

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN GRETA THUNBERG'S SPEECH

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Abstract

Although the study of personal pronouns in speeches is very popular, only a few studies are conducted to analyze non-political speeches. In spite of Greta Thunberg's famous and bold speaking manners, none of the researchers are interested to look deeper at speeches delivered by the young activist. In this study, I employ Fairclough's (1992a) model of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the use of 102 first-and-second person personal pronouns in her speeches. Forty-seven percent of the pronouns are you and twenty-five percent of the pronouns are we. Furthermore, the high percentage of the occurrence towards you and we shows the characterization of her speeches. It shows both othering strategy and personalization strategy between the speaker and the audience. In addition, the pronouns act both as inclusive and exclusive. The variation of inclusiveness and exclusiveness is highly affected by who the audience is. These findings propound that the use of the same pronouns by the same person acts differently depending on who the audience is.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, pronoun, exclusive, inclusive

INTRODUCTION

When related to a discourse, the inappropriate use of pronouns may cause miscommunication referring to how the others are addressed (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2011). Personal pronouns indicate the interpersonal strategies of the speaker. In this paper, I draw an implication from relating the language use, especially the personal pronouns and the social stances. Language is flexible enough to change and develop according to its social settings and the speaker's intentions (Hasan, 2013). It means that the language can be used to conclude what the speaker is going to convey and why he/she is using the particular features, especially the personal pronouns.

Pronouns are grammatical items that represent the meaning from other noun phrases in a discourse (Fromkin et al., 2011; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). There are several types of pronouns but this research will focus only on the use of first-person and second-person personal pronouns. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002) categorize personal pronouns as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Categorization of English Personal Pronouns

	Subjective Case	Objective Case
First Person		
Singular	<i>I</i>	<i>Me</i>
Plural	<i>We</i>	<i>Us</i>
Second Person		
Singular/plural	<i>You</i>	<i>You</i>
Third Person		
Singular		
- Masculine	<i>He</i>	<i>Him</i>
- Feminine	<i>She</i>	<i>She</i>
- non-personal	<i>It</i>	<i>It</i>
Plural	<i>They</i>	<i>They</i>

In relation to discourse, pronouns are used to represent an object/an entity that has been mentioned previously. The misuse of pronouns may cause misunderstanding between the speaker and the hearer. A pronoun gets its reference from the previous noun phrases within the same sentence so it is bound to that noun phrase (Fromkin et al., 2011). In a discourse, the choice of personal pronoun is able to indicate the speaker's discursive strategies in communication (Gochecho, 2012). Generally, the usage of personal pronouns in a speech may portray the social distance, politeness, or solidarity between the speaker and the audience (Bano & Shakir, 2015; Hasan, 2013). Thus, the use of personal pronouns in a speech is absolutely related to the way the speaker addresses someone or himself. It is implied that addressing someone using a certain personal pronoun may show how distant the relationship between the speaker and the audience. In this research, I focus only on the use of first-person personal pronouns (I and we) and the second-person personal pronoun (you). It is possible to formulate the ideational and interpersonal functions in terms of social distance in a particular context by seeing the choice of pronoun (Widdowson, 2004). The personal pronouns you and we are used to personalize the communication in order to accomplish implicitness towards the audience (Woods, 2006). The personalization strategy is commonly found in advertisement to persuade the recipient. It is assumed that when a speaker uses personalization, it means that he/she knows a lot about the audience. In other words, it makes the speaker and audience become closer. The personal pronoun you is specially used as the speaker speaks directly to the audience.

In the real context of communication, Dan (2015) states that there is a vagueness in the use of personal pronouns as you may represent the plurality of you but we does not present the plurality of I. The pronoun we has more complex referential presuppositions. Goddard (1995) interprets that we is used to initiate the audience to think of who else than I is being talked about. It is also explained that we contains a metalinguistic act of 'same-saying', within the speaker and the audience in solidarity. Further, Woods (2006) and Dan (2015) state that the personal pronoun we can be interpreted as 'you and me', 'me and the people I represent, but not you', and 'me and the people I represent along with you too'. Reviewing the previous statement, it means that I need to take a deep understanding to identify the use of pronoun we in the speech. Thus, the first personal pronoun I is generally used to show commitment in taking responsibility towards certain actions (Woods, 2006). It also shows subjectivity which also leads into several negative assumptions such as self-centeredness/selfishness, subjectivity, and exclusiveness

