Person Deixis in 2019 UK General Election Campaign: Analysis on the Use of *We* and *They* in Jeremy Corbyn's and Boris Johnson's Rally Speeches

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ABSTRACT

Personal deixis is frequently employed and occasionally used discursively in political speeches. This article explores the use of the person deixes *we* and *they* in the 2019 rally speeches of Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson. Drawing on Huang's (2014), Arroyo's (2015), Vladimirou's (2007), and Halliday's (2004) taxonomies, the study investigates person deixes to understand their rhetorical roles. The study utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze a self-compiled corpus. The objectives of the study are as follows: to identify instances of personal deixis, specifically the pronouns we and they; to calculate their frequency; to categorize and analyze the identified instances; and to compare the rhetorical styles of the two former candidates. The results indicate that both candidates employ persuasive discourse. They opt for the exclusive *we* to emphasize their plans and objects and for the inclusive we to foster a sense of unity with the British people. Johnson favors the opponent *they* to refer to opponents, distinguishing his approach from Corbyn's. The research contributes to the understanding of person deixis used discursively and rhetorical strategies employed in rally speeches.

Keywords: Person deixis, Jeremy Corbyn, Boris Johnson, rally speeches, deixis

1. Introduction

Election campaign speeches are designed to promote the candidate as the right fit for the presidency. While these speeches serve to introduce the candidate, their primary objective is often to establish a connection and bond between the speaker and the audience. The strategic choices of how candidates refer to their opponents, the public, and their parties play a crucial role in persuasion. Lyons (1977) defines deixis as follows:

> By deixis is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and a least one addressee (1977, p.377)

Levinson (1983) describes personal deixis as the encoding of the roles of individuals involved in the speech event where the specific utterance is being communicated. Person deixes are often employed and sometimes discursively used in political speeches and political discourse. The intention of the candidate can also be observed by the person deixis they use, whether they advertise themselves, discredit their opponents, polarize the public, or create an inclusive environment. Several studies have been carried out regarding the functions and roles of person deixes in election campaign speeches and political discourse analysis. Van Dijk (1997), in his famous conceptualization of basic principles of political discourse analysis, explores possible manipulative and partisan uses of deictic pronouns. Zupnik (1994) analyzes the persuasive functions of deixis in political speeches. Arroyo (2000) explores the use of person deixis in the Spanish political-electoral debate of the 1993 general elections. Hamdaoui (2015) explores the persuasive power of person deixis in Obama's speeches during the financial crisis of 2007-2009. Hamdaoui's study shows that the deictic pronoun *we* is often used in political discourses for its persuasive purposes and inclusive functions which create a bond between the public and the speaker, including the audience as active participants of the speech. Ivanova (2015) studies deictic references and expressions in the political domain. Putri and Kurniawan (2015) analyze person deixis in the campaign speeches of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. This present corpus study aims to analyze Jeremy Corbyn's and Boris Johnson's use of the person deixes *we* and *they* in their 2019 campaign rally speeches and to understand their rhetorical choices. The objectives of the study are to identify the instances of person deixes *we* and *they*, to calculate the frequency, to categorize and analyze the identified instances, and to compare the rhetorical styles of two former candidates.

2. Data & Methods

The data of this self-compiled corpus study are collected from the 2019 campaign speeches of Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson. The study employs qualitative and quantitative methods for the analysis. Three speeches by each speaker on dates between October 2-December 9 were chosen for the analysis:

(1) Jeremy Corbyn, October 31 (2019), London.
(2) Jeremy Corbyn, November 18 (2019), London.
(3) Jeremy Corbyn, December 9 (2019), Bristol.
(4) Boris Johnson, October 2 (2019), Manchester.
(5) Boris Johnson, November 6 (2019), London.
(6) Boris Johnson, November 24 (2019), Telford.

3. Theoretical Framework

According to Huang "person deixis is concerned with the identification of the interlocutors or participant-roles in a speech event" (2014, p. 174). There are various taxonomies regarding the non-singular first-person pronoun. Van Dijk argues that

> the use of the political plural *we* (or possessive our) has many implications for the political position, alliances, solidarity, and other socio-political position of the speaker, depending on the relevant ingroup being constructed in the present context: *We* in the West, *we* the people, *we* American citizens, *we* Democrats, *we* in the government, or indeed *we* the President (1997, pp. 33–34).

