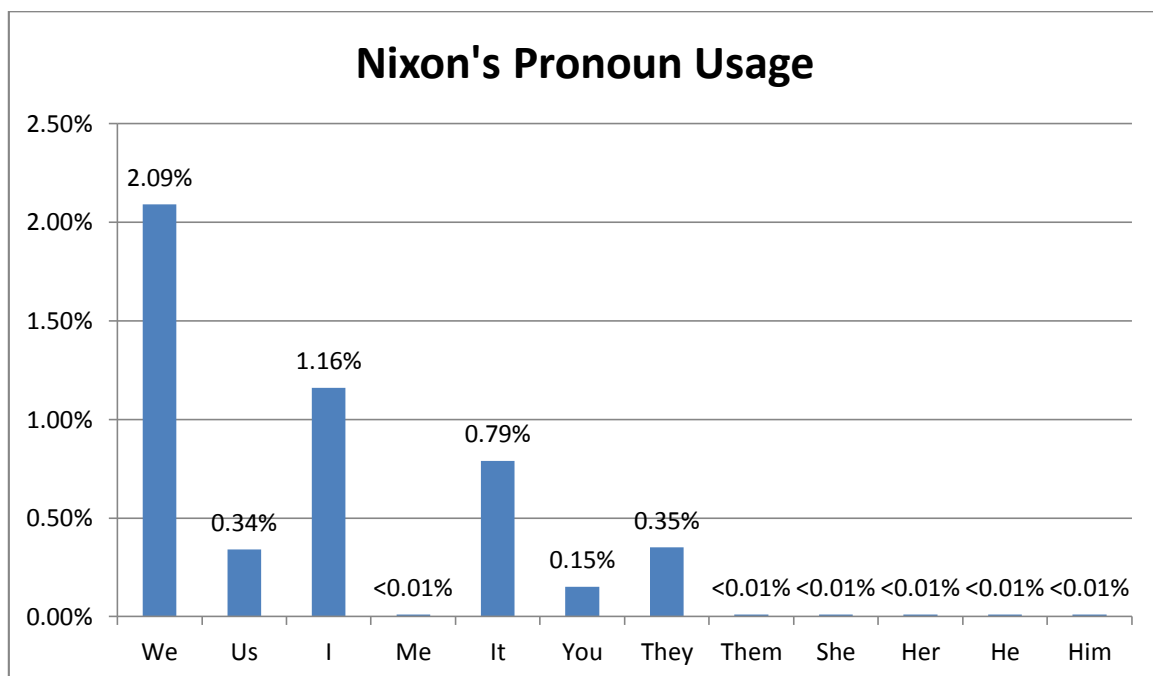

Figure 5 – Nixon's use of Pronouns, as percentage of total words.

6.4.1. We/us

As with the other discourse analysed in this essay, Nixon's use of *we* and *us* is consistent with the tendency to give America and its government strength through agency. A few examples of this can be found below.

71. *We* met the challenges *we* faced 5 years ago

72. In our relations with the Soviet Union, *we* have turned away from a policy of confrontation to one of negotiation.

73. Let *us* do everything *we* can to avoid gasoline rationing in the United States of America.

Example 71 is a typical example of the *we* of the American people and government portrayed with agency, as are examples 72 and 73. There are very few examples where *we* is passive, as with the other speeches.

6.4.2. They/them

Nixon's *they* mostly refers to the American people, the military, or other subjects he appears to be positive towards. Therefore, *they* holds a similar amount of agency as *we*, or at least, is not passive, as seen in the examples below:

74. Strong military defenses are not the enemy of peace; *they* are the guardians of peace.

75. …State and local governments, to make *them* more responsive to the people *they* serve.

76. …our troops have returned from Southeast Asia, and *they* have returned with honor.

As seen in the above examples, the groups Nixon refers to as *they* or *them* are mostly positive, holding agency or other positive attributes as in example 74. More noteworthy is that Vietnam, which he refers to in example 76, is not referred to more than a few times; this will be discussed in section 6.4.7.

6.4.3. I/me

Nixon uses the first person singular pronouns more than twice as often as Bush or Kennedy, and slightly more often than Obama. Unlike Obama, however, Nixon does not use *we* and *us* as much, resulting in a rather personal tone of speech. As is the case with the other presidents, the discourse paints Nixon as a man of action, as seen in the examples below:

77. Let *me* speak to that issue head on.

78. *I* urge the Congress to join *me* in mounting a major new effort…

79. *I* have discussed these in the extensive written message that *I* have presented to the Congress today.

