

Framing otherness in the US political discourse around the Ukrainian-Russian war. *The case of pronouns*

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Riassunto

Il discorso politico spesso denota come il linguaggio venga manipolato per raggiungere un proprio fine. Questo studio indaga la manipolazione della deissi nel discorso politico Statunitense in merito alla guerra Russo-Ucraina. Utilizzando tecniche di linguistica dei corpora, questo articolo analizza l'uso dei pronomi nei discorsi pronunciati al Senato degli Stati Uniti durante il primo anno di conflitto Russo-Ucraino dai rappresentanti dei due maggiori partiti Statunitensi: Partito Democratico e Partito Repubblicano. Attraverso un approccio *corpus-assisted*, questa ricerca approfondisce gli aspetti qualitativi e quantitativi di come i rappresentanti politici utilizzino la deissi per costruire un'identità e influenzare gli ascoltatori guidandoli verso una particolare prospettiva.

Parole chiave

Deissi personale, costruzione dell'identità, linguistica dei corpora, discorsi del Senato americano.

Abstract

In political discourse, language is often manipulated to achieve one's own political end. The present study aims at investigating the manipulation of person deixis in the United States political discourse around the Ukrainian-Russian war. Through the framework of corpus linguistics, the author will analyse the use of pronouns in a corpus of speeches made at the United States Senate during the first year of conflict from the representatives of the two major parties of the United States: Democrat and

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Republican. The corpus includes the speeches delivered between February 2022 and February 2023 in relation to the Ukrainian-Russian war. By means of a corpus-assisted approach, this research will delve into the qualitative and quantitative aspects of how political representatives employ person deixis to construct various facets of identity and sway the audience towards embracing a particular perspective.

Keywords

Person deictics, identity construction, corpus linguistics, US Senate speeches.

1. Introduction

The use of language as a powerful instrument for conveying certain concepts has been practiced throughout history, in both spoken and written forms. One phenomenon that has been shown as a device to uncover the speaker's attitude and 'social standing' is the use of person deixis (Wilson, 1990). The use of the pronominal system highlights the political and ideological backgrounds on which politicians base their political discourse. Pronouns can be strategically employed in discourse to serve the politicians' political agendas and achieve their objectives (Van Dijk, 2003). This pronominal manipulation may establish distal/proximal relations between the speaker and the individuals involved in their discourse. In fact, it was shown how the speakers can distance themselves from the events and issues being discussed in text and speech (Chilton, 2004; Marmaridou, 2000; Wilson, 1990).

Previous research (Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018) showed how the personal pronouns "we" and "I" in the 2016 US Presidential Election Debates between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were used as tools for communicating political ideas and persuasive messages, particularly about the inclusion and exclusion of self and group references. The results demonstrate considerable variations in the occurrences and uses of "we" and "I" in the speeches of both candidates, displaying different persuasion techniques.

In the same way, Zheni (2020) investigates the deceptive use of language, particularly political pronouns, in shaping public opinion. The research, which focuses on speeches made by George W.

Bush on the second Iraq War between March 2003 and June 2004, employs Fairclough's sociocultural method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to shed light on how the West manipulates Arabs and Muslims. Through the use of political pronouns, the analysis distinguishes between pro- and anti-US organizations within the referents, revealing a clear WE/THEY dichotomy. The study shows that the use of pronouns misrepresents the referents and distorts the reality by labeling them as proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and associating derogatory phrases with them. This study shows how important language is in political discourse and urges media literacy and critical thinking to combat such deceptive linguistic tricks. Overall, the study offers an insightful understanding of the misleading nature of the language used in political communication, giving readers a broader appreciation of how political pronouns are used to sway public perception and opinion.

In another recent investigation, Munk & Ahmad (2022) analysed President Zelenskyy's statements during the Ukrainian crisis, with a particular emphasis on the function of pronouns. The study highlights the importance of pronouns in power representation, as "I" expresses accountability and "we" build togetherness, while "our" pronoun supports ownership of endangered areas. Overall, the study clarifies how speeches use language to unite the country and present a unified front against attack.

As shown by previous research, the study of political pronouns is relevant to the present study because it reveals the nature of relations between different referents, specifically in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian War (from February 2022-present). This relational structure may unveil the biased attitude of the US political representatives of its two major parties (Republicans and Democrats) and expose the deceptive language they employ to manipulate the audience. The objective of this study is to a) uncover what experiential, relational, and expressive values person deixis has in the discourse of Republicans and Democrats, b) investigate how person deixis is manipulated to misrepresent Ukrainians and Russians in the American political discourse, c) show how political pronouns reveal the speaker's biased attitude and hidden agenda.



2. Person Deixis

Within the domain of person deixis, we commonly recognize three distinct categories: first-person deixis, which relates to the speaker; second-person deixis, which relates to the listener; and third-person deixis, which encompasses individuals or objects not directly engaged in the communication process. Table 1 offers a comprehensive overview of these different forms of person deixis and their corresponding distinctions:

Tab. 1 - Overview of the types of person deictics and their variations.