For the analysis of the use of the pronoun *we*, this study employs Huang's (2014) taxonomy: "we-inclusive-of-addressee" and "we-exclusive-of-addressee" (p. 177). For further analysis and subcategories of *we,* the partisan *we* is borrowed from Arroyo's (2000) classificational framework. According to Arroyo, the partisan *we* diffuses the speaker's reference "in the area of the political and ideological community that the candidate represents" (Arroyo, 2000, p. 5). It is inclusive because "[partisan we] in which the other members of the same political side participate with the candidate" (Arroyo, 2000, p. 8). The semantic type of *we*-indefinite from Vladimirou's (2007) taxonomy is borrowed. Vladimirou defines this particular category as "a generic first-person plural reference which includes people in general" (2007, p. 148). Finally, Halliday's (2004) classification of the anaphoric *they* is borrowed. Halliday elaborates on the non-deictic *they,* which he refers to as anaphoric *they:*

> 'They' and 'their' do not necessarily have to refer to people, but can also refer to non-human referents, such as laws, regulations, etc. Secondly, the usage of the third person plural is very often used anaphorically, not deictically, referring to a concrete word mentioned earlier in the text or utterance (Halliday, 2004, pp. 534–535).

Van de Putte (2016) studies person deixis in relation to European citizenship policy. His conceptualization of the anaphoric *they* builds on Halliday's definition: "As I will show later, 'they' or 'them' is used very often as an anaphoric reference to the word 'citizens' mentioned earlier in the text" (Van de Putte, 2016, p. 112). The remaining categories in this present study are named in accordance with their referents:

(1) Inclusive *we:* speaker + audience: applies to those who listen to the speech.

(2) Inclusive *we*: speaker + the British people: applies to British people.

(3) Opponent *they:* applies to the opponent party/parties and their leaders.

(4) Attributive *they* and *we*

(5) Public *they:* applies to British people.

(6) Partisan *they:* applies only to Boris Johnson, he refers to his party members/workers with the deictic *they*

There are occasions of Jeremy Corbyn quoting other people in his speech. The instances of *we* from quotes from other people are not taken into consideration in this study.

4. Quantitative Analysis

Table 1. Corpus size and number of instances

	Corpus Size (Word Count)	Number of items *we*	Normalized frequency *we* (1,000/w)	Number of items *they*	Normalized frequency *they* (1,000/w)
Jeremy Corbyn	5070	91	17.94	29	5.71
Boris Johnson	7373	211	28.61	37	5.01

Table 1 shows the normalized frequency of the instances of *we* and *they*. It should be noted that Johnson often refers to the opposition party and its leader Jeremy Corbyn by his name rather than using the opponent *they*. Johnson also uses *we* more than Corbyn does. The classification of subcategories can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of *we* and *they*

	Inclusive *we*	Exclusive *we*	Opponent *they*	Anaphoric *they*	Partisan *they*	Public *they*	Attributive *they*
Jeremy Corbyn	28	63	5	12	0	12	0
Boris Johnson	79	132	14	6	1	15	1

There is an instance where Boris Johnson refers to his party members by using the deictic pronoun *they*, therefore the classification "partisan *they*" is coined. As the table shows, exclusive *we* has been favored by both candidates with Johnson exhibiting a particularly strong inclination towards it. Both candidates employ a category referred to as public *they*, which has been introduced in this study when referring to the British people. Additional subcategories can be generated within the category of the public *they* since both candidates, but particularly Corbyn, use this pronoun to specifically refer to Conservatives (those who vote for or support

the Conservative Party), Labour supporters, and British society as a whole. Boris Johnson favors inclusive *we*: speaker + British people and inclusive *we*: speaker + audience more than Corbyn does. A more detailed analysis concerning further classifications of inclusive and exclusive *we* are shown in the following tables:

Table 3. Subcategories of *we* in Jeremy Corbyn's speeches

Type	Number of instances
We exclusive: partisan	63
We inclusive: speaker + audience	6
We inclusive: speaker + British people	19
We inclusive: *we* indefinite	3
Total:	91

Table 4. Subcategories of *we* in Boris Johnson's speeches

Type	Number of instances
We exclusive: partisan	132
We inclusive: speaker + audience	24
We inclusive: speaker + British people	55
We inclusive: *we* indefinite	0
Total:	211

The most frequent use of *we* by both candidates is *we* exclusive: partisan. They both refer mostly to their parties; this may indicate their wish to advertise their electoral pledges to their audiences. The second most frequent use approached by both candidates is *we* inclusive: speaker + British people. They address the nation and Johnson sometimes personifies British statehood through his references to the British people. The implications of rhetoric strategies and styles will be analyzed in the next section.

