

Use of First-Person Pronouns: A Study of Two Nigerian Presidential Inaugural Speeches in 2015 and 2023

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of first person personal pronouns as well as plural pronouns in the inaugural speeches given by two Nigerian Presidents: Muhammadu Buhari and Bola Tinubu at their inauguration in 2015 and 2023 respectively. The study uses qualitative means by exploring the occurrences of personal pronouns by the two personalities. The findings show that President Tinubu had used a total of 135 personal pronouns. A breakdown shows that he produced the pronoun 'I' and its variants 37 times; for the pronoun 'we' and its variants, he used them 98 times. For President Buhari, he exploited the singular personal pronoun 'I' and its variants 29 times. On the use of the plural pronoun, he employed them 63 times. The study revealed that the two presidents exploited the personal pronouns to convey their commitments and plans of action given the challenges confronting the nation at the time of their inauguration. In their use of the plural pronouns of “we” and “us”, the presidents used them in an inclusive manner beckoning on the citizenry to partake and share in the responsibility of the tasks that lay ahead in nation-building. The paper shows how personal pronouns are used by the presidents to construct various identities and to transpose sentiments and sympathies in order to seemingly enhance national development and promote their political agenda. This study recommends that future researchers should go beyond understanding the nuances and implications of the use of personal pronouns to a greater and a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics in Nigeria.

Keywords: pronouns, personal pronouns, variants, inclusivity, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The Nigerian Presidential election has always generated interest within the country, in the sub-Saharan region of the African continent and other parts of the world. Since the return of democracy in 1999, the eyes of the world have always been on Nigeria as a super power on the African continent. There have so far been seven cycles of presidential elections, the latest being that held in February 2023. The 1999 presidential election produced Olusegun Obasanjo as the President. Since then, Nigeria has had Musa Yar 'Adua (2007), Goodluck Jonathan (2011), Muhammadu Buhari (2015) and Bola Tinubu (2023) as Presidents. The elections which produced these presidents have been keenly contested. The 2023 election was of particular interest since one of the contestants, Atiku Abubakar, was a former Vice President from 1999-2007, and the eventual winner, Bola Tinubu, was a former Governor of Lagos State and a business czar believed to possess the magic wand of industrializing and revolutionizing Nigeria. Therefore, the speeches

given by both men received a quantum of national public interest.

All aspirants in the Nigerian presidential elections since 1999 embark on political campaigns across the nation in the build-up to the elections soliciting for votes by giving speeches in each of the organized campaign. Every speech delivered during campaigns is viewed as significant to the chance of the aspirant winning or losing the election and it is a critical part of the Election Day voting pattern. Nigeria does not have a rich and consistent political history when compared to older democracies like the US, British or French politics that have come of age. This does not however exclude Nigeria as a nation of practising politics with political parties. For most outsiders, Nigeria connotes an image of chaos, confusion, military coups and other negative vices. However, when it comes to politics, the political parties know what to do, such fielding candidates, putting structures in place, organizing rallies and campaigns. The number of political parties is inconsistent as old parties die and new ones are born. Unlike mature democracies like the US with known ideologies and parties that are either Democratic or Republican, Nigeria's version is a potpourri fused into what the founders of the political party believe is their ideology. The 2023 presidential is the seventh in the four-year cycle of presidential elections.

Attempts to incorporate Presidential Debate as part of presidential election have been unsuccessful. This is unlike the US where the debate is what Americans and non-Americans use as a barometer to know who to vote for based on their speech to convince the audience. However, in Nigeria, groups and organizations have been able to organize one or two debates, but most of the aspirants shun the debate. Again, in terms of organization, in whatever forum the aspirants come together it is on ad-hoc basis.

Scholars in different parts of the world have investigated the speeches of their political leaders and investigated the roles and importance of person pronouns, as literature would indicate later in this investigation. Studies on this aspect are quite few and in-between in Nigeria. This investigation will swell the literature and bring to light the importance and roles of personal pronouns as used by Nigerian political leaders. In this research, the preoccupation is not to investigate the speeches of Nigerian presidents at their inauguration, but to investigate a smaller part of the speeches. The main focus is on uses of first personal pronouns to express persuasive messages, inclusion/exclusion of the citizenry 'self' and 'group' reference. It is hoped that this study and a few that have been published before now, will open the floodgate for scholars to study the various aspects of grammar in speeches.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles and functions in the use of first personal pronouns in the speeches of Nigerian political leaders. In other words, it is aimed to investigate:

Why Nigerian presidents prefer using first person pronouns in their speeches.