Examples 77 through 79 all allocate Nixon himself an active role. Again, this is very similar between all presidents, and likely most political discourse. Nixon does, interestingly, also use the word *urge,* seemingly lessening his authority, in example 78, but as in Kennedy's speeches, the word does not appear often enough for certain conclusions. Nixon does have a fairly personal style of speaking, exemplified on the use of *I* in these examples, whereas for example Obama typically attempts to include the people in his policies and statements.

6.4.4. You

Nixon addresses the listeners as *you* occasionally during his speeches, but along with Kennedy, he does this considerably less than the more recent presidents. While *you* occurs too few times to provide much to comment on, it is worth noting that this might indicate that the practice of addressing the public directly may have grown more common in these speeches at some point in time between Nixon's and Bush's presidencies.

6.4.5. He/she/him/her

There are too few occurrences of these pronouns to provide any manner of pattern in Nixon's discourse. It is, however, worth noting that the examples of Americans that Bush and Obama use for rhetorical purposes cannot be found here, similar to Kennedy's speeches; this, then, may indicate that said examples are a newer tendency.

6.4.6. It

Finally, when it comes to Nixon's use of *it* referring to social actors, this is mostly done to allocate agency to policies and similar. Effectively, the use is the same as Bush's, Obama's and Kennedy's, and is discussed in the relevant sections.

6.4.7. Other References

In stark contrast to Kennedy's *communists* and Bush's *terrorists,* Nixon appears to mostly exclude the Vietnam War from his 1972 speech, likely due to its negative reception. This is one of the few key points where what appears to be intentional exclusion can be observed. When the war is mentioned in in his 1974 speech, the country itself is not even named; the discourse is entirely on the positive aspect of soldiers returning. Nixon apparently avoids creating negative *they*-groups, but in doing so, chooses to exclude them entirely. This seems logical, as he knew America was tired of the war (Vartabedian 2009: 370) and adjusted his rhetoric to suit this Thus not discussing the situation would make sense.

6.5. Comparisons by Time

Ultimately, the type of American political discourse that is exhibited in the analysed State of the Union speech has not changed much with time. The presidents' *I* and *we* tend to hold the agency. There are two key tendencies that can be observed, however; directly addressing the public and the usage of "example Americans". That is, the newer presidents use *you* more, addressing the listeners, such as the Congress or the American people in general, whereas Kennedy and Nixon do this very little. Kennedy and Nixon also do not tell anecdotal examples of Americans whose actions suit their policies and agendas.

One could, based on the data examined, make an observation that the Republican side has grown more accustomed to creating "us and them" groups, in comparing Bush with Nixon, who completely avoids creating enemy actors, but this could simply be an issue with the data and Nixon himself, rather than an overarching tendency. More research is therefore required on this subject.

7. Conclusions

The fact is that even with a carefully selected material such as the present State of the Union speeches, the exact topics can and will differ. Bush's speeches, for example, focus a fair amount on terrorists, whereas Kennedy speaks of communists, and Obama in turn focuses more on the American people themselves. There are, however, also fairly clear similarities between how these groups are mentioned in the discourse. The clearest one, shared between both parties and times is that there tends to be an "other" group, opposing America, and the presidents have a tendency to portray this group as a homogenous mass, i.e. *assimilation* and *indetermination*, as van Leeuwen refers to these practices, and this is subsequently often used to legitimize and justify war (Oddo 2011: 288). The groups are typically portrayed with negative or no agency, compared to America itself, which nearly always, as the *we* of the speeches, holds agency. This can likely be explained by the sociocultural climate of the times, that is, the cold war for the earlier presidents and the threat of terror for the more recent ones. The exception to this, however, is Nixon, who both escalated (Vartabedian 2009: 370) and eventually concluded the Vietnam War, but mentions it explicitly exactly once in the course of his two speeches. Given these facts, the most common aspects of van Leeuwen's social actor theory that can be observed in these speeches would thus be indetermination and assimilation, though other aspects of it do appear, namely *functionalization,* in identifying groups by what they do, namely *terrorists.* Nixon's use of exclusion is also interesting.

Agency in these speeches is typically allocated to the speaker and those he chooses to include with *we,* whereas agency is removed from the "other" groups by either excluding them, *or* personalizing their actions instead. However, agency is still given to the negatively perceived groups as well, and thus, the agency is not always perceived as positive. Still, most of the time, the groups with the most agency are the "good" ones, and when given a choice ("failure to act would cause consequences…") the lack of agency is seen as a negative thing.

Additionally, directly addressing the listeners appears to be a relatively new tendency. Both of the more recent presidents address the listeners more, whereas the ones from earlier periods, Nixon and Kennedy, do so very rarely. The newer presidents also tend to tell anecdotal stories of "American lives", exceptional individuals who are nearly always portrayed with agency, something that also does not appear in the older speeches.