<i>Person Deictics</i>	<i>Variations</i>
I	me, myself
You	Your, yours, yourself, yourselves
He	him, himself
She	Her, herself
It	Its, itself
They	them, themselves
We	us, ourselves

First person deixis First-person deixis encompasses two primary pronouns: “I”, referring to the speaker, and “we”, encompassing both the speaker and others associated with them. Variants of the first-person singular pronoun include “me” and “myself”, while the first-person plural pronoun has variations such as “us” and “ourselves” (Wilson, 1990). The first-person singular pronoun, “I”, holds particular significance as it conveys the speaker’s personal commitment to their statements or actions, signifying their active involvement in the communicative event (Wilson, 1990). It explicitly identifies the speaker’s role. Similarly, the first-person plural pronoun, “we”, plays a pivotal role in political discourse, serving politicians’ personal and political objectives (Marmaridou, 2000; Wilson, 1990).

The pronoun “we” encompasses not only the speaker but also the addressees participating in the speech event. Within the realm

of “we”, there are inclusive and exclusive forms, each carrying distinct connotations (Marmaridou, 2000). Politicians strategically use the inclusive “we” to foster a sense of shared involvement between themselves and the audience regarding the discussed matter. Conversely, they employ the exclusive “we” to create a sense of distance from specific perspectives or actions while implicating participants in the discourse (Wilson, 1990). Unlike the inclusive “we”, which signifies social proximity between the speaker and the audience, the exclusive “we” widens the social distance between them. This becomes particularly evident when politicians seek to distance themselves from institutional or governmental viewpoints (Marmaridou, 2000; Wilson, 1990). In the realm of political discourse, the pronoun “we” becomes a potent tool for politicians to achieve their political objectives. They may employ the inclusive “we” to garner support and assistance from their constituents. Conversely, they may opt for the exclusive “we” to deflect blame, criticism, and assume less responsibility for decisions that may have been poorly made.

Second person deixis. Pronouns frequently serve the purpose of establishing a closer rapport between the speaker and the audience while simultaneously creating a sense of distance from others (Triki, 1989). In this context, direct second-person pronouns work to foster a proximal relationship, forging a “common bond” between the speaker and the listeners. This bond can manifest as both physical and psychological closeness. It’s worth highlighting the concept of “proximization” as introduced by Chilton (2004) and Cap (2008). Cap (2008) defines proximization as a rhetorical strategy employed by the speaker to portray events and their actors as directly affecting the addressees. By involving the listener in this manner, the perceived distance between the speaker and the interlocutors is minimized. This can be viewed as a form of “legitimization” employed by the speaker to sway the audience and justify their actions through the strategic use of person deixis (Cap, 2008). This spatial framework generates proximization effects, narrowing the gap between the addressee and the deictic center. However, it’s essential to recognize that in different contexts, the opposite can hold true. Indeed, “you” can signify distance from the speaker or the center,



thereby placing “you” on the periphery—a physical, psychological, and mental space distinct from the “ego” (Marmaridou, 2000, p. 100). Consequently, the selection of pronouns can be employed as a strategic tool to create distance and depict “you” as fundamentally separate from “I”. In the context of this study, which focuses on US political discourse concerning the Russo-Ukrainian war, “you” may refer to American citizens, soldiers, allies, Putin, or Russian citizens in general. Consequently, deciphering the relational system embedded in the function of “you” in political discourse, based on dichotomies such as “Proximity/Distance” or “Near/Far” (Cap, 2008; Wilson, 1990), assists in clarifying the nature of the relationships between US representatives and the audience. This analysis also reveals whether the hearers are perceived as friends or foes, supporters of the current American policy, or opponents of US support for Ukraine.

Third person deixis. In English, third-person deictics are identifiable through the usage of third-person singular pronouns like “he” or “she”, along with their respective forms such as “him”, “himself”, “her”, and “herself”. Additionally, the third-person plural pronoun “they” and its associated forms, “them” and “themselves”, are commonly employed (Triki, 1989). The third-person pronoun has the versatility to refer to humans, animals, or objects (Chalker, 1984). Typically, third-person deictics do not pertain to either the speaker or the addressee but instead point to individuals or entities external to the ongoing interaction. The third-person pronoun is often considered absent or excluded from the context of the utterance.