There are a lot of previous studies that give overviews of the choice of personal pronouns in a speech. It shows that how the speaker chooses the personal pronouns to address specific parties is very important in a speech or other spoken discourse. First, Inigo-Mora (2013) conducted a study that involved three main political interviews of the President of Spain (Jose M. Aznar),

the President of the USA (G.W. Bush), and the Prime Minister of the UK (Tony Blair). Second, different from the previously mentioned study, Hasan (2013) conducted a study focusing on one speaker only. The study also involved a political discourse. The data were taken from Hosni Mubarak's speech. From the data, the study analyzed the use of in-group and out-group pronouns in the speech. This study was described using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Third, Kaussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) also conducted a study analyzing the speech of President Buhari. The study combined the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this study, the choice of personal pronouns is used as the support of deontic and epistemic modality choices.

Fourth, Goheco (2012) conducted a study of Tagalog language focusing on the pronominal choice in relation to persuasion and culture reflection in the Philippines. The data were taken from a political discourse that also played role as a campaign and advertisement on television. In the study, the researcher pointed out that persuasion strategies were embedded in the use of personal pronouns by the politicians. As the conceptual framework, the study employed Schacter's and Otnes' (1972) categories of personal pronouns namely genitive, absolutive, and locative. In this study, I followed Goheco's analysis of personal pronouns by choosing a theory of the categorization as the framework. The use of personal pronouns was seen according to their corresponding forms. As the basis in interpreting the data, the researcher adapted Reid's and Liao's (2004) theory about a patient as the undergoer role and an agent which carries the actor's macro role. The result of the study was supported by quantitative data in the form of percentage. Further, the result was described along with the examples and explanations.

As shown by the numerous previous studies, personal pronouns in political discourse have been studied popularly. The language portrays how the speaker constructs the information, ideas, persuasion, and how they are delivered. Unfortunately, none of them analyze the use of personal pronouns in non-political speeches. To fill the gap, I do not use data from political discourse. The data of this study are taken from a persuasive speech delivered by Greta Thunberg during the UN Climate Summit 2019 and the Montreal Global Climate Change 2019. Greta Thunberg is well-known for her straightforward and bold speaking manners to the world leaders. Media describe her as a role model for future leaders because of her strike movements. In the past two years, she has received numerous awards and honors. She was also featured on the cover of Time magazine. A study that analyzes the language aspects in Greta Thunberg's speech has not been found despite of her popularity. Thus, I believe that this topic is interesting to study.

In line with the previous studies, this study aims at revealing personal pronouns that characterize the speech delivered by Greta Thunberg. To limit the area of the study, I only focus on the use of first-person personal pronouns and second-person personal pronouns since they are closely related to the speaker and the audience. Dan (2015) states that the speaker and the audience of a communication context are generally marked linguistically by the first-person and second-person pronouns. In particular, this study questions how the first-person personal pronouns and second-person personal pronouns characterize Greta Thunberg's speech.

From this study, the readers will know how personal pronouns are used in Greta Thunberg's speech as a strategy for delivering her ideas. Considering all the pros and cons towards the climate activist Greta Thunberg, some insecurities about the worsening climate change among youths, and the contrast mindset with senior world leaders, it is worth to understand Greta's speech in a deeper way. I expect the readers to be able to see how Greta put herself in the setting, and how she makes the audience ideologically motivated or empathized to support her actions.

METHOD

Research design

To serve as the theoretical framework of the study, I employ Fairlough's (1992a) Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as conducted by Al-Gublan (2015) to examine how power

and strategy were presented by jurists in the deposition of Bill Clinton. Fairclough (1992a) suggests a three-step model namely: 1) the investigation of linguistic features within a text in the discourse; 2) the discursive practice exploration in which the text is related with the processing analysis; and 3) the consideration of the wider context in which the text is used as the socio-cultural practice. The use of CDA was enough since it also explained the relation between the text and the social context.

