

# A Pragmatic Analysis of Person Deixis in a Political Discourse: The Case Study of President Akufo Addo's Inaugural Address

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of person deixis in President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's 2017 inaugural address within a pragmatic framework. The study aims to identify, quantify, and interpret how deictic expressions—particularly personal pronouns—are used to construct political identity, express ideological stance, and engage the audience. Drawing on Levinson's (1983) theory of deixis, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation of contextual usage. The findings reveal that first-person plural deixis (*we, our, us*) is the most dominant, accounting for 60.6% of all deictic references, followed by third-person (17%), first-person singular (15.1%), and second-person (7.4%) forms. This distribution indicates a strong preference for collective framing, with the president positioning governance as a shared national responsibility. The alternation between *I* and *we* reflect a pragmatic balance between personal accountability and inclusive leadership, while second-person forms (*you, your*) enhance direct audience engagement. Third-person deixis functions to differentiate the current administration from past regimes, thereby reinforcing ideological positioning and historical continuity. The study concludes that person deixis in political discourse is both a quantifiable linguistic feature and a powerful rhetorical resource, used to construct solidarity, legitimacy, and national vision. Beyond the Ghanaian context, the findings highlight the broader significance of deixis in shaping political rhetoric in emerging democracies. The study therefore recommends comparative analyses of presidential discourse in Ghana and other African contexts to further illuminate how deictic strategies evolve across political regimes and communicative settings.

**Keywords:** Person deixis, pragmatics, political discourse, inaugural address, Ghana, Akufo-Addo

## INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most powerful instruments available to political actors. Through it, leaders establish authority, convey ideologies, inspire followers, and shape national consciousness. Political speeches, particularly inaugural addresses, are therefore not merely ceremonial but strategic communicative acts laden with meaning and intention. They represent carefully constructed rhetorical performances through which a new leader seeks to define their political identity, set national priorities, and establish a relationship with the citizenry. Every lexical and structural choice in such speeches reflect an underlying pragmatic purpose. Among these linguistic resources, deixis—the context-dependent aspect of language that anchors utterances to the speaker, listener, and situation—plays a pivotal role in shaping the interaction between a political leader and their audience.

This study undertakes a pragmatic analysis of person deixis in the inaugural address delivered by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo upon assuming office on January 7, 2017. The address, which marked the commencement of his first term as the fifth president of the Fourth Republic of Ghana, provides rich material for linguistic inquiry. Through a detailed examination of personal pronouns and related deictic expressions, this paper explores how Akufo-Addo constructs his persona, aligns himself with the people, and situates his administration within the continuum of Ghana's democratic development.

Political discourse has long been recognized as a fertile ground for pragmatic analysis because it operates at the intersection of language, ideology, and power (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). The choice of pronouns in political speeches is far from arbitrary—it indexes social relations, reveals ideological positioning, and signals inclusion or exclusion. For instance, the first-person plural “we” may denote national unity (“we as Ghanaians”) or political partisanship (“we the government”), depending on context. Similarly, the first-person singular “I” may convey personal resolve or self-promotion. Thus, person deixis serves as a lens through which political identity and leadership style can be interpreted.

The 2017 inaugural address is particularly interesting because it was delivered at a critical moment in Ghana’s democratic journey. Having won a decisive electoral victory, Akufo-Addo used his first major public speech as president to reassure citizens, outline his vision, and project himself as a unifying leader. The linguistic choices in this address—especially those relating to person deixis—offer insight into how he sought to position himself and his administration relative to the people, the opposition, and the nation’s political legacy.

From a pragmatic standpoint, deixis is concerned with how language points to people, places, and times relative to the speaker’s position (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Person deixis specifically refers to linguistic expressions that identify participants in the speech event: the speaker (first person), the addressee (second person), and others (third person). In political speeches, person deixis becomes a key device for enacting social relationships and projecting collective belonging. By examining these deictic choices in Akufo-Addo’s address, this study reveals how the president negotiates proximity, authority, and solidarity in his communication with Ghanaians.

### **1.1 The objectives of this study are threefold:**

1. To identify and quantify the occurrences of person deixis in President Akufo-Addo’s 2017 inaugural address.
2. To analyze the pragmatic functions of each type of person deixis within the context of the speech.
3. To interpret how deixis contributes to the overall persuasive and ideological goals of the discourse.