The reasons for using first person pronouns.

This study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. Do Nigerian Presidents choose first person pronouns in their speeches to show their intentions and beliefs?
2. Is there a difference in the preference of using first person pronouns as exclusive or inclusive by Nigerian leaders?

2. Literature Review

Since the seminal work of Brown and Gilman (1960) on power relations based on the choices of pronouns in political speech, more and more scholars have continued research in political discourse as it relates to the

use of personal pronouns by political leaders in various climes. The circle is ever-expanding and improving on the initial idea. Therefore, for over six decades, academics have been exercising their minds on the pronoun, as a category of lexical words and its variants.

The study of the use of personal pronouns has become an important aspect of analyzing political speeches (Makutis, 2016). Politicians are able to explore the flexibility of pronominal reference to construct a view of themselves and others that portray them in good light. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns is associated with authority and solidarity (Bramley, 2011).

This work is embedded in the larger context of political discourse but narrowed to the language aspect and much narrower to the specific functions of the linguistic components in delivering the speech. Pronouns are linguistic markers; they are used in place of nouns to avoid repetition. Their meaning is understood through context in discourse, because they are devoid of any meaning, so that pronouns are found in the mental dictionary of speakers without expressing clear meaning. Pronouns are divided into classes which include personal, impersonal, relative, interrogative, and demonstrative. In this study, the researcher is interested in the use of personal pronouns. The personal pronouns are: *I, me, we, us, you, he, him, she her, they and them*.

Wilson (2015) argues that personal pronoun is one feature used to nuance the political language. Romadlani (2021) notes that personal pronouns are used for referencing of objects and persons that can be singular or plural and are also differentiated based on gender. When these pronouns are used in the discourse of politics, the scope of their meanings are expanded. Romadlani (2021) says when pronouns are used in the context of political discourse, they show how the users transfer their perceptions to others in the discourse. Politicians have since devised means of using appropriate linguistic devices in their speeches to sway their listeners (Uvehammer, 2005; Teittinen, 2000). Their speeches are laden with words and phrases that do not only persuade but convince people. In a way, the speeches are motivational in nature.

Al-Jarrah, Al-Mahameed and Ababneh (2020) in their study on the use of personal pronouns in Arabic, Spanish and English revealed that there are variations in each of the languages. The variations are important to number of referents, gender and distance. In a study that is more inclined to the genre of political discourse, Alinezhad and Nemati (2019) report that personal pronouns are constantly used in political speeches and they cannot be divorced from political discourse. They argue that politicians are aware of the role and importance of personal pronouns that is, for the inclusion and exclusion of others. Similarly, Alavidze (2017) report that the use pronominal elements by political leaders differ significantly by those who use them on whether they want to share the responsibility with others or not. Furthermore, the use of pronominals is dependent on how self-assured the speaker is that his listeners will share his opinions.

Taha (2023) in a study of personal pronouns employed in Joe Biden's victory speech reports that the American President, like most politicians, manipulated pronouns in order to advance his intentions and philosophies as a newly elected President. The President shortens the distance between him and Americans through the use of the pronoun "we" in the inclusive sense of the word. By using the first person pronoun "I", Joe Biden reveals his intention to shoulder the responsibility of being at the forefront of leading Americans to prosperity, equality and power. Overall, in the use of personal pronouns, the American President tries to win the confidence and support of the American people.

Nasuha and Ekawati (2021) in their work on the use of personal pronoun in Donald Trump's speech reveal that the use of personal pronouns in presidential speech shares the speaker's corroboration, view point, beliefs, intentions and purposes. They point out that the use of the first person pronoun "I" is deployed to highlight the good personality of the President in leading America as well as emphasize his dedication and contribution towards the nation-building.

