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A Pragmatic Study of the Use of Personal Pronouns in Joe Biden's Victory Speech

A B S T R A C T

In fact, every word said by the politicians in their public speech cannot be chosen randomly. There are always different interpretations behind their choice of words.

This paper is a pragmatic study that analyzes the use of personal pronouns by the politicians in general, and in Joe Biden's, the president of the United States, victory speech after winning the presidential election, in particular. It tries to clarify the different purposes of the politicians, particularly Biden, behind their choice of the personal pronouns.

In the introduction of this study, the researcher tries to present, define and clarify pragmatics and pronouns, with its types, more specifically the personal pronoun. Furthermore, the use of the personal pronouns in the political speech is explained followed by its pragmatic dimension. Then, some examples of the use of the personal pronoun, specifically I, we, you and they, in the American president's speech are presented and analyzed pragmatically. This study hypothesizes that any change of the use of personal pronouns by politicians change the connotation of that speech. The conclusion of this study proves this hypothesis.

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توظيف الضمائر الشخصية في خطاب النصر لجو بايدن

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الخلاصة:

تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليل توظيف الضمائر الشخصية في خطاب جو بايدن رئيس الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية ، بعد فوزه في الانتخابات الرئاسية ، بوصفه ممثلاً للخطاب السياسي الأمريكي. ففي مقدمة هذه الدراسة حاول الباحث تقديم مفهوم البراغماتية، و تعريفها و توضيحها ، ثم تقديم مفهوم الضمير ، و ايضاحه في اللغة الانجليزية ، بأنواعه متبوعاً بمحاولة تفسير استعمال الضمائر الشخصية (ضمائر الأنا)

في الخطاب السياسي، و توضيح كيفية توظيفه، و بعده البراغماتي، ثم تم عرض بعض الأمثلة على استعمال الضمائر الشخصية في خطاب النصر الأمريكي للرئيس جو بايدن ، و تحليلها براغماتيا. تفترض هذه الدراسة أن أي تغيير في استخدام السياسيين للضمائر الشخصية يغير دلالة الكلام . خاتمة هذه الدراسة تثبت صحة هذه الفرضية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: البراغماتية، الضمائر الشخصية، الخطاب السياسي، جو بايدن، خطاب النصر.

Introduction

Unlike semantics which mainly studies the meaning that is related to the relationship among words, pragmatics focuses on the intention of the writer or the speaker behind his/her words and, more specifically, on the context in which these words are used in addition to the listeners' own understanding and knowledge. However, one can understand that pragmatics deals with the factors that semantics does not deal with like the social communication and the intended meaning behind it. It also refers to what the speakers involve and avoid in their language to suit the situation (Crystal, 2008: 397). Crystal (Ibid) summarizes all these ideas in his definition of pragmatics as “the study of those aspects of meaning not covered by a semantic theory”

Yule (2010: 127) agrees with Crystal in his brief definition by defining pragmatics as “The study of what speakers mean, or “speaker meaning,”.

Besides, Richards and Schmidt (2010: 449) focus on the communication and the context in specifying meaning defining pragmatics as “the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used. ”

In pragmatics, context is considered the first and the main factor that determines the meaning of the word whether it is a linguistic context, which refers to the surrounding words, or a physical one, which refers to where and

when the speech occurs (Yule, 2010:129-130). According to Hussein and Mhammad (2016:53) context is the environment in which language takes place including the surrounding circumstances and any other element that may play a role in interpretation.

Equally, Richards and Schmidt (2010: 127) summarize this idea in their definition of the context of situation as “the linguistic and situational context in which a word, utterance or text occurs. The meaning of utterances, etc., is determined not only by the literal meaning of the words used but by the context or situation in which they occur.”

One can conclude that in speaking and writing, everyone can usually avoid repetition of words, phrases and sentences if there is no purpose behind it. Even the words can be substituted with others that convey the same meaning like pronouns, which refer to the same word that is mentioned previously (Yule, 2010: 132).