The frequencies of the pronouns looked at are roughly similar; *we* and *us* are always the most commonly used pronouns, followed by *I* or *it,* though the latter rarely refers to social actors. In none of the speeches, for example, is a social actor referred to as *it*, as doing this would effectively deny their humanity. What can be concluded is that there are certain tendencies, as mentioned here in the conclusions, and that these seem to be more reliant on time – and thus the surrounding discourse and socio-political atmosphere – than on party membership. It seems interesting that the main two political parties of the US use a similar style of discourse, at least according to the type of analysis performed in the present study; while the parties are superficially different, there are no great differences in their rhetoric.

While these are the patterns that have been observed in the analysed speeches, they are not entirely conclusive due to the limited scope of this study; regardless, they should provide a good starting point for further research into this area.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

There is a rather large variety of further research that could be done in this area, both regarding pronouns and agency, as well as aspects relating to van Leeuwen's social actor theory.

8.1 Further Research on Pronouns and Agency

Pronouns other than merely the personal ones could produce interesting research. The genitive pronouns, for example, are used commonly by all politicians; the ownership of agency (e.g.

"their attack on us"), then, would be a viable avenue of further research. This would likely illustrate different tendencies are more overt agency allocation.

8.2 Further Research on Republican Discourse

As discussed in section 6.5, Nixon avoids creating the "us and them" groups that can to some degree be found in the presidents' speeches. This study cannot by itself answer whether or not Republican discourse has grown more prone to this type of rhetoric between Nixon's and Bush's presidencies, or whether this is simply something particular to Nixon himself. A study of the discourse of the various other Republican presidents between Nixon and Bush could therefore be considered.

8.3 Further Research on Social Actor Theory

Exclusion is a difficult aspect to analyse in political discourse, unless the researcher is intimately familiar with the region's current affairs and a neutral, reliable source to refer to. This would, however, be a rather good direction for further research on political discourse- What actors are completely excluded from speeches, rather than mentioned negatively or as passive individuals, should be indicative of either intentional manipulation of the public or, at least, show what facts the receiving public is expected to know.

8.4 Further Research on Diachronic Analysis of Political Discourse

Finally, a solid study of how the 9/11 attacks changed American political discourse, or even international discourse, could be valuable. It seems reasonable to assume that politicians such as Bush would not include the same amount, or at least not the same kind of anonymization and otherization in their speeches, had the attacks not happened. Indeed, this was likely not the case before, but this would require a fairly large-scale study with a matching corpus to analyse properly.

References

Primary Sources

Bush, George W. 2007. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=24446.

Bush, George W. 2008. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=76301.

Kennedy, John. 1962. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9082.

Kennedy, John. 1963. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9138.

Nixon, Richard. 1972. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3396.

Nixon, Richard. 1974. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=4327.

Obama, Barack. 2014. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=104596.

Obama, Barack. 2015. State of the Union address. Retrieved March 5, 2015 from
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=108031.

Secondary Sources

Benwell, Bethany; Stokoe, Elizabeth. 2006. *Discourse and Identity.* Edinburgh University
Press: Edinburgh.

Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis: Papers on the Critical Study of
Language.* Longman: New York.

Janks, Hillary. 1997. "Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool". *Discourse:
Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 18(3), 329-342.

McEnery, Tony; Wilson, Andrew. 2001. *Corpus Linguistics.* (2nd edition). Edinburgh
University Press: Edinburgh.

Oddo, John. 2011. "War legitimation discourse: Representing 'Us' and 'Them' in four US
Presidential speeches". *Discourse and Society*. 22(3), 287-314

Van Dijk, Teun. 2001. "Critical Discourse Analysis". In Schiffrin, Deborah; Tannen Deborah;
Hamilton, Heidi E. (eds). *Handbook of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell: New
Jersey. 352-371.

Van Dijk, Teun. 2003. "Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity". In Wodak, Ruth & Meyer, Michael. (eds). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage: London, 95-120.

Van Leeuwen, Theo. 2009. "Critical Discourse Analysis". In Renkema, Jan (ed). *Discourse, of Course.* John Benjamins: Amsterdam, 352-371.

Vartabedian, Robert. 1985. "Nixon's Vietnam rhetoric: A case study of apologia as generic paradox" *Southern Speech Communication Journal*. 50(4), 366-381.

Wodak, Ruth; Fairclough, Norman. 1997. "Critical Discourse Analysis". In van Dijk, Teun (ed). *Discourse as Social Interaction.* Sage: London, 258-284.

Wodak, Ruth; Meyer, Michael. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage: London.