The speaker generally employs third-person pronouns to establish a degree of separation from others. This separation extends not only to the addressees but also encompasses distancing oneself from the ideas and beliefs embraced by others (Wilson, 1990). This gives rise to a dichotomy between “we” and “they”. The latter reinforces the “center vs. periphery” divide, with “we” symbolizing the center of the speech event and “they” positioned on the periphery. “we” denotes proximity and closeness, whereas “they” conveys a sense of remoteness and distance from the center (Wilson, 1990). In this context, deixis aligns with an “Idealized Cognitive Model” (ICM) that proposes an image-schematic structure based on the

center versus periphery dichotomy (Marmaridou, 2000). According to this schema, the center holds greater significance than the periphery, and the periphery always depends on the center. “I” is perceived as the center, while third-person deictics like “he” or “they” are relegated to the periphery. This evokes another image schema put forth by Johnson (1987), known as the “Near/Far” schema, where the speaker is perceived as spatially near, while the “others” are mentally mapped or positioned on the margins (Marmaridou, 2000). Pronouns also serve as markers of distinctions between “in-group” and “out-group” in political discourse (Van Dijk, 2004). This use of pronouns highlights conflicts and disagreements between different groups characterized by varying political stances and biased personal perceptions of members belonging to other groups. Specifically, in political speeches, interviews, programs, or propaganda, the focus often centers on topics favored by “our” group or party, highlighting our achievements while associating political opponents with negative subjects such as war, violence, drugs, lack of freedom, and so on (Van Dijk, 2004). Consequently, the speaker links all positive aspects to their own group while attributing all negative elements to opponents or others.

Examining personal pronouns within a political context provides valuable insights because the manipulation of these pronouns may unveil the nature of relationships between politicians and their audience (Wilson, 1990), as well as their relationships with the subjects discussed in political discourse. The selection of pronouns serves as a reflection of the perceived distance between the speaker and others, shedding light on the speaker’s perspective towards addressees, allies, and opponents (Van Dijk, 2004). This perceived distance can convey feelings of exclusion and rejection towards adversaries, while acknowledging and including supporters. Consequently, individuals are mentally categorized based on specific criteria, such as ideological, cultural, or ethnic factors (Bednarek, 2005; Van Dijk, 2004). These mental categorizations position individuals either as close or distant from the center, where the center represents the speaker (Marmaridou, 2000). Such stereotypical categorizations arise from shared mental models involving “positive self-presentation” and “negative other-presentation” (Van Dijk,



2004). This framing can encompass social, cultural, political, ideological, or geographical dimensions (Bednarek, 2005). According to Van Dijk (1998), discursive strategies like assigning agency, blame, or responsibility allow actors to express either unfavorable or favorable sentiments depending on their motives. These strategies perpetuate the notion of a virtuous “us” and a villainous “them”. The source of contention often lies in one group presenting its members as responsible and the opposing group as irresponsible. The favorable portrayal of “us” accentuates positive traits that align with the first segment of the ideological square. These elements are integral to the field of discourse analysis and significantly contribute to the analysis conducted in this study.

In summary, the choice of pronouns in discourse holds immense significance as it shapes the relationships between participants and unveils the speaker’s attitudes and perspectives towards events, objects, individuals, and the broader world.

3. Methodology: the corpus and its analysis

3.1. The corpus: *US Senate speeches Ukraine-Russian war*

The corpus used in this research comprises texts sourced from the official United States Congress website (congress.gov). It encompasses speeches delivered by both Republicans and Democrats in the US Senate during the first year of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, spanning from February 24, 2022, to February 24, 2023. In conducting our analysis, we specifically focused on speeches related to the Ukraine-Russian war, excluding all other unrelated speeches from the corpus. For compiling and conducting a partial analysis of the corpus, we employed the open-source software #LancsBox, revealing that the corpus comprises 242,577 tokens and 16,984 distinct types distributed across 261 texts. The speeches included in this study convey the viewpoints of Senators affiliated with the two predominant political parties in the United States concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Table 2 presents a comprehensive overview of the dataset.

Tab. 2 - Us Senate speeches Ukraine – Russian war (February 24, 2022 – February 24, 2023).

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>N. speeches</i>	<i>Tokens</i>	<i>Types</i>
Democrats speeches	119	63303	6526
Republican speeches	142	179274	10458

3.2. *The analysis*

The analysis that was carried out for this study combines both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. We proceeded integrating a corpus-driven and inductive data analysis with corpus based and more focused considerations. For the data-driven analysis, a quantitative analysis was carried out in order to assess the relevance of person deictics in our corpus. A particular attention was given to the distribution of person deictics in the speeches of the two political parties under analysis. Concordances involving person deictics were automatically retrieved using *#LancsBox* (Brenzina et al., 2020). We then used *Sketchengine* (Kilgariff et al., 2004) to further report person deictics' usage and functions through a qualitative concordance evaluation.

4. Analysis of person deictics

4.1. *Quantitative analysis of person deictics*

The corpus was queried to identify the frequency of each person deictic variant as described in Section 2. Table 3 below shows the raw occurrences and the percental distribution of the deictics in the speeches of the Democratic and the Republican parties as retrieved from the *#Lancsbox* software. Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of first, second and third person deictics out of all deictics in the corpus.