Yule (Ibid: 131) defines reference as “an act by which a speaker (or writer) uses language to enable a listener (or reader) to identify something”. Using pronouns and other words, e.g. James, he, school, do not refer only to specific people or things. Instead, each one of these may depend on the speaker and to whom does he refer. This is because, for example, there are so many people in the world named “James”, and this is what is called the “range of reference”. So, again, understanding this is closely related to knowing the context. According to Crystal (2008: 407), reference refers to the “relationship of identity that exists between the grammatical units”. In addition, what is called back-reference refers to the previously mentioned subject “anaphora”, (i.e. it refers to previously mentioned words or phrases).

On the other hand, while reference refers to what the speaker refers to, inference is the “additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant.” (Yule, 2010: 132)

Moving to presupposition, it refers to something like what the speaker presupposes when he speaks or asks and what he thinks the listener already knows or has pre-information about what is said in the communication or the interactive act (Crystal, 2008: 385).

The term “presupposition” is closely related to the previously explained subjects (i.e. it is all about using any name, word, sentence or expression) supposing that the listener knows, understands and can recognize the exact entity that is referred to. An example of this ism 1- “when will you see the doctor?” This example shows that there is a presupposition that you are ill or need to see the doctor. Another one is, 2- “Why did you quit the college?” In which there is a presupposition that you were a student in the college (Yule, 2010).

Another important term that is used in pragmatics is the speech acts, which is defined by Crystal (2008: 446) as a term that is used “to refer to a theory which analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication.” It is a “communicative activity”. So, it refers to both, to what the speaker aims at when he speaks and how the listeners are affected by it. Accordingly, it refers to what the speakers want from the listeners to do in their speaking like commanding, questioning, promising...etc. Moreover, the performative verbs are those verbs that are used in the speech acts.

So, in speech acts, one can go beyond the words to refer to what kind of action we perform in speaking. So, speech acts refer to “the action performed by a speaker with an utterance”, for example:

3- Close the door please. (the action attached to this utterance is commanding) (Yule, 2010:133).

As this paper studies the personal pronouns, it is possible to shed light on it theoretically before moving to the pragmatic analysis of the chosen examples in Biden's political speech.

The role that any word plays in the sentence determines its part of speech. In fact, there are eight parts of speech in English: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, prepositions, conjunctions and articles.

Crystal (2008: 391) defines pronoun as "a term used in the grammatical classification of words, referring to the closed set of items which can be used to substitute for a noun phrase (or single noun)." Thus, the meaning of the pronoun can be inferred by knowing the noun or noun phrase to which it refers. Rodman and Hyams (2007: 200) confirm that context plays a vital role in specifying its meaning.

As the pronoun is used to refer to noun, as mentioned previously, there should be an agreement in case, person, number and gender between them (Leech and Svartvik, 2002: 355).

In fact, there are several types of pronouns in English: the reflexive, possessive, demonstrative, reciprocal, interrogative, relative, indefinite pronouns and personal pronouns, which will be explained in a separate section.

Starting with the reflexive pronouns, they are the ones that end with (-self) for singular and (-selves) for plural. Using such a kind of pronouns show that the subject and the object of the sentence indicate the same person, 4- She encouraged herself (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 451).

The possessive pronouns refer to possession. They are of two types: the possessive determiners which should be followed by a noun to modify it. They

include the following pronouns: (my, your, our, his, her, its, our and their), 5- This is my car. The second type include (mine, yours, ours, hers, his, hers, its and theirs). These pronouns, unlike the possessive determiners, are used alone, i.e. they are not followed by other words, 7- This car is mine (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002, 101).

The demonstrative pronouns are used to demonstrate things. They are of two types: the first one is used to refer to what is near, including “this” for the singular and “these” for the plural. The second one is used to refer to what is far, including “that” for the singular and “those” for the plural (Gucker, 1966: 53).

“The former” and “the latter” are two other demonstrative pronouns which are used to refer to two nouns...etc. The former is used to refer to the first noun while the latter is used to refer to the second one (Eckersely, 1966: 27).