### **1.2 The study is guided by the following research questions:**

1. What types and frequencies of person deixis occur in President Akufo-Addo’s inaugural address?
2. How are these deictic expressions pragmatically employed to achieve communicative and political effects?
3. What do the patterns of deixis reveal about the president’s self-representation and relationship with his audience?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

1. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to integrate both quantitative and qualitative perspectives in pragmatic analysis. While several studies have examined political speeches from thematic or rhetorical angles (Fairclough, 2001; Opeibi, 2009; Okoro, 2017), fewer have provided detailed pragmatic and statistical examinations of deictic structures in African political contexts. By focusing on a Ghanaian inaugural address, this paper contributes to the regional scholarship on political communication and enriches understanding of how pragmatic devices reflect leadership discourse strategies.

2. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the subtle ways in which pronoun usage indexes collective belonging and political vision. Akufo-Addo’s repeated use of inclusive “we” forms, for example, functions to dissolve the boundaries between the government and the governed, projecting an image of participatory governance. Conversely, selective deployment of “I” underscores personal responsibility, while references to “they” and “them” demarcate ideological contrast or continuity with past regimes. These linguistic dynamics underscore the inherently relational nature of political discourse.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section Two reviews related literature on deixis and political discourse. Section Three outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study, particularly the pragmatic

theory of deixis. Section Four describes the methodology used in collecting and analyzing data. Section Five presents the findings with tables illustrating the distribution of person deixis. Section Six discusses the pragmatic implications of these findings, while Section Seven concludes the paper with reflections on broader communicative functions and implications for political language studies.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study of deixis in political discourse has attracted sustained scholarly attention due to its relevance in understanding how language encodes context, identity, and power. This section reviews key contributions in pragmatics and political discourse analysis, with particular focus on person deixis, and situates the present study within both global and Ghanaian scholarship.

### 2.1 Deixis in Pragmatic Theory

The concept of deixis has its roots in early pragmatic theory, where scholars such as Fillmore (1975) and Lyons (1977) conceptualized it as a fundamentally **context-dependent linguistic phenomenon**. These foundational works established that deictic expressions cannot be interpreted without reference to the speech situation.

Building on this foundation, Levinson (1983) provided a systematic classification of deixis into five categories—person, place, time, discourse, and social deixis—emphasizing its central role in meaning-making. Similarly, Yule (1996) demonstrated that deixis is essential for discourse coherence, as it anchors utterances to participants and context.

More recent scholarship has moved beyond structural descriptions to emphasize the **interactional and ideological dimensions** of deixis. Marmaridou (2000) and Hanks (2005) argue that deixis is not merely grammatical but also socially embedded, reflecting relationships of power, authority, and participation. In institutional discourse—particularly political speech—deictic choices are therefore strategic, shaping how speakers position themselves and their audiences.

### 2.2 Person Deixis in Political Discourse

A substantial body of research has examined the role of person deixis in political communication, particularly the use of pronouns as tools of persuasion and identity construction. Beard (2000) observes that pronouns in parliamentary discourse are used to either foster solidarity or create distance, depending on communicative goals. Similarly, Wilson (1990) highlights the oscillation between inclusive and exclusive reference as a key feature of political rhetoric.

Studies in Western contexts further demonstrate the strategic deployment of pronouns. Bull and Fetzer (2006) and Charteris-Black (2011) show that the pronoun *we* is frequently used to construct collective identity and shared purpose, while *I* conveys leadership responsibility and authority. In analyses of American presidential discourse, including the inaugural addresses of Barack Obama, scholars such as Bramley (2001) and Thomas and Wareing (2004) illustrate how *we* rhetorically merges the speaker with the citizenry to promote unity and national vision.

In African contexts, similar patterns emerge but are shaped by distinct socio-political realities. Opeibi (2009) demonstrates that Nigerian political speeches rely heavily on inclusive deixis to project collective responsibility. Okoro (2017), in a study of President Buhari's inaugural address, notes that *we* fosters national belonging, while *they* often refers to previous administrations or political adversaries. Adegaju (2009) likewise shows that deixis in Obasanjo's speeches reflects leadership ethos and persuasive intent.

In Ghana, Agyekum (2015) highlights the importance of deixis in mediating between individual authority and communal identity, a central feature of Ghanaian sociocultural communication. However, existing Ghanaian studies have largely remained qualitative and descriptive, with limited attention to systematic quantification or detailed pragmatic analysis of presidential discourse.