Overall, the corpus contains a total of 13703 pronouns which constitute the 5,6% of all tokens in the corpus. The Democratic party speeches contain 3247 pronouns of which the deictics referring to first-person singular pronoun (“I”, “me”, “myself”) makes 21% of all person deictics. As for the first-person plural pronouns (“we”,

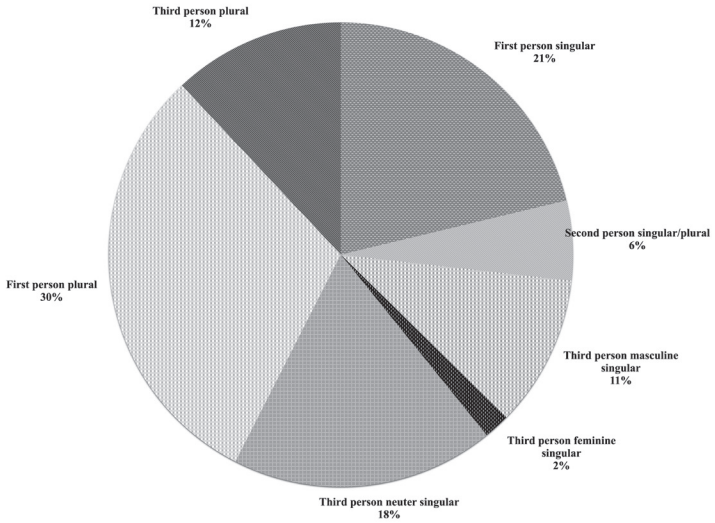


Fig. 1 - Distribution of person deictics in the US Senate speeches of the Democratic party.

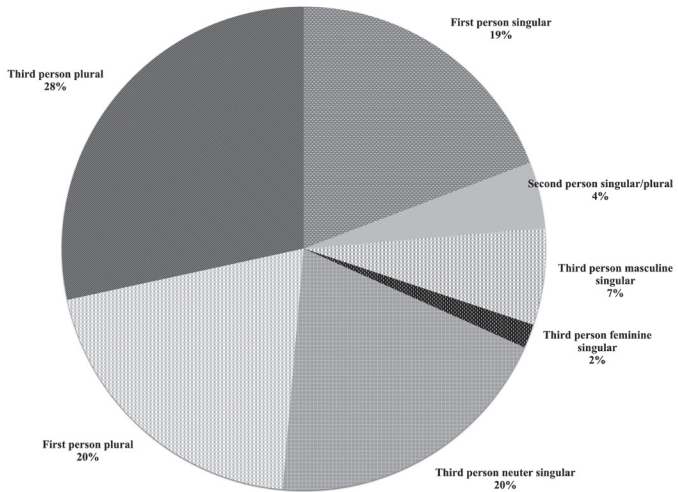


Fig. 2 - Distribution of person deictics in the US Senate speeches of the Republican party.

“us”, “ourselves”), it makes a total of 30% of all person deictics and is the most frequent category, with the pronoun “we” which occurs 27.3% of times. Moreover, in the Democratic party speeches, third-person plural pronouns (“they”, “them”, “themselves”) occur only 12% of times. Interestingly, for the Republican party speeches, while first-person singular pronouns (“I”, “me”, “myself”), second-person singular/plural pronouns (“you”, “your”, “yourself”, “yourselves”) and third-person singular pronouns (“he”, “him”, “himself”, “she”, “her”, “herself”, “it”, “its”, “itself”) seem to have a similar distribution and dispersion of the Democratic party speeches, first-person plural pronouns and third-person plural pronouns seem to have an opposing pattern. In fact, in the Republican party speeches, third-person plural pronouns (“they”, “them”, “themselves”) are used 30% of times and first-person plural pronouns (“we”, “us”, “ourselves”) are occur only 18% of times. These numbers point to a different way used from the two parties to engage the audience. The Republicans’ speeches show how third-person plural deictics (“they”) are used more often than first-person plural deictics in a possible attempt to refer to others (i.e., those who are not included in the identity of the speaker). On the other hand, Democrats’ speeches more frequently use first-person plural pronouns (“we”) indicating a preference for the expression of collective identities and for marking group membership (Clark, 2013, Vignozzi, 2022). Table 3 provides an overview of the occurrences of the deictics in the corpus divided per political party.

Tab. 3 - US Senators use of pronouns.