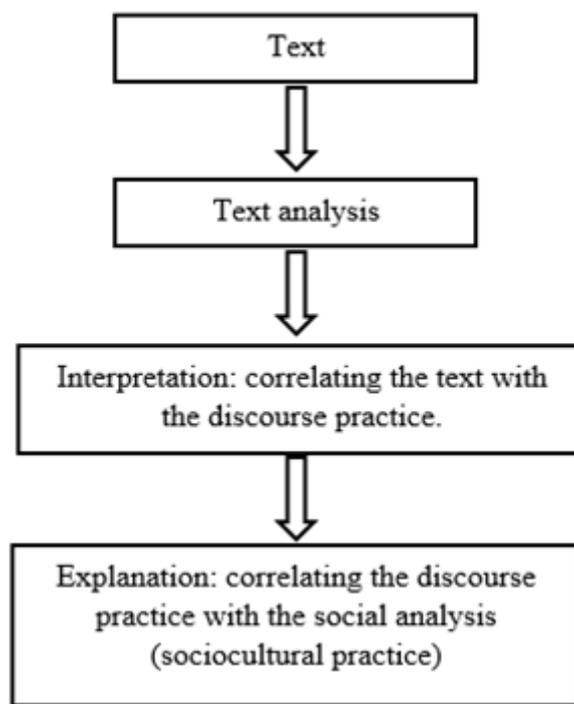


Figure 1. The model of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough

In this research, the English personal pronoun categorization proposed by Greenbaum and Nelson (2002) was employed. However, this study focused on only the application of first-person personal pronouns (I, we) and second-person personal pronoun (you). To support the interpretation, I presented data percentages in terms of the personal pronouns as done by Gochecho (2002). The quantitative data were important to strengthen the interpretation. The theory of personal pronouns in relation to context proposed by Woods (2006) was also employed. In addition, the explanation in this study involved the support of the previous studies so the result is well grounded.

Data Source

The data were taken from two speeches delivered by Greta Thunberg. The first speech was delivered during the UN Climate Summit 2019 that took place in New York City on 23 September 2019. The speech had been watched 4.1 million times on the Guardian official YouTube channel, 5 million times on VICE News official YouTube channel, and 2.6 million times on the PBS NewsHour official YouTube channel up until December 4th 2019. Furthermore, Greta Thunberg also uploaded her full version of speech on her official Instagram account. It had been watched 4.5 million times. The video also gained 143.258 comments. In this research, I observed Greta Thunberg's speech uploaded on the VICE News official YouTube channel. The reason was because it had the most viewers and the video was in the original full-length version. The second speech was delivered at the Montreal Global Climate Change on 27 September 2019. She spoke briefly to appreciate the presence of the audience. However, the similarity between the second and the first speech was to urge the world leaders in taking the immediate

actions towards climate problems. The full version of the speech was uploaded on CBC News and the Global News official YouTube channels. It had been viewed 234 thousand times on CBC News and 3.7 thousand times on Global News. Therefore, I took the video uploaded by the CBC News.

I chose those two speeches since they were the most recent speeches delivered by Greta. Furthermore, the second speech showed the success of the first speech that she was able to move several hundred thousand people into taking an action in the strike. Both speeches were delivered by the same speaker but different audience. Greta Thunberg is now very famous, proven by the search result in Google. There were 138 million results (0.48 seconds) when I typed 'Greta Thunberg' and 33.3 million results (0.44 seconds) when I typed 'Greta Thunberg's Speech' in Google search engine. To support the analysis, I used the transcription of the speech downloaded from <https://www.npr.org/>. The transcription was validated through an actual viewing of the speech downloaded from YouTube to make the materials more comprehensive.

Data Analysis

The data were in form of word chunks along with the clauses to determine the context. The presence of the personal pronouns was traced and categorized according to Greenbaum and Nelson (2002). The quantitative data related to how many times a pronoun occurred was also presented. The use of first-person personal pronouns (I, we) and the second-person personal pronoun (you) was described in terms of their number of occurrences. The data were deconstructed and interpreted using Fairclough's model. To summarize, the goals of the study were; 1) categorizing the personal pronouns to see their distribution in the speech; 2) applying CDA approach to examine the contextual usages of pronouns; and 3) interpreting the result by providing underlying implications of how the pronouns characterize Greta Thunberg's speech.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How the first-person personal pronouns and second-person personal pronouns characterize Greta Thunberg's speech?

Table 2. The Distribution of First-Person and Second-Person Personal Pronouns in Both Speeches

First-Person Singular Pronoun	1st speech	2nd speech	Total	%
Subjective (<i>I</i>)	7	4	11	11%
Objective (<i>me</i>)	0	0	0	0%
First-Person Plural Pronoun				
Subjective (<i>we</i>)	6	42	48	47%
Objective (<i>us</i>)	6	5	11	11%
Second-Person Pronoun				
Subjective (<i>you</i>)	17	9	26	25%
Objective (<i>you</i>)	5	1	6	6%
TOTAL	41	61	102	100%
	40.2%	59.8%	100%	

When a speaker delivers a speech, he/she needs to consider specific attitudes and feelings that are shown by the language choice to move the audience. As illustrated in Table 3, the first-person plural is the most frequently used in the speech, with a total of 48 occurrences out of 102 occurrences of first-person and second-person personal pronouns in the data.