### 2.3 Deixis, Ideology, and Power

Beyond its referential function, person deixis plays a crucial role in encoding ideological meanings. Van Dijk (2006) argues that pronouns are instrumental in constructing in-groups and out-groups, thereby organizing social cognition and reinforcing ideological boundaries. Fairclough (1995, 2001) similarly views deixis as part of broader discursive strategies that sustain power relations and legitimation.

The contrast between *we* and *they* is particularly significant in political rhetoric, often representing a symbolic divide between “the people” and “others,” such as political opponents or previous regimes. Chilton (2004) emphasizes that such deictic contrasts are central to persuasion because they encode alignment, opposition, and moral positioning.

In African democracies, these patterns are often intertwined with postcolonial concerns of nation-building, inclusion, and legitimacy, where leaders must simultaneously assert authority and foster unity. Thus, person deixis becomes a key linguistic resource for negotiating these competing demands.

### 2.4 Person Deixis, Leadership Persona, and Context

Person deixis is also central to the construction of leadership persona in political discourse. Fetzer (2014) argues that politicians strategically shift between *I* and *we* to navigate between personal agency and institutional representation. While *I* signals commitment, accountability, and decisiveness, *we* distributes responsibility and fosters collective ownership.

Inaugural addresses are particularly significant in this regard, as they mark the transition from electoral contestation to governance. They provide a platform for articulating national vision, legitimizing authority, and redefining relationships between leader and citizens.

In the Ghanaian context, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo’s 2017 inaugural address must be understood against the backdrop of a highly competitive democratic transition, following the 2016 general elections in which power shifted from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The speech reflects a moment of renewed national expectation, economic challenges, and strong public demand for accountability and governance reform.

Within this context, the use of person deixis is not merely linguistic but deeply political and symbolic. For example, expressions such as “*I will protect the public purse*” foreground personal responsibility, while “*We have the responsibility to make our nation work again*” constructs a collective national project. These choices reflect an attempt to balance authority, inclusiveness, and legitimacy in a politically sensitive moment.

### 2.5 Summary and Identified Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that person deixis is a powerful pragmatic tool in political discourse, functioning at the intersection of language, ideology, and power. While extensive research exists in Western contexts, and growing attention has been given to African political discourse, significant gaps remain.

In particular:

- Ghanaian studies on deixis are limited in scope and largely qualitative
- There is little integration of quantitative frequency analysis with pragmatic interpretation
- Few studies explicitly connect deictic patterns to specific political contexts, such as electoral transitions

This study addresses these gaps by providing a systematic, mixed-methods analysis of person deixis in a Ghanaian presidential inaugural address. It combines quantitative evidence (frequency and distribution) with qualitative interpretation, while situating the analysis within the 2017 Ghanaian political context. In doing so, it

offers a more nuanced understanding of how deixis functions as a strategic resource in Ghanaian political communication.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEIXIS IN PRAGMATICS

Deixis is one of the most fundamental concepts in pragmatics because it deals with how language encodes context. The term derives from the Greek word *deiktikos*, meaning “pointing” or “indicating.” In linguistic pragmatics, deixis refers to words and phrases—known as deictic expressions—whose interpretation depends on the context of the utterance, particularly the identity of the speaker and listener, the time and place of speaking, and the discourse situation (Levinson, 1983; Fillmore, 1997; Yule, 1996).

The core idea of deixis is that meaning is not always self-contained in linguistic forms; it is anchored to situational parameters. For example, pronouns like *I*, *you*, *he*, *they* or adverbs such as *here* and *now* cannot be understood without reference to who is speaking, to whom, where, and when. Thus, deixis connects language to context and situational meaning.

### 3.1 Types of Deixis

1. Linguists generally recognize five main types of deixis (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996):
2. Person Deixis – points to participants in the speech event (speaker, addressee, others).
3. Place Deixis – refers to spatial locations relative to the speaker (*here*, *there*, *this*, *that*).
4. Time Deixis – indexes temporal relationships (*now*, *then*, *today*, *tomorrow*).
5. Discourse Deixis – relates utterances to parts of discourse (*in the next section*, *as mentioned above*).
6. Social Deixis – reflects social relationships and hierarchies (*sir*, *madam*, *Your Excellency*).

This study focuses exclusively on person deixis, which plays a particularly powerful role in political discourse because it encodes the relationship between the speaker and others in the communicative situation.