	<i>Deictic</i>	<i>Democrats</i>		<i>Republicans</i>	
		<i>N. of hits per token</i>	<i>Percentage of occurrence</i>	<i>N. of hits per token</i>	<i>Percentage of occurrence</i>
First-person singular	I	647	19,9	1888	18,1
	me	40	1,2	116	1,1
	myself	3	0,1	6	0,1



Second-person singular/ plural	you	155	4,8	419	4,0
	your	24	0,7	41	0,4
	yourself	0	0	1	0,01
	yourselves	1	0,03	1	0,01
Third-person singular	he	281	8,7	581	5,6
	him	45	1,4	83	0,8
	himself	17	0,5	12	0,1
	she	37	1,1	101	1,02
	her	22	0,7	66	0,7
	herself	0	0	0	0
	it	475	14,6	1674	16,01
	its	99	3,05	327	3,1
First-person plural	we	885	27,3	1563	14,9
	us	103	3,2	338	3,2
	ourselves	2	0,1	12	0,1
Third-person plural	they	257	7,9	2128	20,4
	them	127	3,9	961	9,2
	themselves	6	0,2	81	0,8

Given these preliminary results and the described patterns, we decided to investigate the occurrences, the functions in context, and the possible identity construction of only first and third person plural deictics, which are the most typical and recurrent types of person deictics in our corpus.

4.2. The first-person plural deictic *we*

The open-source software #LancsBox was used to determine the most frequent nouns that occur to the left or the right of the first-person plural deictic “we”. Again, the analysis of collocates was divided between Democrats and Republicans speeches. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the most common left and right collocates of “we”. In this type of graphs, proximity to the node stands for the frequency of the pattern and the spatial disposition of the collocates (left or right) shows whether they preceded or followed the queried form. Table 4 sums up the top-20 collocates and their frequencies.

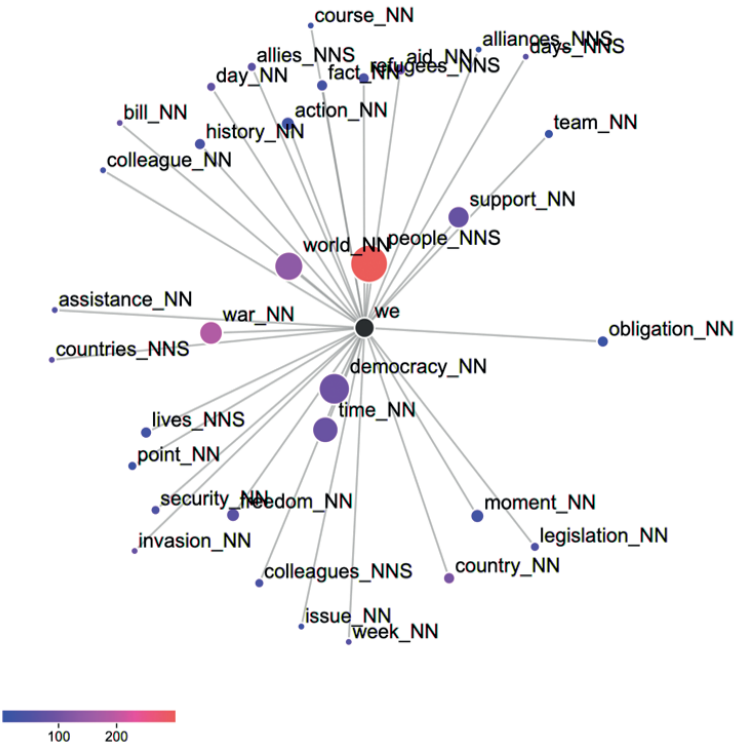


Fig. 3 - Collocates graph for *we* in the Democrats speeches.

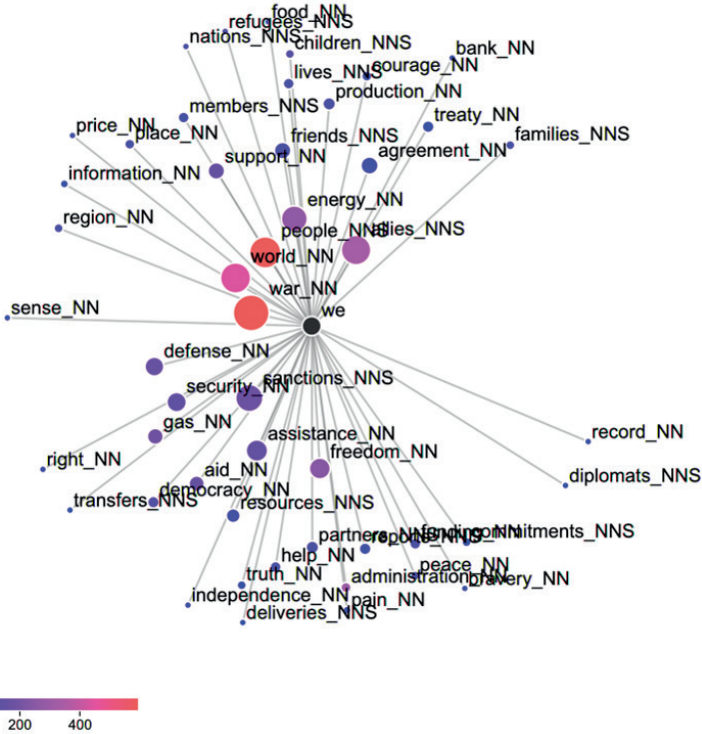


Fig.4 - Collocates graph for we in the Republican speeches.