Yi & Zhou (2020) who studied the deployment of personal pronouns by late Queen Elizabeth II and former President Trump in their Christmas and New Year's messages to the British and American people, their results yielded to the suggestion that the Queen's message produces ... a sort of mutual trust that brings about an interpersonal relationship that brings about a public appeal to remain peaceful and be kind. Her message also portrays her as ... a humanitarian personality garbed in a decent image before her people. Furthermore, the results showed that on his part, President Trump through the use of the pronoun I, reduces the distance between him and fellow Americans and publicizes his views to the citizens.

Karapetjana (2011) found that the use of personal pronouns helps create a particular image of a politician. The findings also showed that when politicians use the pronominal *I*, it shows their involvement, responsibility, commitment and authority. For the pronoun *we*, politicians use it to share the "load of responsibility". The exclusive *we* as referred to the whole world may also lay emphasis on the importance of the speaker's intentions. Meanwhile, by using the inclusive personal pronoun *we*, a politician aims at establishing relationship with the interlocutors, fostering solidarity and building interpersonal involvement with the audience. Adetunji (2006) is another scholar who has discussed representations of inclusion and exclusion in person deixis by conducting a focused analysis of the speeches of a Nigerian president. Adetunji's argument follows the same logic as Karapetjana's and many others': the use of pronouns is dependent on context, but also strategic and functional (p. 189).

Stanculete (2019) in her findings on the speeches of two Prime Ministers, although similar to previous findings on the use of the pronouns, *I* and *we*, by political leaders in their speeches, reported the penchant for the use of personal pronouns is contingent on their perception of democracy as a system of government. Stanculete further noted that the consistent use of *I* by these personalities connote assuming the whole responsibility and the willingness to put their persona and ideas ahead; on the other hand, the recurrent use of *we*, puts more emphasis on the notion of a 'team' and this fits into the idea of democracy as a system of government.

Laukkanen (2019) in his study of the State of the Union address by six former US Presidents from Reagan to Trump, showed that among these personalities, first person pronouns are used the most, especially first person plural pronouns, which are used very frequently. Further findings reveal that second person pronouns are used the least by the former presidents. Another finding was that the different pronouns have different collocations, an indication that they appear in different contexts and are used for different purposes. Nakaggwe's (2012) work, although on personal pronouns differs slightly from earlier reports. The findings show that the politicians use personal pronouns to persuade their listeners that they are superior and more legitimate leaders than their opposition. When they use *I...*, *you...* and *we...*, the intention is strategically to both delegitimize the opposition and legitimize the speaker.

The preoccupation in this section of the study has been a study of the functions and importance of personal pronouns in political discourse as has been studied in several parts of the world. This means that the study will be able to see how my results relate to the results of previous research and to provide some interesting new possibilities and questions for future research.

3. Theoretical underpinning

The preoccupation in this investigation is the use personal pronouns. It is therefore imperative to shed more light on them and understand how they theoretically explain the issue at hand. In English language, there are eight parts and the pronoun forms part of the number. Others include noun, verb, adverb, adjective, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections. Although pronouns occupy a minute part when compared to other parts of speech, they have been of interest to scholars of English language. This explains their importance as exemplified by Mühlhäusler & Harré (1990) in their book *Pronouns and People: The Linguistic Construction of Social and Personal Identity*. They argue that the importance of pronouns lies in the role they play in “personal, social and other deixis,” not just as something with “anaphoric properties” that stand in for nouns. For example, pronouns help a speaker to refer to other people and also let them create and maintain relationships with other people. (p. 47).

Leech and Svartvik (2002) note that the pronoun is a word used instead of a noun. They identify the following types of pronouns: reflexive, possessive, demonstrative, reciprocal, interrogative, relative, indefinite pronouns and personal pronouns. The personal pronouns are split into three types. First, the pronouns (I, we) which are called the first person pronouns that are used to refer to the speaker/ speakers. Second, (you) is the pronoun that is used to allude to the addressee. Third, (he, she, it), which are called the third person pronouns. Those are used to refer to a person or thing that is not present in the time of speaking. The Pronoun as a grammatical item belongs to the closed system family. “Closed” in the sense that items in this family do not easily combine with each other in the structure of a given utterance and do not readily lend themselves to inflectional variation unlike the open class system (Quirk, 1979; Crystal, 2008). Pronouns are able to help talk about other people and also to create and maintain relationships with other people. In addition, this class of words have the capacity to influence the social identities of individuals. Pronouns also have the intrinsic power to create and strengthen those identities that are is inherent in personal pronouns.

