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Original Research Article

The Use of Pronouns in Diplomatic Discourse: An Appraisal of Speeches of some Cameroonian Diplomats

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Abstract: This paper is aimed at investigating the use of pronouns, specifically the use of personal pronouns in diplomatic discourse made by some Cameroonian diplomats. Diplomacy is a tool for international communication and negotiations, and researchers have shown significant interest in it. The main emphasis here is the use of first personal pronouns 'I' and 'we' as persuasive methods of communicating to their audience, and diplomatic ideas through the tactical use of the inclusion and exclusion of their audience. There is the use of 'self' and 'group' participation in their productions. Using personal pronouns, the diplomats' intentions are identified and also help in the construction of their image. The speeches were selected from the official website of Cameroonian Ministry of External Relation. Critical Discourse Analysis was adopted in order to investigate in what context the personal pronouns (I and we) were used in speeches of two Cameroonian ministers of external relations: Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo and Lejuene Mbella Mbella. The findings show that the occurrences of personal pronouns 'I' and 'we' in the speeches of both speakers differ slightly, particularly in specific contexts of use. They tend to use more of the 'we' pronoun than the 'I' in their production. This implies that these pronouns are used differently to achieve different results. They are used to reveal the diplomat's attitude, motivation, social status and trustworthiness as well as paint a positive image of his country.

Keywords: Diplomatic discourse, pronouns, pronouns in diplomatic discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars of diplomacy have acknowledged that diplomacy and its practices and human interaction span across the universe, although the word 'diplomacy' only started being used immediately after the last decade of the 18th century. Jacobs (2016: 4) maintains that "in order to gain a good understanding of diplomatic negotiations, observation from multiple perspectives is necessary". This suggests that a few theories have dominated the study of diplomacy and continue to do so. The study of resources of language, discourse and communication has, however, been underused in the study of diplomatic debates. In this light, while language-focused approaches have been intermittently used to examine negotiating and bargaining in everyday situations, researchers studying more formal negotiations in the international scene have hardly used them.

Language plays a key role in international negotiation and communication. In fact, the goal of using particular language techniques in diplomacy is to assert one's convictions, views and opinions and to show one's superiority over others. In Cameroon, the languages of diplomacy remain French and English, depending on the audience. This is true

when we consider Brimelow (2008: 27) who holds that "any language which has been used for the conduct of official relations between governments of independent states may be called a language of diplomacy". To this effect, the languages of diplomacy in Cameroon is French and English.

Cameroonian diplomats, like other diplomats, engage in international negotiations, persuasion, presentations and communication. These exchanges warrant the use of language and, to implore great language skills, diplomats must decide what to say, when to say it and for whom to say it. Consequently, Moukoko Mbonjo and Mbella Mbella are informed that the mastering of language skills and the necessity to put their messages in specific contexts is paramount. By using the first personal pronouns, they are fully aware that their audience might likely consider their messages as a threat, warning, promise, suggestion, agreement or advice. By using the 'we' and the 'I' pronouns, they understand the need to persuade the audience to their course and, in no time, present Cameroon as a country, ready to follow the path advanced by the United Nations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Diplomatic Discourse

There has been little or no research done in the domain of diplomatic discourse in Cameroon till this moment. Germana D'Acquisto (2017) examines the use of language in the United Nations Resolutions concerning Palestine. He used two sub corpora which are, sixty-six Security Council Resolutions amounting to 2965 words, and forty General Assembly Resolutions making a total of 2529 words from 1948 to 2006, with links to the key events of the conflict that started from the plan of partition of the territory called Palestine which was established in the General Assembly of Resolution 181 in 1947. He examines the role of English verbal system and archaic expressions in connection with modality in the institutional language of the United Nations in order to reveal different pragmatic reasons of such normative text types. His findings revealed that, in spite of the existence of universal model of primary procedure in international negotiations, the misunderstanding in negotiation is as a result of different meanings and interpretation attached to some words or sentences which are largely impacted by cultural elements. To this effect, Cohen (2001:67-91) asserts that:

- The language of diplomacy is yet a further refinement of language as medium of communication [...] Language is often a cause for misunderstanding and conflict [...]
- The case for the importance of language and culture lies on the view that semantic distinctions reflect different interpretations of reality and normative.