As depicted in figures 3 and 4, both political parties’ speeches exhibit specific words closely associated with the node “we”. This indicates their frequent co-occurrence, forming significant combinations. Examining the word concordances provided in Table 4 reveals that each party employs distinct recurrent words, offering insights into the identity constructed around the deictic “we”. For instance, while “war” ranks as the most frequent co-occurring noun in Republican speeches, it holds only the fifth position in Democratic speeches. Despite this difference, it appears that both Democratic and Republicans speeches employ the deictic “we” in

conjunction with nouns expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Here, “we” is used to reference the collective need of Americans to support Ukrainian refugees and allies, presenting a united front. In Table 5, we analysed the referents designated by the deictic “we”.

Tab. 4 - Top-20 noun collocates of “we” in the Corpus divided between Democrats and Republicans speeches.

Democrats		Republicans	
<i>Noun</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Noun</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
people	26	war	64
democracy	20	people	50
world	18	world	47
time	17	allies	45
war	16	sanctions	39
support	14	energy	36
action	14	assistance	26
freedom	14	freedom	25
moment	13	security	22
aid	11	defense	21
lives	11	agreement	18
country	10	friends	17
history	9	support	17
obligation	8	gas	16
refugees	8	aid	15
fact	8	resources	13
security	7	partners	11
colleagues	7	treaty	11
allies	7	democracy	11
legislation	7	members	11


Tab. 5 - Distribution of deictic “we” in the Corpus

Democrats’ speeches		
<i>Referents</i>	<i>Number of occurrences (%)</i>	<i>Example</i>
American community	402 (45.4%)	[..] assistance for Poland and all the other countries, Moldova, Romania, and others taking in Ukrainian refugees. We have to help them feed, clothe, and shelter these people during this period of invasion by the Russians. Russia is
NATO alliance	280 (31.7%)	[..] was a conversation as well from other Ambassadors that day, but the message that came through dramatically was that we are now unified. The NATO alliance and other countries in Europe, like Sweden and Finland and Switzerland [..]
Members of the Senate	203 (22.9%)	[..] We in this Senate must also do what we can to help Ukraine in its fight for freedom and democracy [..]
Republicans’ speeches		
<i>Referents</i>	<i>Number of occurrences (%)</i>	<i>Example</i>
Members of the Senate	567 (48.8%)	[..]I t also would be helpful in our battle against inflation here in the United States. Each of these challenges can be met if we in the Senate are unified in purpose. The American people and the world view this body as divided, unable to come [..]
American community	368 (31.8%)	[..] of our American farmers that can be shared. There really is no excess production; the need is so great, whatever we produce will feed people. Our government should utilize the resources of its farmers and promote stability where [..]
NATO alliance	226 (19.4%)	[..] I welcome the news from this weekend that we are going to be joined by a number of allies in sanctioning Russia’s central bank and cutting off a number of their [..]

In the Democrats' speeches, the first-person plural deictic "we" serves to designate the American community, its allies and friends. In fact, most first person plural deictics refer to either the American community (402), or the NATO alliance (280), or the other Senate members (203). Reference to coalition nations is collocated with nouns, like 'democracy', 'freedom', 'refugees' and 'security' as in the examples below:

1. [...] Ukrainian people have fought on behalf of democracy for these years. They have lost blood and lives and treasure, and **we** have an obligation to stand strong for our **democracy** at this moment. We have an opportunity and an obligation. [...]
2. [...] brought and continues to bring other nations to the table and has allowed Ukraine to continue to fight for its **freedom**. **We** remember that moment after the invasion began when President Zelenskyy stood in Kyiv [...]
3. [...] to find ways to compensate or backfill our allies' supplies. **We** also must continue to strengthen the **security** of our NATO allies and demonstrate that the transatlantic community [...]

In the Republicans' speeches, the referents designated by the pronoun "we" are again Senate members (567), American community (368), NATO allies (226). Reference to these entities are collocated with words referring to "freedom", "friendship", and "economic sanctions".

4. [...] Island geographically, but we understand what is beating in the hearts of the people who now wanted to echo that motto. **We** breathe **freedom**. We believe in the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. We strive to create a more perfect Union [...]
5. [...] seeds are so inspired--for ordinary **Ukrainians** are responding to Putin's aggression with extraordinary heroism. **We** should be in awe of what our **friends** are accomplishing. Make no mistake though, war is not an abstraction. [...]
6. [...] of **oil**, around \$70 million per day for oil and refined products, or over 700,000 barrels of petroleum products per day.



We are financing with our oil purchases the ability of Russia to do harm around the world. [...]

Notably, within the speeches of Republicans, the use of the pronoun “we” in reference to Ukrainians frequently coincides with words expressing friendship with Americans and frequently shed light to the heroism and bravery of Ukrainians. This stands in sharp contrast to the connotations associated with the pronoun “they”, as we will see in the next section.