4. Methodology

This study was conducted within a descriptive research design aiming to determine the employment of first person pronouns by two Nigerian Presidents, one former and the other who is the current president. Both quantitative and qualitative data was elicited and analyzed in this study. President Mohammadu Buhari ruled Nigeria from May 2015 to May 2023. On the other hand, Bola Ahmed Tinubu assumed the position of President in May 2023. For the benefit of this study, only two inaugural speeches were included. This gives the opportunity for the investigator to be able to see how the two personalities used the first singular pronoun and to what effect. Data in the corpus were scanned manually. The reason is two-fold: the speeches are not lengthy and in addition, the researcher does not have the software that could make the count electronically to find the occurrences of the personal pronouns used. Frequency analysis was conducted to provide quantitative data for the analysis of the first person pronouns in the speeches. In addition, first person pronouns used in the speeches were analyzed qualitatively. All the occurrences were studied in context to ensure that they belong to the speakers.

5. Results and Discussion

In this section, the study shall report the results of the corpus searches and analyze what the main issues are that arise from the results. I have divided the section into two parts based on the different results that I will be analyzing. In reporting the results, this section will discuss the most significant results of the study, compare them with earlier research, and go over the limitations of this study as well as possible areas for further research.

The length of the inaugural speech of Nigerian presidents vary and are not restricted. The length depends on the speech style and message a president has for the citizenry. A look at the frequencies in the corpus shows an internal variation within each president's speech at the time it was delivered. The data reveal significant differences in the use of pronouns by the two presidents and the overall number of pronouns utilized. Interestingly, the total number of words in the speeches of the two presidents indicate that the length of Buhari's speech is 1903 words while that of Tinubu 1977 words, a difference of 74 words. Pronouns behave differently based on the positions they find themselves in a sentence. Pronouns are grammatical items of the closed system which may function in place of nouns and noun phrases. In other words, a pronoun is a grammatical item used in substitute for a noun or noun group. There are some distinguishing features of the English pronouns. For easy understanding and comprehension, the features are categorized into four categories which include: person, number gender and case.

In the context of the pronouns, person refers to the roles played by entities in a speech activity. In other words, this implies that in any speech situation, there are three (3) observable characters (the first person, second person and the third person) and their roles such as speaking, listening and reference. The first person refers to the person making a speech that is the speaker. The second person is the person spoken to, that is the listener and the third person is the person spoken about.

The paper shall at this point set the tone for the discussion of the results by representing the research questions posed earlier in the introductory part of this study.

Research question 1.

Do Nigerian Presidents choose first person pronouns in their speeches to show their intentions and beliefs?

In providing answer to these questions, the researcher shall take excerpts from the data and examine them to see if they fit into what the paper is seeking.

1. *I also wish to assure the wider international community of our readiness to cooperate and help to combat threats of cross-border terrorism, sea piracy, refugees and boat people, financial crime, cybercrime, climate change, the spread of communicable diseases and other challenges of the 21st century* (Buhari, 2015).
2. *In this spirit, I ask you to join me in making Nigeria a more perfect nation and democracy such that the Nigerian ideal becomes and forever remains the Nigerian reality* (Tinubu, 2023).

Personal pronouns to express their personal opinions, claims, intentions and achievements either individually or collectively as representatives of their government. The

3. *My supporters, I thank you. To those who voted otherwise, I extend my hand across the political divide. I ask you to grasp it in national affinity and brotherhood. For me, political coloration has faded away. All I see are Nigerians* (Tinubu 2023).

4. *I would like to thank the millions of our supporters who believed in us even when the cause seemed hopeless. I salute their resolve in waiting long hours in rain and hot sunshine to register and cast their votes and stay all night if necessary to protect and ensure their votes count and were counted. I thank those who tirelessly carried the campaign on the social media. At the same time, I thank our other countrymen and women who did not vote for us but contributed to make our democratic culture truly competitive, strong and definitive* (Buhari 2023).