The reciprocal pronouns include two pronouns: each other, referring to two people, and one another, referring to more than two people, 6- Mary and Peter hate each other (Kolln and Funk, 2006: 313). The interrogative pronouns are also explained by their title, i.e. they are the pronouns that are used to suggest interrogation like who, where, when ...etc, 7- Where does she work? (Ibid: 316). The relative pronouns are used to relate the subject or the object with another clause in order to modify it. These pronouns, like who and which, always begin the relative clause, 8- The teacher who left the school is very smart (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002: 104).

The indefinite pronouns include pronouns like one, anyone, everything, somebody, anybody, something and everybody. As it is suggested by their title, such pronouns do not refer to specific things or people, 9- Her handwriting is better than anybody else in the class (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 252).

The personal pronouns are those that refer to a person or a thing (Kolln and Funk, 2006: 307). They can be divided into three types. First, the pronouns (I, we) are called the first person pronouns which are used to refer to the speaker/speakers, 10- We are friends. Second, (you) is the pronoun that is used to allude to the addressee, 11- You are clever. Third, (he, she, it), which are called the third person pronouns, 12- Kate is a student. She is smart.. Those are used to refer to a person or thing that is not present in the time of speaking (Azar, 2002: 38).

In addition, the personal pronouns are either singular: (I, you, he, she and it), or plural (we, you and they). Regarding gender, pronouns are either masculine (he), feminine (she), not specified which are used for male and female (I, we, you and they), neutral (it). As for case, the personal pronouns can be subjective: (I, we, you, he, she, it and they) or objective (me, us, him, her, it, them and you) (Silva, 1998: 13).

Actually, although there should be an agreement between the pronoun and the noun to which it refers as mentioned earlier in this paper, the case is different in the collective nouns. A singular pronoun is used when it is intended to refer to the group as an individual one. One can also use a plural pronoun if it is intended to refer to the individuals in that group. Furthermore, as for the generic nouns, like teacher, doctor, for which the gender may not be specified, the singular masculine is generally used, although it is possible to use feminine pronouns as well. Otherwise, one can also use the plural pronouns in substituting such a kind of nouns (Azar, 2002: 39).

Generally speaking, one can notice that the use of some subjective and objective pronouns is sometimes confusing, especially for the foreign speakers. An example of this is in the compound subject, the subject has to be in the subjective case, 13- my brother and I go to school together. Another case in which the subjective case is used is that when the verb to be is used in the

sentence as it is the case in the 14- (it is I who called you yesterday) (Nelson, 2001: 59).

2. The Use of Personal Pronouns in the Politicians' Speech

Generally, language is the main means of communicating the human's ideas and feelings (Mohammed, 2020:23). According to Ondondo (2015), language is the major form that is used to deliver and communicate either written or spoken messages. In addition, speech is the oral medium of communicating the thoughts and the ideas of people. It is used in order to deliver information, to argue and clarify some ambiguous ideas.

Regarding politicians, their speeches are usually public as they are delivered to their people or, at the same time, are delivered to discuss or solve some public problems, usually political, economic and other national and international issues. Expressing the ideas orally is usually more effective than expressing them by writing. This is because they are accompanied by the facial expressions and the body language which let the audience have a full understanding of what is said.

Generally speaking, politicians are usually known and introduced to people by their carefully chosen language by which they try to reflect their ideas and power to the world and to show, or even hide, some facts. Thus, the use of personal pronouns helps them in delivering their intentions since their choice of the pronouns is not random. Usually, there are social, political and motivational reasons behind it. Such reasons are of great importance for people, especially in the unstable countries as those of the Middle East which are directly, or indirectly, affected by the Great powers. This justifies the people interest in the speech of the western politicians.

3. The Pragmatic Dimension of the Use of Personal Pronouns in the Politician's Speech

The data Generally, the choice of the personal pronoun depends on how any politician, especially presidents, likes to present him/herself to his/her people, the media and the world. Anyway, this paper focuses on the main and the most used personal pronouns by the politicians.

Starting with the first person pronoun "I", it is possible to say that using it has two explanations. One can easily notice that the politicians use it in their speeches in order to reflect their personality to their audience which also, sometimes, may make them detached from their people whether by their opinion, decision or personality (Bramley, 2001: 259). It is also used to reflect their control and mastery to the world.