Example 1. The use of first-person plural personal pronouns (exclusive)

(Excerpt 1) My message is that we'll be watching you.

(Excerpt 2) So a 50% risk is simply not acceptable to us — we who have to live with the consequences.

(Excerpt 3) We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line.

The example 1 provides excerpts from the first speech that indicate “me and the people I represent, but not you”. It can be clearly seen that the audience (the world leaders) were not part of her supporters in urging the issue of climate change. The exclusion of you in the speech shows where the speaker takes a different position from the audience. From the sentences, it can be stated that the speaker made a threat towards the audience. The purpose is to “wake them up” realizing that the earth is getting worse. The exclusive we used in the speech means that the speaker had negative relationship with the audience. The speaker believed that the audience held the strategic solutions of the climate crisis and capable of doing so. Unfortunately, the speech shows that they did not take enough action. This interpretation is supported by Greta's following speech in Montreal Global Climate Change as she stated, “This week, world leaders all around the world gathered in New York for the UN Climate Action Summit. They disappointed us once again with their empty words and insufficient plans.” The objective case us is also presented in the same way as we.

Example 2. The use of first-person plural personal pronouns (inclusive)

(Excerpt 4) We marched for a living planet and a safe future for everyone. We spoke the science and demanded that the people in power would listen to and act on the science.

(Excerpt 5) They say we shouldn't worry, that we should look forward to a bright future.

(Excerpt 6) And once again, we are not communicating our opinions or political views. The climate and ecological crisis is beyond party politics.

The pronoun we is also used to indicate inclusiveness as occurred in the second speech. The audience of the second speech is Greta's supporters that gathered during the Montreal Global Climate Change. The inclusive we shows that the speaker was together with the audience. Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) suggest that we displays a complex functionality and vagueness. The inclusive we refers only to the participants of the strike that consist of 500.0000 of Greta's supporters. It may also show a high optimism between Greta and her supporters that they have done this far together, they share the same destiny, and they need to keep working together so they can solve the global climate crisis as well as ironizing the world leaders that have not done much, according to the speech. Interestingly, in the second speech, we was used to address Greta herself as a Swedish. The use of we acts as we and I whereas us acts both as me and us.

From the previous examples, it can be seen that Greta used the first-person personal pronoun (we) to indicate both exclusiveness and inclusiveness. In the first speech, she used the pronoun we to refer to the youths she represented but not the audience. It is because she had different ideas and goals from the audience. The difference made Greta speak more powerfully in order to persuade and to urge the audience to take real actions towards the global warming and other climate crisis. The use of personal pronoun we in the second speech is different from the first speech since the audience was also different. The sign of inclusiveness was shown by Greta to indicate strong solidarity, optimism, and commitment.

Example 3. The use of second-person personal pronouns (exclusive and inclusive)

(Excerpt 7) Fifty percent may be acceptable to you. But those numbers do not include tipping points, most feedback loops, additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution or the aspects of equity and climate justice.

(Excerpt 8) You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.

(Excerpt 9) ...and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth.

(Excerpt 10) You are a nation that is allegedly a climate leader.

(Excerpt 11) You are not at work today. Because this is an emergency, and we will not be bystanders.

(Excerpt 12) The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

According to the categorization proposed by Greenbaum and Nelson (2002), the personal pronoun you acts both in the subjective and the objective cases. The use of second-person personal pronoun you does not provide the same rhetorical effect since the speaker does not belong to the community (Dan, 2015). This is the case when talking about the exclusive you. In the excerpts 7-9 which belong to the first speech, the personal pronoun you was used as the strategy to exclude the audience (you) since they did not share common beliefs and the speaker did not speak on their behalf. Greta Thunberg, the young climate activist had moved millions of people in the world to take an immediate action towards the climate crisis. Unfortunately, as she said, the world leaders keep talking about technology and economic growth but rarely pay attention to the climate issues.