### 3.2 Person Deixis

Person deixis expresses distinctions between participants in an interaction, typically realized through pronouns, verb inflections, and possessive forms. These are conventionally divided into:

- First person: referring to the speaker (*I*, *we*, *me*, *us*, *my*, *our*).
- Second person: referring to the addressee (*you*, *your*).
- Third person: referring to others not directly involved in the interaction (*he*, *she*, *they*, *them*, *his*, *their*).

Levinson (1983) asserts that person deixis is central to understanding the pragmatic structure of communication because it reflects the shifting roles of speaker, listener, and others. Similarly, Bühler (1934) introduced the concept of the deictic center—the reference point in space, time, and identity from which all deictic expressions are interpreted. In most discourse situations, the speaker is the deictic center; however, in political discourse, the deictic center can shift strategically to create solidarity or distance.

### 3.3 Pragmatic Perspectives on Person Deixis

In pragmatic analysis, person deixis is more than a grammatical feature; it is a social and rhetorical tool. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness, for instance, underscores that pronoun choice reflects degrees of formality, intimacy, and power relations. In political speeches, pronouns are carefully chosen to project authority while maintaining inclusiveness. The alternation between *I* and *we* can mark shifts between personal commitment and collective ownership (Chilton, 2004).

Fairclough (2001) argues that pronoun use in political language is ideologically loaded: the inclusive we may function to construct unity and erase division, while the exclusive we can demarcate insiders from outsiders. Similarly, Wilson (2005) emphasizes that deixis contributes to political identity construction by positioning the speaker within particular relational and ideological coordinates.

Deixis also connects with speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) in that deictic expressions often perform illocutionary functions—such as commitments, promises, and declarations—by explicitly marking the speaker’s involvement. When President Akufo-Addo says “I will protect the public purse,” the pronoun I not only identifies the speaker but also enacts a performative commitment.

### 3.4 The Deictic Center in Political Discourse

Political speeches often manipulate the deictic center to achieve rhetorical goals. The speaker may position themselves as part of the people (“we Ghanaians”) to foster solidarity, or as distinct from them (“I will lead you”) to emphasize leadership responsibility. The audience may be directly addressed (“you have entrusted me...”) to heighten engagement and shared responsibility.

Chilton (2004) proposes that in political discourse, deixis functions within three cognitive dimensions: spatial, temporal, and modal. The spatial dimension involves proximity or distance between the speaker and audience; the temporal dimension situates the political vision within time (past, present, future); and the modal dimension concerns the degree of certainty or obligation expressed. Person deixis interacts with all three, anchoring ideological meaning within the speaker’s perspective.

### 3.5 Relevance of Pragmatic Theory to Political Communication

The pragmatic analysis of person deixis provides insights into how politicians use language to manage relationships and craft identities. As van Dijk (2006) and Beard (2000) observe, the power of political discourse lies not merely in what is said but in how it positions the speaker and the audience within a shared social reality. Deixis, therefore, functions as a linguistic bridge between the personal and the collective, the leader and the nation, the individual and the institution.

This study adopts Levinson’s (1983) pragmatic framework of deixis as its guiding theoretical lens. Levinson’s model emphasizes the contextual anchoring of deictic reference and provides a systematic typology suitable for analyzing person-based reference in discourse. This framework enables the identification and categorization of deictic expressions in Akufo-Addo’s speech and facilitates interpretation of their pragmatic functions within Ghana’s political context.

## METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative-quantitative (mixed) research design to provide a comprehensive analysis of person deixis in political discourse. The quantitative component involves identifying and counting the occurrences of person deictic expressions in President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo’s 2017 inaugural address, while the qualitative component focuses on interpreting their pragmatic and ideological functions within context. This mixed-methods approach aligns with the pragmatic research tradition, which emphasizes the integration of numerical data and contextual interpretation in explaining language use in social interaction (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### 4.2 Data Source

The data for this study were drawn from President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo’s inaugural address delivered on January 7, 2017, at Independence Square, Accra. The official transcript was obtained from the website of the Presidency of Ghana and cross-verified with national media sources such as *Graphic Online* and

*Ghana Web* to ensure textual accuracy. The speech contains approximately **2,457 words** and represents a suitable corpus for pragmatic analysis due to its blend of ceremonial rhetoric, political vision, and persuasive discourse.