The other opinion of using "I" is a positive one that does not show a personal detachment, rather, it shows a personal participation, responsibility, accomplishment, power, ability and involvement, especially when there are good news or promises to be delivered which show the president, for example, a man of action. At the same time, using this pronoun is not easy because at any mistake the president, for example, makes, people only blame him as he previously showed himself as the only responsible individual (Beard 2000: 45).

Furthermore, the pronoun "we" is different when it is said by the politicians. For the presidents, It is usually said when they like to share their people's suffering, problems, challenges and fate. Karapetjana (2011: 43) argues that the politicians like to show that they are involved in all of their people's concerns. That is why they use this pronoun.

The shift between two, or more, pronouns by the politicians like the most common one, between "I" and "we", suggests "the politician's moving between his/her identity as an individual and his/her identity as a member of

a group." Usually, They use the plural pronoun "we" in order to show that they are near to their people reflecting the idea that they can easily work together in building their country (Alavidze 2017).

As a result, the politicians do not exclude their delivered speeches to using one personal pronoun only. They usually change whenever they feel it is needed. As for the second person pronoun "you", it does not specify number, whether singular or plural. Bramley (2001: 261) say that it is a more complex pronoun than the previous ones because to whom it is addressed is ambiguous. In spite of that, Darong (2021: 62) argues that using this pronoun adds a conversational sense and intimacy to the politician's speech.

It is clear that "you" is the pronoun that is used when politicians intend to address their audience, whether all, when it is general, or part of them. Distinguishing who exactly they address is by the context of the speech. (Alavidze 2017) Actually, using this pronoun is very important because it may be considered a polite indicator when the politicians like to criticize or advice part, or all, of their audience indirectly, without specifying exactly to whom they intend to address their speech in order not to humiliate them. In addition, it will let their people to carefully listen to the speech and may be to take their advice without feeling that they are offended in front of the others.

Regarding the other pronouns like "they", it either refers to the citizens, or the enemies, or, maybe, another group that the politician does not want to directly specify. Generally, it is interpreted according to the context.

In fact, if it is used to imply citizens, using this pronoun, by the politicians creates a connotation of separation, i.e. as if the politicians are parting themselves from their people. It also suggests the irresponsibility and carelessness on the one hand. On the other hand, it shows that the politicians

are trying to serve their people and to respond to their educational, commercial and evolutionary needs.

4. Data Selection and analysis

This study is conducted to analyze the choice of personal pronouns in selected examples of Biden's victory speech pragmatically. After presenting a general explanation of the use of personal pronouns by politicians, this section analyzes the main and the most used personal pronouns in Biden's victory speech with their connotations.

"Anyway. Folks, the people of this nation have spoken. They've delivered us a clear victory, a convincing victory, a victory for we the people."

These lines are expressive and declarative ones. They are considered very clear and straightforward. Using the pronoun "we" implies two interpretations. On the one hand, it indicates how the newly chosen president tries to declare himself as one of his citizens, i.e. unified with them. Using the word "victory" that is used in the surrounding context and repeating it implies the victorious president's happiness and feel of power. On the other hand, using the pronoun "we" implies the president's intentions to refer to his victorious party, the democratic one, in an attempt to promote it and to let the Americans, and the whole world, have more ideas about its propaganda.

Joe Biden describes his victory as a "clear" one because he got the most votes for a president in the history of America. This is related to the next lines:

"Well, I must admit it surprised me. Tonight, we're seeing all over this nation, all cities, in all parts of the country, indeed across the world, an outpouring of joy, of hope, renewed faith in tomorrow bring a better day."

In these joyful and hopeful lines, he uses the first personal pronoun "I" at the beginning to express his happiness and luck in this election. He promises that tomorrow will be better with him as a president. In addition, using the pronoun "we" here suggests that the American people will be the core of this change.

In fact, this change is not limited to America, but to the whole world, as it is mentioned by the president, the thing that reflects his power as a president, and the power of America, the number one country in the world which has a strong effect and even control over the other countries. These lines are considered expressive and hopeful.