5. Qualitative Analysis

5.1. Inclusive *we*

Inclusive *we* will be divided into three subcategories: speaker + the audience, speaker + the British people as a nation, and in some cases as a society, and *we* indefinite. Inclusive *we*: *speaker* + British people has the function to create a sense of inclusion and solidarity as in the example below:

> *(1) **We**'re young, **we**'re old, **we**'re black, **we**'re white, **we**'re straight, **we**'re gay, **we**'re women, **we**'re men, **we**'re people of all faiths and none, from the North and from the South. And when*

Labour wins, the nurse wins, the pensioner wins, the student wins, the office worker wins, the engineer wins. ***We*** *all win.* (Corbyn 2019)

In this example, Corbyn demonstrates his commitment to inclusion and emphasizes the value and equal rights of every member of British society. His strategic continuation reinforces the positive outcomes that would result from Labour's victory, with Corbyn arguing that these rewards would extend to everyone. Candidates sometimes make the audience active participants of their speeches, they address the immediate audience who listen to them. The example below, of the speaker + the audience subcategory, uses the strategy of rhetorical questions. These questions often have persuasive effects on the immediate audience.

(2) *Do* ***we*** *want that kind of leadership my friends? Do* ***we*** *want more delay? Do* ***we*** *want more dither and drift and deadlock and division?* (Johnson, 2019)

The last subcategory of the inclusive *we* is *we* indefinite, which refers to people in general:

(3) ***We*** *are facing a climate crisis.* (Corbyn 2019)

5.2. Exclusive *we*

The partisan *we* portrays the speaker as the representative of his party. It is often used when candidates advertise their parties and objectives of their campaign (4), mention its past actions/achievements (7) and the plans (8):

(4) *Today* ***we*** *are launching the most ambitious and radical campaign our country has ever seen to bring real change to our country.* (Corbyn 2019)

(5) *So, we're going after the tax dodgers.* ***We're*** *going after the dodgy landlords.* ***We're*** *going after the bad bosses.* ***We're*** *going after the big polluters. Because* ***we*** *know whose side we're on.* (Corbyn 2019)

(6) ***We*** *were in Wales yesterday, in the South West today, we're going to the Midlands, we're going to the North West, we're going to Scotland, we're going to the North East, we're going to the East Midlands and* ***we'll*** *finish off in London because* ***we*** *are a party with a message for the whole country.* (Corbyn 2019)

(7) *Well, I've got news for them, there is no health market.* ***We*** *shut that down in 1948 when* ***we*** *established the National Health Service. Health care is free at the point of being for all.* (Corbyn 2019)

(8) *So that* ***we*** *are not only recruiting more doctors and nurses, and training them but in the next 10 years* ***we*** *will build 40 new hospitals in the biggest investment in hospital infrastructure for a generation.* (Johnson, 2019)

It can be inferred that Johnson proclaims a condition while he addresses the future acts of his party, depending on the final decision of Brexit:

*(9) Get Brexit done – and **we** restore confidence and certainty to businesses and families. Get Brexit done – and **we** will see a pent-up tidal wave of investment into this country. Get Brexit done – and **we** can focus our hearts and minds on the priorities of the British people.* (Johnson, 2019)

5.3. Opponent *they*

Candidates, while criticizing opposition parties and oppositional leaders, use *they*. It does not necessarily have to refer to the main oppositional party (11):

*(10) as for Labour, **they** will plainly give in to Nicola Sturgeon and waste the whole of next year in two more referendums, one on Scotland and one on the EU.* (Johnson, 2019)

*(11) how **they** would refuse, every other party, to get Brexit done.* (Johnson, 2019)