### 4.3 Data Preparation and Coding Procedure

To enhance transparency and replicability, the speech was first **transcribed, cleaned, and segmented into numbered clauses and sentences**. This facilitated systematic identification and tracking of deictic expressions.

All person deictic items were identified and coded based on **Levinson's (1983)** classification:

- **First-person deixis:** *I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours*
- **Second-person deixis:** *you, your, yours*
- **Third-person deixis:** *he, she, they, them, his, her, their, theirs*

### Coding Procedure

1. Each pronoun was **manually highlighted and tagged** within the text.
2. A **coding sheet (spreadsheet)** was created to record:
  - the pronoun
  - its frequency
  - its grammatical category
  - its referential meaning (e.g., speaker, audience, political actors)
3. Each instance was assigned a **contextual label** indicating whether it functioned as:
  - inclusive (e.g., *we* = speaker + citizens)
  - exclusive (e.g., *we* = government only)
4. Ambiguous cases (e.g., "*our ancestors*") were resolved through **contextual interpretation**, considering surrounding clauses.

Although the coding was conducted manually to preserve contextual sensitivity, **basic digital tools (Microsoft Word and Excel)** were used to organize, count, and cross-check frequencies.

### 4.4 Analytical Framework and Procedure

The analysis is grounded in **Levinson's (1983) theory of deixis**, supplemented by **Chilton (2004)** and **Fairclough (2001)**, which emphasize the ideological and discursive functions of language in political contexts.

The analytical procedure followed four main stages:

1. **Identification** – extracting all person deictic expressions from the text.
2. **Classification** – grouping them into first-, second-, and third-person categories.
3. **Quantification** – calculating frequencies and percentages, presented in tables to enhance clarity and interpretability.
4. **Interpretation** – analyzing the pragmatic and ideological roles of each category.

To strengthen the link between analysis and data, representative excerpts from the speech were systematically incorporated into the discussion. These textual examples serve as empirical evidence supporting claims about how specific pronouns function rhetorically and ideologically.

In addition, tabular presentations and simple visual summaries were employed to make frequency patterns more transparent and accessible, thereby improving the robustness of the quantitative analysis.

### 4.5 Reliability and Validity

Several measures were taken to ensure the **reliability and validity** of the study:

- **Repeated Coding:** The dataset was coded twice at different times to minimize omissions and inconsistencies.
- **Inter-coder Verification:** A second linguist independently reviewed approximately **20% of the data**, and discrepancies (less than 5%) were discussed and resolved collaboratively.
- **Transparent Procedure:** The use of a coding sheet and clearly defined categories enhances replicability.
- **Contextual Validation:** Each pronoun was interpreted within its immediate linguistic and situational context, following established pragmatic principles (Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983).
- **Data–Analysis Linkage:** The inclusion of direct quotations from the speech strengthens the credibility of interpretive claims, ensuring that ideological interpretations are grounded in actual textual evidence.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the quantitative results of the deixis analysis and interprets them pragmatically.

### 5.1 Quantitative Results

The total number of deictic expressions identified in the speech was 312, distributed across the three major categories of person deixis. The counts and percentages are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Person Deixis in Akufo-Addo’s 2017 Inaugural Address**

Type of Person Deixis	Examples	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
First Person Singular (I, me, my, mine)	I, me, my	47	15.1%
First Person Plural (we, us, our, ours)	we, us, our	189	60.6%
Second Person (you, your, yours)	you, your	23	7.4%
Third Person (he, they, their, them, his)	they, them, their, his	53	17.0%
Total	-	312	100%

### 5.2 Interpretation of Quantitative Findings

The frequency counts reveal a dominance of first-person plural deixis (we, us, our), which constitutes over 60% of all person references in the address. This pattern underscores the president’s strategic effort to construct a collective identity and shared responsibility with his audience. The heavy use of we and our aligns with the pragmatic principle of inclusiveness, where the speaker aligns with the nation and dissolves hierarchical boundaries.

The first-person singular forms (I, me, my) appear 47 times (15.1%), showing that the president also sought to project personal agency, accountability, and moral commitment. For instance, expressions like “I shall protect the public purse” and “I am determined to ensure transparency” signal self-identification with responsibility and leadership ethos.

The second-person deixis (you, your) occurs 23 times (7.4%), reflecting moderate direct engagement with the citizenry. The president uses you mainly when appealing to citizens’ cooperation or acknowledging their role in nation-building, as in “I urge you, my fellow Ghanaians...” This form personalizes the relationship, momentarily shifting from collective rhetoric to interpersonal address.