4.3. The third-person plural deictic they

The other group of person deictics under analysis are those standing for third persons. In particular, our attention is given to the plural form “they”. As shown in Table 3, “they” occurs more frequently in the Republican’s speeches rather than in the Democrats’. An initial qualitative analysis of its concordances revealed that in the Democrats’ speeches, “they” refer more to Ukrainians than Russians, while in the Republicans’ speeches the opposite can be observed. In fact, in the Republicans’ speeches, in almost half of the contexts, “they” refers to Russians, while in only 15% of cases to Ukrainians and in the remaining instances either to President Biden’s administration, to the NATO allies, to Sweden and Finland or to other parties. In order to better evaluate the patterns around this deictic and its contribution to identity construction, especially when referring to the Russians or Ukrainians, Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the immediate right and left collocates of they and Table 6 gathers the top-20 frequent collocates.

As can easily be observed, the two political parties present different collocates with the pronoun “they”. The Democrats seem to use the pronoun “they” not differently from how they used the pronoun “we”. In fact, it is evident that most concurrent words indicate Ukrainians as refugees who has courage and that are victims in this war. On the other hand, Republicans’ concurrent words refer to the presence of enemies, tyrants and dictators. Republican speeches seem to feature concordances related to the necessity, as Americans, to aid Ukrainians in halting aggression by deploying troops and providing military assistance. Moreover, it seems that in



the Republicans' speeches, more than in the Democrats', "they" is clearly used to separate and distinguish the identity of the speaker and of his/her group (i.e., Senate members, Americans etc.) from that of Russians. In Table 7 we analysed the referents designated by the deictic "they" in the speeches of the two parties under analysis.

Tab. 6 - Top-20 noun collocates of "they" in the Corpus divided between Democrats and Republicans speeches.

Democrats	Republicans		
<i>Noun</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Noun</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
people	30	weapons	46
freedom	28	help	41
allies	28	war	41
civilians	26	torture	30
aid	24	defense	27
war	24	military	25
world	24	missiles	22
tools	21	aid	21
refugees	20	dictator	19
sanctions	19	artillery	19
territory	19	troops	19
democracy	18	soldiers	18
assistance	18	enemies	17
children	18	refugees	16
families	17	crimes	16
tears	15	tyranny	16
courage	14	tanks	16
lives	14	battle	15
oil	11	air	15
food	11	ammunition	15

Tab. 7 - Distribution of deictic “they” in the Corpus.

Democrats’ speeches		
<i>Referents</i>	<i>Number of occurrences (%)</i>	<i>Example</i>
Ukrainians	334 (49.8%)	[..]of these same people about the situation which they are facing in Ukraine . They would come up to me afterwards and say they have been on the telephone with members of their family who are frightened for their lives, didn’t know if they could [..]
Russians	216 (32.2%)	[..] It isn’t the Russian people’s Russia. They have no idea what is actually happening. They believe because they have been told that President Zelenskyy, who is [..]
Republicans’ members of the Senate	87 (12.9%)	[..]Biden heeded Republicans’ pleas to ban Russian oil. Then they pounced. A cynic is rarely disappointed by this Republican Party. [..]
Supporters of Ukrainians in general (e.g., Germans, oil companies)	34 (5.1%)	[..] whether or not Germany will step up and support the Ukrainian people. They decided they would, and they also decided that they would make a substantial investment in military spending as part of NATO. [..]
Republicans’ speeches		
<i>Referents</i>	<i>Number of occurrences (%)</i>	<i>Example</i>
Russians	783 (48.7%)	[..] They murder journalists and conduct summary executions on behalf of their Kremlin overlords. They target civilian populations with the specific purpose of terrorizing innocents and eliminating dissent [..]
Ukrainians	334 (20.8%)	[..] The Ukrainian military and civilians are fighting for their homes. Obviously, they want to be an independent nation. They have our moral support and even some of our weapons, and they probably need a lot more help from the United States [..]



The President and his administration	255 (15.8%)	[..] aggression. But last week, the President said he and his advisers never thought sanctions would deter Russia. Now, they are finally imposing sanctions but short of everything that is available. So to what end exactly? [..]
NATO alliance	162 (10.1%)	[..] chance. Other countries on the frontlines also need to know we are with them, especially our NATO allies , because they are nervous, as you can imagine. [..]
Others (e.g., Sweden and Finland)	75 (4.6%)	[..] NATO countries still aren't meeting. While historically neutral Sweden and Finland are considering joining NATO, they aren't members yet, but they are still sending much needed military aid to Ukraine. Even Switzerland has broken its [..]

As previously mentioned, Democrats predominantly use the pronoun “they” when referring to Ukrainians, whereas Republicans tend to direct it more towards Russians. However, it is noteworthy that in the instances when Democrats do refer to Russians, it is often in the context of Russian individuals who do not endorse the invasion of Ukraine, as exemplified below.