This pattern indicates that Nigerian leaders are always willing to shoulder responsibility and accountability for their actions, decisions and showcase their leadership capabilities. In addition, leaders frequently, deployed the use of plural pronouns such as “we”, “our” and “us”. Their use by Nigerian presidents indicate their (presidents) collective approach to governance and their perceived inclusion of the broader population in the decision-making process. In the use of first person pronouns (“I” and “we”), collected data shows that President Tinubu had used 47 of them combined, 2 more than President Buhari, who used 45 of them. The analysis further show that Buhari used the first person pronoun “I” 19 times while Tinubu used them 10 times. It is important to note that for these personalities, the use of the first person singular pronouns seems natural and obvious, this is because it emphasizes their individuality and it also relates them to Nigerians. This is a feeling that brings about comradeship. Furthermore, the use of the first person creates and strengthens kinship and personal relationship between the presidents and the citizens.

For politicians, the selection of personal pronouns helps them also to evoke multiple identities of themselves and others from different perspectives. The essence of analyzing pronouns in political discourse is that they help in reconstructing these various identities, associations, actors and ideological groupings. The use of the first person 'I' indexes the speaker, it anchors the talk in the moment by providing subjectivity and stating the speaker's position. It provides personal involvement and commitment. Furthermore, the use of the first person pronoun, 'I' indicates a clear sense of the personal involvement of the presidents which is especially useful when good news is delivered. This is particularly appreciated from the fact that the country had been in turmoil in the areas of politics, economy, and security among others. The use of these shows the intention of the presidents to tackle these challenges headlong. They are pledges and commitments personally made by the presidents. The excerpts labeled 1-4 clearly reveal this. For the two presidents, the use of the personal pronoun *I*, reveals their personal commitment to tackle the problems they understand Nigeria is passing through. In the first statement, the speaker has positioned himself to give an assurance of an intention. In the second statement, there is a plea on the part of the president, beckoning on the citizens to join hands with him to make Nigeria advance further in its democratic journey. The presidents sees the citizens are partners in progress, who have a significant role to play in this venture. The statement suggests an appeal to the citizenry, irrespective of their status. In 3, President Tinubu uses the pronoun *me* in the sense of taking personal responsibility of politics is about.

Excerpts 5-6 are interesting in the sense that the two presidents make use of the pronoun *we* in two folds. The pronoun 'we' can be used simultaneously as inclusive and exclusive on the people listening to the speech, or those referred to. Any construction with a 'we' clearly presupposes the existence of others. When a person makes use of this pronoun in an inclusive manner, it automatically excludes others. According to Fairclough (1989), when 'we' is used in an inclusive manner as part of the led, it brings the leader closer to the people. From excerpts 5-6, the two presidents have used the pronoun as a strategy to draw themselves

closer to the people and make them realize that they cared for and considered in the scheme of things. In this current speech, we can see how the various dimensions of the 'we' here are brought to full political effects in 20 occurrences. Some excerpts from the texts which point to these are:

5. *My appeal for unity is predicated on the seriousness of the legacy we are getting into. With depleted foreign reserves, falling oil prices, leakages and debts the Nigerian economy is in deep trouble and will require careful management to bring it round and to tackle the immediate challenges confronting us, namely; Boko Haram, the Niger Delta situation, the power shortages and unemployment especially among young people. For the longer term we have to improve the standards of our education. We have to look at the whole field of medi-care. We have to upgrade our dilapidated physical infrastructure* (Buhari 2015).
6. *We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten the peace and stability of our country and our sub region* (Tinubu 2023).

Nigeria has been battling insurgency since the early 2000 to date. Successive governments have been inundated by the demands from Nigerians to flush the country of these elements. Getting rid of the insurgents have become a point of campaign to score political point. For the two presidents, the use of the pronoun 'we' puts the people in a stead of partners to be part of the solutions in an inclusive manner.

The report can say at this point that in answering the first research question that the use of first person pronoun by Nigerian presidents is done to indicate their intentions, line of action and decision to ameliorate the many challenges the country has been facing.

Research question 2.

Is there a difference in the preference of using first person pronouns as exclusive or inclusive by Nigerian leaders?