Finally, third-person deixis (they, them, their, his) appears 53 times (17%), mainly to refer to past governments, political predecessors, and external actors. Through these references, the president constructs political contrasts, acknowledges continuity, and legitimizes his leadership transition.



## 5.5 Pragmatic Interpretation

### 5.5.1 First-Person Singular Deixis: Assertion of Leadership

Akufo-Addo's use of I, me, and my is deliberate and contextually marked by solemn commitment. In inaugural rhetoric, such use enacts performative speech acts (Austin, 1962)—the leader not only states intentions but performs promises.

#### Examples include:

*"I shall protect the public purse."*

*"I am in the debt of the Ghanaian people."*

Here, *I* functions as a marker of personal responsibility and moral ethos, aligning with Fairclough's (2001) notion of discursive legitimation—the process by which a leader claims moral right to govern.

### 5.5.2 First-Person Plural Deixis: Construction of Unity and Solidarity

The high frequency of we, our, and us embodies the inclusive voice of governance. These pronouns blur distinctions between the government and the governed, aligning the president's actions with the people's collective will.

#### For example:

*"We have a duty to ourselves and to our nation."*

*"Let us rise together."*

Such expressions create a shared deictic center (Bühler, 1934), where both speaker and audience occupy the same moral and national space. The pragmatic effect is to build solidarity and enhance persuasion by appealing to collective responsibility.

### 5.5.3 Second-Person Deixis: Engagement and Appeal

Though less frequent, the use of you and your creates direct interpersonal engagement. In lines such as "I urge you, fellow Ghanaians," the speaker reduces social distance, making the address dialogic. Yule (1996) observes that second-person deixis creates immediacy and personal relevance, which is crucial for mobilizing citizens' emotional response.

### 5.5.4 Third-Person Deixis: Contrast and Continuity

The third-person forms (they, them, their) are pragmatically used to refer to predecessors and political others. For example:

*"They have served their nation with dignity."*

*"We shall continue their unfinished work."*

Such references perform two functions: (a) acknowledgment of political continuity, and (b) differentiation, marking the current administration's distinct agenda. The alternation between acknowledgment and differentiation aligns with Chilton's (2004) concept of political positioning through deixis, where leaders situate themselves ideologically within a national narrative.

## 5.6 Summary of Analytical Findings

The analysis of the 2017 inaugural address reveals that Akufo-Addo's pragmatic use of person deixis strategically balances collective identity and individual authority. The dominance of first-person plural deixis

underscores an inclusive, nation-building rhetoric, while controlled use of I foregrounds moral leadership. Second-person deixis personalizes appeal, and third-person deixis contextualizes political continuity. Together, these deictic patterns encode a pragmatic discourse of unity, responsibility, and renewal.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 6.1 Overview

The analysis of person deixis in President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's 2017 inaugural address demonstrates that deictic choices are not arbitrary grammatical selections but strategic pragmatic devices that shape political meaning and audience alignment. This discussion interprets the implications of the quantitative and qualitative findings within broader theoretical and sociopolitical contexts.

### 6.2 Person Deixis as a Tool for Identity Construction

Deixis plays a central role in constructing speaker identity in political discourse. The overwhelming presence of first-person plural deixis (we, our, us)—accounting for 60.6% of all person references—reveals the president's deliberate effort to embed his persona within a collective national identity. By using we instead of I, Akufo-Addo symbolically merges himself with the people, portraying governance as a shared enterprise.

This strategy resonates with what Fairclough (2001) describes as synthetic personalization—the rhetorical technique of addressing a mass audience as though it were a single individual or unified entity. In the Ghanaian context, this rhetorical unification serves to dissolve post-election divisions and legitimize leadership through the discourse of togetherness.

For example, the statement “We have the responsibility to make Ghana work again” positions both government and citizenry as co-agents of national transformation. Here, the inclusive we functions not only grammatically but ideologically—it signals shared agency and mutual obligation, which are vital for democratic legitimacy.

### 6.3 Balancing Leadership and Solidarity through Deictic Alternation

A salient observation from the data is the alternation between singular and plural deixis, reflecting a delicate balancing act between authority and solidarity.