*(12) Labour will put wealth and power in the hands of the many Boris Johnson's Conservatives, who think **they're** born to rule, will only look after the privileged few.* (Corbyn 2019)

(13) They've slashed taxes for the richest and slashed vital services and support for everyone else. But real change is coming. (Corbyn 2019)

5.4. Public *they*

Candidates, sometimes refer to British people, with the pronoun *they*:

*(14) I travel all around our country and listen to people. This is what I learn from them: **they** don't see politics like the media and political class do.* (Corbyn 2019)

Sometimes the candidate refers to the opponent party's supporters as *they*:

*(15) People who think it's OK to rip people off and hide their money in tax havens so **they** can have a new super yacht. Or are you on the side of the children with special educational needs who aren't getting the support **they** deserve because of Tory and Lib Dem government cuts?* (Corbyn 2019)

Particular uses of the public *they* may have polarizing effects on society:

*(16) One on Scotland – because he [Jeremy Corbyn] has done a deal with the Scots nationalists to assist the break up of the union if **they** sustain him in power.* (Johnson, 2019)

Scots who allegedly promised to support Jeremy Corbyn are referred to as *they* in contrast to Johnson's frequent use of *we* inclusive: speaker + British people.

5.5. Anaphoric *they*

The pronoun *they* replaces entities mentioned earlier in the speech.

*(17) Two thirds of businesses worry **they** won't be able to fill skilled posts in the future.* (Corbyn 2019)

(18) *What about real action on the climate crisis by creating hundreds of thousands of new, green energy jobs in communities where **they**'re most desperately needed.* (Corbyn 2019)

(19) *(...) when the chlorinated chickens waddle from the hencoop where **they** are hiding.* (Johnson, 2019)

5.6. Partisan *they*

This category includes party members or workers as referents. Boris Johnson refers to his team:

(20) *I want to thank everyone in the building behind me and across government for all the work, the wonderful work **they** have done over the last three months.*

5.7. Attributive *they*

This category includes hypothetical dialogues. Boris Johnson hypothetically creates a dialogue on his own to criticize and satirize Jeremy Corbyn:

(21) *What on earth are **they** supposed to think in Brussels? Bonjour monsieur Corbyn comment allez vous? tell us about this that deal you want...*

This is a rather ambiguous example that could be classified as the opponent *they*, however, *they* here also refers to Nicola Sturgeon and Brussels, a metaphor for the EU as many of its headquarters are located in Brussels.

Conclusion

To conclude, the choice of person deixis in political discourse has many purposes. Electoral campaigns are opportunities for politicians to articulate their ideas and plans, to be better understood by the immediate audience, and to use rhetorical styles to discursively persuade people. The quantitative and qualitative analysis demonstrates that both candidates opt for the exclusive *we* partisan as they highlight their parties' plans, stance on Brexit, and past achievements. Corbyn's rhetorical style of inclusion and emphasis on unity can be observed through his use of the inclusive *we*: we + the British people. Corbyn endeavors to evoke a sense of respect for the diversity among people and conveys his message of caring for every individual. When he opts for the opponent *they*, he mainly criticizes how Conservatives enrich the rich and while doing so, he conveys his message that he stands with the poor as well. His constructive criticism serves as a strategic means of highlighting his concerns for the less advantaged people, effectively showcasing his dedication to their well-being. Jeremy Corbyn does not favor the opponent *they* because his speeches focus more on his plans regarding the future of the nation. Johnson opts for the opponent *they*, however, he criticizes Jeremy Corbyn individually more often than he criticizes his party in general. Johnson also uses the partisan

they when he refers to his party members, and attributive *they* when he satirizes Corbyn. Inclusive *we* is mainly used by both Corbyn and Johnson to create a sense of unity. They use exclusive *we* when they mention their parties' past and plans. The opponent *they* is used to criticize the opposition. While the public *they* is used to refer to British people or the opponent party's supporters, there is an incident of the public *they* discursively used to polarize the society. Several studies conducted on person deixis in political speeches focused on campaign speeches from various countries, however, this particular study attempted to analyze the 2019 British election's rally speeches of Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson. It is intended that this study contributes to the neglected field of person deixis in British rally speeches and opens the way for future research.

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