There is a difference in the preference of using first person pronouns by Nigerian presidents. First and foremost, it creates an atmosphere of intimacy between them president and the citizens. From the excerpts, their usage suggests that they want to be held accountable in a way to convince the people and this also implies that they would be held for their words. From excerpts 1 and 2, the examples of first person pronouns as used by the presidents indicate attributes they wish to use to express themselves as men with principle, moral, power, and who are not afraid to take action when it becomes necessary. Excerpt 1 particularly shows the challenges at hand for President Buhari and his appeal to the international community to help resolve them. In addition, it portrays the confidence of the President. Going further, by the use of the first person pronoun, the presidents present themselves as individuals who speak from their own perspective. A sharp contrast can be made when this excerpt is placed side by side with 7-9. In these, they speak as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The usage of plural pronouns such as “we”, “our” and “us” by Nigerian presidents is aimed to nurture a sense of unity and solidarity among Nigerians. The usage of these plural pronouns are likely to have several effects on their leadership effectiveness and public perception. Firstly, this study suggests that the use personal pronouns allows the presidents to project themselves as leaders who are relatable and accessible to the populace. When the leaders use first person pronouns, they can create a sense of closeness with the citizens, presenting themselves as approachable individuals rather than distant personalities of authority. This linguistic strategy can help leaders to gain the trust, support and confidence of the population. This

point is instrumental in our situation because over the years, public trust and confidence of politicians has eroded thus creating an atmosphere of despair and lack of trust. Politicians say what they do not mean and also mean what they do not say. In other words, a politician's speech is always taken with a pinch of salt.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the use of personal pronouns by leaders is capable of eliciting a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among the citizens. Through the use of pronouns like “we” and “our”, the leaders are able to convey the impression that they are working collectively for the benefit of the nation and Nigerians. The following excerpts will point to the impression:

7. *We shall invest more in our security personnel, and this means more than an increase in number. We shall provide, better training, equipment, pay and firepower* (Tinubu 2023).
8. *We shall continue the efforts of the Buhari administration on infrastructure. Progress toward national networks of roads, rail and ports shall get priority attention* (Tinubu 2023).
9. *Unemployment, notably youth un-employment features strongly in our Party's Manifesto. We intend to attack the problem frontally through revival of agriculture, solid minerals mining as well as credits to small and medium size businesses to kick – start these enterprises. We shall quickly examine the best way to revive major industries and accelerate the revival and development of our railways, roads and general infrastructure* (Buhari 2015).

Previous findings as contained in the literature section (Adetunji, 2006, Nashua & Ekawati, 2021, Alavidze, 2017 and Karapetjana 2011) have mirrored our finding. The use of the collective pronouns is meant to foster a feeling of participation and involvement, potentially leading to increased citizen engagement in national affairs. A call to citizen-engagement is best captured during the inauguration of a new president because it is at this time that potential goals and mission of the administration are reeled. However, it is not all the goals that would be disclosed, but the few that would be revealed, would need the cooperation of the citizens to succeed. For example, in excerpts 7-9, there is a plethora of the use of the pronoun *we* in an inclusive for the two Presidents. President Tinubu used this pronoun 37 times in his speech while President Buhari used it 26 times. The use of the pronoun indicates the involvement of the people. In these excerpts, the use of the inclusive pronoun is clearly seen. Its use also refers to both the person speaking and those hearing him. It is a case of 'me and you'. By the use of the inclusive pronoun, the two personalities are involving Nigerians in general in their agenda of nation-building. The use of *we* by the two presidents seem to suggest a means of positioning them nearer to the people in a manner of solidarity. The effect of commitment is also a factor for the use of the inclusive pronoun. Furthermore, the use of the plural inclusive pronoun by the two presidents signals the idea of togetherness. This is in addition to the concept of equality, where the speakers do not consider themselves more important or better than the people. The consistent use of the pronoun indicates their willingness to unite the people, given the diversity and multicultural nature of the Nigerian people. Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-religious and multiethnic country that requires tact in harnessing the diverse potential of the people for national development. The inclusive pronoun captures the desire of oneness that must be spearheaded by the President. The use of the inclusive pronoun resonates politicians' desire for what they say and promise to have an effect of the citizenry so that the consequences will be felt by all. However, a word of caution must be sounded here on the excessive use of personal pronouns. When leaders use them in excess, they can be perceived as self-centered and egocentric. A moderation in their use is the watchword. The use 'we' can simultaneously be

seen as inclusive and exclusive as a pronoun of solidarity and of rejection, of inclusion and exclusion. Any construction of a 'we' clearly presupposes the existence of a 'they' or 'you'. Thus, by inclusion, it, at the same time, excludes and assumes a parallel 'other' exists elsewhere.