7. [..] The **Russian people** have to make that decision, and if **they** are given the truth, I am sure they will make the right decision. That is why Vladimir Putin is trying to control the media [..]

Russians are instead described by Republicans generally as enemies even as civils.

8. [..] Russians believe in what Putin is saying, they believe him. There is no way they don't know what it's going on, but they still support this massacre [..]

5. Conclusions

This corpus-based study investigates the use of person deixis in speeches delivered within the US Senate, focusing specifically on the context of the Ukrainian-Russian war. The primary objective is to analyze the pivotal role played by person deixis, particularly personal pronouns, in shaping and negotiating identities and identity traits within the discourse of the two prominent American political parties: Democrats and Republicans.

Initial analysis revealed a notable disparity in the frequency of various categories of personal pronouns within the corpus. Democrats exhibited a distinct preference for the first-person plural pronoun “we”, while Republicans displayed a pronounced preference for the third-person plural pronoun “they”. Interestingly, both parties consistently employed the first-person plural “we” more frequently than the singular “I”, indicating a preference for expressing a collective identity replete with shared visions, values, and assets. Moreover, it was evident that both Democrats and Republicans commonly employed the personal pronoun “we” to refer to members of Congress, NATO allies, or Americans at large. By examining the primary collocates, it became possible to discern the common nouns frequently associated with these pronouns. Additionally, both parties appeared to accompany these pronouns with words denoting freedom, refugees, and strategies to counter Russians through economic sanctions rather than military force.

In contrast, when examining the deictic “they” Democrats and Republicans diverged in their reference points. Democrats predominantly associated “they” with Ukrainians, while Republicans leaned toward referring to Russians.

In the case of Republicans, at the experiential level, “we” encompassed Americans, NATO allies, and Senate members, whereas “they” referred to the enemy and was often paired with pejorative or derogatory expressions. This underscores the significance of nouns in unveiling the speaker’s representation of both the experiential and perceptual worlds. In terms of relational values, the Republicans’ use of personal pronouns shed light on the dynamics between the USA and Russia. This became evident through the utilization of a “we/they” dichotomy, which accentuated the idear



that see Americans as champions of freedom and Russians depicted as criminals, enemies, and tyrants led by a dictator. This dualistic division of the world into “we”, representing pro-Americans, and “they” representing anti-Americans, established a distant relationship between democratic nations and terrorist networks. This division was further elucidated through the use of nouns that highlighted the contradiction between two spheres or poles defined by different principles and distinct cultural and political backgrounds.

Regarding the expressive value of person deixis in Republican discourse, attention was drawn to the positive or negative evaluations encoded within. First-person plural pronouns like “we” received positive evaluations, while third-person plural pronouns like “they” were presented in a negative light. This distinction was further underscored through the analysis of nouns, categorized as synonyms and antonyms. The contrast between these two categories was evident through the use of antonymous words, such as “friends” vs. “enemies,” “democracy” vs. “dictatorship,” “treaty” vs. “battle,” and “security” vs. “crimes.” Positive evaluations were consistently allocated to “we”, while “they” was closely associated with derogatory and offensive terms that intentionally ascribed negative characteristics to Russians.

Republicans made a clear distinction between “they = Russians/terrorists” and “they = Ukrainians/victims.” This distinction created a “Near/Far” image schema, positioning Ukrainians closer in proximity than Russian fighters. This configuration also suggested that “we” occupied a central position, while “they = terrorists” was relegated to the periphery to establish a distant relationship with the enemy. Ukrainians, on the other hand, were described as “innocent” people, while the U.S. and its partners were consistently associated with positive connotations, portrayed as peacemakers or missionaries. Consequently, Republicans emphasized the belligerent relationship between “we” and “they” in terms of the value system embraced by each deictic category. “they” was closely aligned with what was considered “wrong” and “false,” while “we” was linked with what was deemed “right” and “true.” Consequently, the discourse of Republicans fostered a dualistic worldview, reflecting two distinct sets of values or ideologies.

Person deixis provided valuable insights into how discourse participants organize their world with respect to reference. The distribution of pronouns introduced a “distance-proximity” dichotomy, exemplifying an important feature of deixis known as “egocentricity,” which positions the speaker as the deictic center around whom everything revolves. Conversely, “they” referents were situated on the periphery of the speech event. This deictic center shifted from one referent to another, establishing “Near/Far” image schemas. Furthermore, person deixis encoded participant roles, as the choice of pronouns was influenced by the roles played by both the speaker and the listeners. Consequently, personal pronouns emerged as inherently political elements in political discourse.

In summary, this small-scale study’s findings unveiled distinct patterns in the discursive construction and conveyance of identities, deftly utilized to establish a rapport with the audience, capture their attention, and shape their beliefs.

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