“And I'm humbled by the trust and confidence you've placed in me. I pledge to be a president who seeks not to divide, but to unify. Who doesn't see red and blue states, only sees the United States. And work with all my heart, with the confidence of the whole people, to win the confidence of all of you.”

These lines are considered commissive. In these lines, he is also using the first personal pronoun "I" as a try to reflect his gratitude to those people who chose him as a president in the election. He, again, uses this pronoun in a direct promise to his people that he will do his best in order to unite them under his presidency carrying the responsibility of this task. This refers that he will not separate the nation from its people.

Using the personal pronoun "you" together with the word "confidence", that is repeated twice for emphasis, relieves his audience as he directly addresses them in his promises to show that he will be a trustworthy president who serves his people.

"I sought this office to restore America. To rebuild the backbone of the nation — the middle class. And to make America respected around the world again and to unite us here at home."

Again, Biden uses the first personal pronoun to make people focus on his character and on his promises about the future plans and achievements. He, in these lines, relates his promises in details. Using words such as "backbone" in this speech to refer to the middle class suggesting how powerful his language is in his try to win his people, gain their confidence and persuade them, especially those who belong to the middle class, who form the majority of Americans and accordingly are the most important class. These lines are declarative and encouraging.

"And I'll have the honour of serving with a fantastic vice president who you just heard from — Kamala Harris — who makes history as the first woman, first Black woman, the first woman from South Asian descent, the first daughter of immigrants ever elected in this country."

The intention behind using the first personal pronoun "I" with the word "honor" here is explained in the next line in which Biden reveals that his vice president is a black woman for the first time in the United States. This suggests that he tries to persuade the Americans of his equality by opposing racism. This is revealed by describing his vice president as "fantastic" the thing that relieves the black Americans who were oppressed throughout the history.

"It's time to put away the harsh rhetoric, lower the temperature, see each other again, listen to each other again. And to make progress, we must stop treating our opponents as our enemies. They are not our enemies. They are Americans. They are Americans."

Biden uses the pronoun "we" in order to refer to all the Americans. He urges everyone to accept each other and to live together peacefully in America. Furthermore, the pronoun "they" is used to refer to the president's rivals in the election. Repeating this pronoun reflects that the victorious president of America is for all the Americans, not only for a specific group or party. He says that in an attempt to gain popularity. Actually, using this pronoun with "must" suggests a strong necessity for something to be done. In politics, using this modal suggests determination with a straightforward intention in achieving the goals. It also urges the audience to work hard to reach to the peaceful coexistence.

In addition, using "lower the temperature" and "they are not enemies" indicates Biden's conflict with Trump and those who voted for him and did not accept Biden's victory. He clarifies that they should all accept his victory as they are all equal in this country. So, repeating "They are Americans", suggests that his victory does not mean the other side is an enemy.

"Our nation is shaped by the constant battle between our better angels and our darkest impulses. And what presidents say in this battle matters. It's time for our better angels to prevail."

One can easily notice that Biden contradicts himself here. After stressing that all the Americans are equal in the previous lines, he says that the good side of a person finally wins in which he refer to America in its two major political parties, the democratic and the republican suggesting that the democrats finally win the battle of election.

5. Conclusion

Speech is the most common means of communication. It is employed by the politicians, as a means of persuasion, to reach to their goals. In addition, this paper confirms that employing the personal pronouns by the politicians in their speeches is one of the most effective ways to convince people of their ideas and promises.

Biden, in his victory speech, manipulates the pronouns to promote his intentions and beliefs as a newly elected president. He could shorten the distance with his people by using the pronoun "we", which may suggest, in one interpretation, that he is part of them. Moreover, using the first personal pronoun "I" reflects Biden's intentions to carry the responsibility of leading America towards power, equality and prosperity. So, using different pronouns changes the connotations of speech.

The newly elected president, as any new one, tries his best to employ using the pronouns throughout his speech in an attempt to give a first good impression in order to gain the confidence and support of his audience.

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