Table 1. President Muhammadu Buhari's use of pronouns at inauguration in 2015.

Pronoun/Class	Frequency
I	19
My	9
Me	-
We	26
Our	28
Us	9
Total	91

Table 2. President Ahmed Bola Tinubu's use of pronouns at inauguration in 2023.

Pronoun/Class	Frequency
I	10
My	19
Me	8
We	37
Our	49
Us	12
Total	135

It is important to determine the choice Nigerian presidents make in terms of first person pronouns in their speeches, as their use is growing among members of the political class. The use of personal pronouns by Nigerian presidents has remained a vital aspect of the political discourse and communication. It is similar to other climes around the world. This investigation was targeted at investigating the occurrence (prevalence), patterns and possible effects of personal usage by Nigerian presidents as exemplified by the two inaugural speeches.

To begin with, the investigation found that personal pronouns were richly used by Nigerian presidents when communicating with the citizenry through addresses such as Independence celebration, Media Chat, New Year's message and so forth. The predominant personal pronouns they use include "I", "we", "our"

and “us”. The findings of Taha (2023), as found in the review of literature section resonates our own finding. This research established that Nigerian presidents habitually used personal pronouns to express their personal opinions, claims, intentions and achievements either individually or collectively as representatives of their government. The plethora and active usage of personal pronouns suggests that Nigerian presidents view it as important to establish a personal relationship, connection and bond with the citizenry and the audience. An analysis of the pronoun patterns showed very interesting patterns in personal pronouns usage among Nigerian presidents. Firstly, this study found that presidents usually used the first person singular pronoun “I” to assume personal responsibility for their actions and decisions. The two excerpts above can attest to this.

1. Conclusion.

Leadership style and communication power dynamics is shaped by leaders through their use of personal pronouns in Nigeria. From the analysis of the inaugural speeches and public statements, it is clearly evident that the choice of personal pronouns is an indication of the political ideologies, cultural traditions and personal preferences. The steady use of first person pronoun “I” by these leaders reveals a centralized leadership approach in which decisions and actions are attributed to the individual leader, in our case, the President, rather than a collective effort. This is a reflection of a top-bottom approach/leadership style in which the leaders are regarded as the sole decision-makers and influencers, sometimes disregarding the relevance of inclusivity and participation of other stakeholders, which is the hallmark of democracy. Furthermore, their use index achievements which are accomplished while the use of 'we' point to issues that are promised or pledged.

Following from this, the use of inclusive pronouns by leaders especially during crises and national challenges points to the collective responsibility and shared destiny of the nation. The leaders become the compass for national direction by galvanizing the citizenry through persuasive speech. By using these pronouns, leaders wish to foster a sense of unity of purpose and collaboration in the citizenry. This approach supports the principle of participatory leadership, as it underscores shared decision-making and the inclusion of diverse voices in shaping national agendas. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns in the Nigerian context is closely intertwined with cultural norms and values. Our leaders oftentimes make use of pronouns which are indicative of humility and respect for the traditional institutions. This highlights the importance of our cultural heritage and an acknowledgement of the traditional authorities in Nigeria leadership discourse.

However, it is important to note that the use of personal pronouns is prejudiced by motivations and strategies. Nigerian leaders can strategically shift their pronoun usage to align themselves with specific voter demographics or to emphasize their connection to a particular region or ethnic group. When pronouns are used with this kind of manipulative tendencies, it is done to create and build political bridges or reinforce existing ones in order to win public support, ultimately challenging the genuineness and consistency of their leadership styles.

Finally, the use of personal pronouns by leaders in Nigeria should be viewed beyond and above grammatical conventions as it provides valuable insights into the leadership styles, cultural values and political strategies. The pronouns used in the inaugural speeches have created identities that foster the presidents' political interest and sustain the state of affairs while at the same time mystifying the real class

and power struggle at the political center. Understanding the nuances and implications of the use of personal pronouns can contribute to a greater and a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics in Nigeria and provide insights for future research and analysis.

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