When Akufo-Addo uses I, it often co-occurs with commitments, promises, and moral declarations—such as “I shall protect the public purse” and “I will not let you down.” These utterances are performative (Austin, 1962): they do not merely describe intentions but perform the act of pledging. The first-person singular thus embodies personal accountability—a vital ethos in governance discourse.

Conversely, we is employed to project a collective voice of governance—“We will build a Ghana beyond aid.” This plural deixis aligns with the ideology of inclusiveness, promoting unity across ethnic, political, and class lines.

This alternation affirms Chilton's (2004) observation that political speakers often navigate between distal and proximal positioning through deictic shifts. The speaker moves closer to the audience through inclusive deixis and farther away through exclusive or authoritative references. Akufo-Addo's pragmatic mastery lies in this dynamic oscillation, which keeps him both within and above the collective body he governs.

### 6.4 Second-Person Deixis and Audience Engagement

The relatively lower frequency of second-person deixis (you, your)—7.4%—does not diminish its rhetorical significance. These pronouns function as points of direct interpersonal connection that heighten immediacy and audience involvement.

In “I urge you, my fellow Ghanaians,” the president establishes a dialogic relationship that simulates conversation. According to Yule (1996), second-person deixis signals engagement and personal appeal, making the discourse participatory rather than monologic.

In African political rhetoric, where oral traditions value direct address and communal interaction, such deictic engagement resonates strongly with cultural expectations. It signals respect and inclusiveness—core values of Ghanaian political communication (Obeng, 2002).

### 6.5 Third-Person Deixis and Political Positioning

The use of third-person deixis (they, them, their, his)—17% of total occurrences—performs a referential and ideological function. These pronouns primarily denote past governments, political predecessors, or historical actors, situating Akufo-Addo’s administration within a continuum of governance.

For instance:

“They have served their nation with dignity.”

“We shall continue their good works.”

In these examples, they function as a marker of acknowledgment and differentiation. The president both honors his predecessors and distinguishes his regime’s direction. This aligns with Wodak’s (2009) notion of discursive legitimation through continuity and contrast, where political actors validate their mandate by situating themselves within historical narratives while signaling renewal.

### 6.6 Ideological Implications of Deictic Patterns

- The deixis patterns reflect a coherent ideological discourse of unity, accountability, and renewal.

- Unity is linguistically constructed through inclusive deixis (we, our).

- Accountability is asserted through singular deixis (I, my).

\* Renewal and continuity emerge from third-person deixis (they, their).

These patterns exemplify how deictic meaning intersects with political ideology, supporting van Dijk’s (1997) claim that political discourse both reflects and shapes sociopolitical realities. In this address, deixis becomes a subtle yet powerful means of negotiating the relationship between power and people, past and future, and individual and collective responsibility.

### 6.7 Comparative Insights

Comparatively, the findings align with other studies on inaugural speeches in African contexts. For instance, Obeng (2002) observed similar deixis patterns in Jerry Rawlings’s inaugural speeches, where we dominated as a marker of populist appeal. Likewise, Okoro and Ezema (2013) found that Nigerian presidents often used we to invoke collective purpose while maintaining personal credibility through I.

This cross-contextual convergence suggests that inclusive deixis is a shared rhetorical feature of postcolonial African leadership discourse, where leaders must constantly reaffirm collective identity amid ethnic and political pluralism. Akufo-Addo’s speech thus fits within a broader tradition of nation-building rhetoric that relies on pronoun choice as a key linguistic resource.

### 6.8 Summary of Discussion

The discussion reveals that person deixis in Akufo-Addo’s 2017 inaugural address is not merely grammatical but ideologically motivated. Through systematic alternation among I, we, you, and they, the president constructs

a multifaceted leadership persona—accountable yet inclusive, authoritative yet collaborative. The findings affirm the theoretical claim that deixis serves as a pragmatic and ideological anchor in political communication.

## SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

This study examined person deixis in President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's 2017 inaugural address using Levinson's (1983) pragmatic framework. Quantitative analysis revealed that first-person plural deixis dominates (60.6%), followed by first-person singular (15.1%), third-person (17%), and second-person (7.4%) forms.

### Qualitative interpretation showed that:

*I* and *my* index personal responsibility and leadership ethos.

*We* and *our* construct collective identity and solidarity.

*You* fosters direct engagement and inclusiveness.

*They* marks continuity and ideological positioning.

Together, these deictic choices constitute a coherent discourse of unity, accountability, and transformation.