The inclusiveness in the use of pronoun you is shown in the excerpts 10-12 which are taken from the second speech. In this speech the second-person personal pronoun was addressed to Greta's supporters. Dan (2015) and Woods (2006) state that the inclusive you was used as the strategy of personalization in order to get closer to the audience. In the speech, Greta put herself as she knew a lot about the audience. It can be seen through the following example.

Example 4. The use of second-person personal pronouns (inclusive)

(Excerpt 13) You are very similar to Sweden, where I'm from.

(Excerpt 14) You have moose, and we have moose. You have cold winters and lots of snow and pine trees.

(Excerpt 15) You play ice hockey; we play ice hockey. You have maple syrup, and we have — well, forget about that one.

During the speech, the speaker mentioned a lot of similarities between we that refers to Swedish people since she is from Sweden. So, we refers to the speaker herself. However, the boundaries between the speaker and the audience were eliminated when the speaker mentioned that she was just like the audience. She convinced the audience that climate crisis was not only threatening her but also threatening everyone. This way, the speaker attempted to gain full support from the audience to urge the world leaders to make clear plans and to act immediately regarding to the climate issues. The pronoun you was also used by the speaker to show directness in communication as the speaker also thanked the audience for leaving schools and offices in order to attend the strike.

The high number of personal pronoun we and you indicates the distance between the speaker and the audience. In the first speech, in which Greta faced the world leaders, she used an othering strategy to exclude the audience from her communication context. Wahyuningsih (2018) and Saj (2012) find out that the high usage of we and you in the context was because of a high cultural difference between the speaker and the audience. This proves that the use of pronoun you and we was affected by the speaker's beliefs and social impacts. In the first speech, Greta used the strategy to show how different positions and roles were shared.

Example 5. The use of first-person singular personal pronoun

(Excerpt 16) I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean.

(Excerpt 17) I do not want to believe that. Because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil. And that I refuse to believe.

(Excerpt 18) ... and I cannot thank you enough for being here.

(Excerpt 19) But I think we have proven that to be wrong by now.

The number of first-person singular pronouns in both speeches was quite a few. However, the use of pronoun I was to show the speaker's position as the leader, the influencer, and the initiator of the movement. Greta would like to see her personal belief and comments towards what has been said to her. There have been a lot of pros and cons that personally attacked her. However, the pronoun I was only used by Greta in a certain situation that required her to act as a leader. As shown in the Excerpt 17, Greta stated her disagreement and judgment towards the world leaders. She used the pronoun I and she also wanted to talk personally as the leader. The use of I indicates strong belief, responsibility, and optimism. In the previous study, Saj (2012) finds out that I is used to describe specific deeds, to highlight the speaker's point of view, and present personal beliefs or comments.

CONCLUSION

The high number of first-person personal pronoun we and second-person personal pronoun you in both speeches is the sign of pronouns that characterize Greta Thunberg's speech. The pronouns were used exclusively and inclusively as well as in subjective and objective cases. The study highlights that the use of personal pronouns varies according to the context. In the first speech, the personal pronouns used were mostly exclusive whereas in the second speech, the personal pronouns used were mostly inclusive. The difference was due to the social settings of both speeches which were also dissimilar. The exclusion of you allows the speaker to create distance and different point of view from the audience.

Since inclusive pronouns were generally used in the second speech, the sense of solidarity can be proved. The audience of the second speech was different from the audience in the first speech. The finding reveals that those pronouns were used by the speaker to create a community oneness and solidarity as the speaker spoke on the audience's behalf. The distance was shortened so they became united and could work together as a team. The interesting point of the speech is that no matter how inclusive or exclusive the language is, the purpose of the speech is to fight and to convince the world leaders that sufficient plans and actions are required.

The findings indicate how Greta took a stance as the leader of young people throughout different contexts. It is in line with the previous study conducted by Goheco (2012) that points out the speaker as the instigator or the undergoer of a particular action. It has been proven in this study that the same pronoun may refer differently. It depends on who is the audience or who is the listener. It helps the readers to understand how ideology is produced. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach has successfully explains how the social and contextual factors are related to the linguistic structures.

However, the study is only limited to the use of first-person personal pronouns and second-person personal pronoun. I suggest further studies of personal pronouns by conducting other models of CDA combined with SFL/SFG as it will bring clearer and more grounded findings. Therefore, the other pronouns occur in the discourse are also useful to study. In this study, I only analyze two out of numerous speeches delivered by Greta Thunberg so I cannot make a generalization or a conclusion of her language style. The findings can be used as an example of how Greta 'plays' with the language in front of different audiences.

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