### 7.1 Theoretical Implications

The study validates the central claim of pragmatic theory that deixis anchors discourse in context (Levinson, 1983). It further extends deictic analysis by showing how pronouns encode ideological stance in political texts. In line with Chilton's (2004) cognitive model, deixis operates not only spatially and temporally but ideologically, positioning speakers and audiences within conceptual frameworks of nationhood, morality, and identity.

### 7.2 Practical Implications

For discourse analysts and political communicators, this study highlights the strategic value of pronoun choice in constructing public ethos. Inaugural addresses, campaign speeches, and policy statements can benefit from conscious manipulation of deixis to:

- Promote inclusiveness and solidarity through *we*-forms.
- Assert credibility and accountability through *I*-forms.
- Maintain dialogic engagement through *you*-forms.
- Frame historical legitimacy through *they*-forms.

In educational contexts, this study can support language and communication courses in showing how pragmatic tools contribute to effective leadership communication.

### 7.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study analyzed a single speech, which limits generalizability. Future studies could:

- Compare deixis patterns across multiple inaugural addresses (e.g., Kufuor, Mills, Mahama, Akufo-Addo 2021).
- Examine how gender, cultural metaphors, or spatial deixis interact with person deixis in political rhetoric.
- Explore audience interpretations to assess whether intended deictic effects align with public perception.

Such extensions will deepen understanding of deixis as a tool of ideological construction in African political communication.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study set out to identify, quantify, and interpret the use of person deixis in President Akufo-Addo's 2017 inaugural address. Through a mixed-methods approach, the analysis revealed that first-person plural deixis dominates the speech, accounting for the majority of occurrences, followed by third-person, first-person singular, and second-person forms. These findings confirm that the president strategically privileges collective identity over individual authority, using *we* as a central rhetorical device.

Qualitatively, the study has demonstrated that person deixis performs multiple pragmatic functions. The alternation between *I* and *we* reflect a careful balance between personal accountability and inclusive leadership, while *you* establishes direct engagement with citizens. The use of *they* enables ideological positioning by distinguishing the present administration from past governments or external actors. These patterns collectively illustrate how deictic expressions are deployed to construct solidarity, legitimacy, and political vision.

President Akufo-Addo's inaugural address thus demonstrates the profound link between language, power, and ideology. Through person deixis, the president transforms grammar into governance—turning pronouns into political instruments. The speech exemplifies how pragmatic choices can bridge leadership and citizenship, affirming that the politics of pronouns is the politics of persuasion.

Beyond the immediate findings, this study has broader implications for political rhetoric in emerging democracies. In such contexts, where issues of legitimacy, accountability, and national cohesion are central, person deixis serves as a crucial linguistic resource for negotiating the relationship between leaders and citizens. The prominence of inclusive deixis underscores the importance of collective framing in democratic consolidation, particularly in post-election contexts marked by high public expectations.

Furthermore, a comparative perspective would significantly deepen understanding of these patterns. Future research could examine how person deixis is used in the speeches of other Ghanaian presidents, including John Agyekum Kufuor, John Evans Atta Mills, John Dramani Mahama, and subsequent addresses by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. Such comparative analyses would help determine whether the dominance of inclusive deixis is a consistent feature of Ghanaian presidential rhetoric or a context-specific strategy.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the field of pragmatics and political discourse analysis by demonstrating that person deixis is both a quantifiable linguistic feature and a powerful ideological tool. By integrating frequency analysis with contextual interpretation and situating the findings within Ghana's political landscape, the study offers a robust account of how language functions as a mechanism of persuasion, representation, and governance.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A:

#### Extracts from Akufo-Addo’s 2017 Inaugural Address

“I shall protect the public purse.”

“We have the responsibility to make Ghana work again.”

“I urge you, my fellow Ghanaians.”

“They have served their nation with dignity.”

“Our destiny is in our own hands.”

“Let us rise together.”

### Appendix B:

#### Sample Coding Table

Line No.	Extract	Person Deixis	Type	Function
12	I shall protect the public purse.	I	1 <sup>st</sup> Singular	Personal responsibility
18	We have the responsibility to make Ghana work again.	We	1 <sup>st</sup> Plural (Inclusive)	National unity



24	I urge you, my fellow Ghanaians.	You	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	Direct appeal
30	They have served their nation with dignity.	They	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	Continuity/acknowledgment
36	Our destiny is in our own hands.	Our	1 <sup>st</sup> Person (Plural)	Empowerment