Cohen's assertion exemplifies the nature of language use in diplomacy. The language which is typical of diplomats is not only used as a medium of communication, but it also plays a manipulative, refined and cultural tool in the art of negotiations. A main role in the art of diplomatic negotiation is represented by the use of language or by what Germana D'Acquisto calls the means of communicative interactions. As Scott (2001:153), cited in Germana D'Acquisto (ibid), holds that, in conference diplomacy, the successful diplomat gets engaged in the negotiation of texts that will often strive to persuade his audience to reach at an agreement on a form of words which combines precision with ambiguity.

Nassar (2011) recommends a replication on how diplomatic discourse establishes a plot to national identity and contributes to the construction of a narrative of a country, having the Brazilian government of Lula as his case study. Nassar's (2011) narrative needs a powerful public diplomacy and has much to add on public relations inside and outside organisations. In a particular context, Nassar believes that the government of Lula da Silva from 2003 to 2010 had repositioned Brazil on the global stage and has make foreign policy at the centre of her services, especially given her national projects. According to Nassar, the strategy adopted by the government of Lula da Silva was to promote self-esteem, strengthened by the belief of the emerging Brazil, the Latin American solidarity, and close ties with African countries in order to change certain narratives and ensure that she overcomes some contradictions that had been witnessed in the past. From his analysis of 24 discourses of Brazilian diplomacy, he settles on an interdisciplinary theoretical path to show the interconnectedness of the narrative of the country, diplomatic discourse and national identity. By so doing, he discovered that the structure of the Brazilian national myth was indispensable to national identity.

Mehtiyev (2010) studies the use of English in diplomatic discourse. He holds that, although there is the existence of several languages in the world today, English is the most popular and is the first choice because the majority and the diplomatic elite prefer to use it over the other languages. Mehtiyev (2010: 1) points out that, "In addition to the 375 million native speakers, it has been suggested that 1.1 billion people know English as a second or foreign language, outnumbering the native speakers by 3 to 1. 51 % of Europeans speak English as their native or as a foreign language". With its great openness to other linguistic variations, the

language as a world language has become the language of power and prestige and, consequently, is an international gateway to social and economic growth. Mehtiyev (2010) reiterates that "English has replaced French as the lingua franca of diplomacy since World War II…. the rise of English in diplomacy began in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles was written in English as well as in French, the dominant language used in diplomacy at that time". The international use and spread of the English language is also made possible by the role it plays especially in English–speaking nations like the United States and the Commonwealth of Nations immediately after the World War II, specifically in the establishment and organization of the United Nations and the rapid development of the Internet.

Rasmussen (2009) looks at the European Union's (EU) public diplomacy and its effects on the EU diplomatic struggle. Drawing from the discourse theory, public diplomacy is looked upon as a modality of diplomacy that tries to nurture specific features under the umbrella of foreign political discourse. Using the discursive approach, specifically the Laclau and Mouffe's Classic discourse theory, the writer demonstrates that the messages seek by the EU shows its identities as "an actor and the diffusion of its own normative foundation" (Rasmussen (ibid). EU's public diplomacy is generally seen through its decentralized nature where its decision makers from the third states are the most important actors in the network. Consequently, they are the ones who plan and execute specific initiatives. Rasmussen thinks that public diplomacy is both fundamentally restrained by political disagreements among member states concerning the nature and role of the EU.

Hafriza (2006) examines diplomatic discourse of the summit conference of the Non-aligned movement and the 10th Islamic summit held in Kuala Lumpur. The writer examines diplomatic language through documentation and discussion of the language choices used. Here, the scholar focuses on the Summit conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and secondly on the 10th Islamic summit both held in Kuala Lumpur in 2003. Hafriza (2006) states that when diplomats speak, they try to avoid certain words or choice of words that are off**e**nsive. Consequently, they use particular style and convention, "they learn to identify and avoid potentially aggressive, insensitive, offensive and destructive uses of language, as they communicate both tactfully and tactically".

2.2 Pronouns in Diplomatic Discourse

Kaewrungruang and Yaoharee (2018:86) observe that "there are eight types of pronouns: reflexive, possessive, indefinite, demonstrative, reciprocal, relative and interrogative". To them, we use pronouns to denote people or things that we talk about. There exist two types of personal pronouns, subjective and objective pronouns. For the purpose of this paper, we limit the scope to personal pronouns 'we' and 'I'. Kaewrungruang and Yaoharee (2018) investigated the use of personal pronouns in political speeches delivered by Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton in the 2016 US presidential election debates. Their focus was on the use of first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I' as strategies to expressing persuasive messages and political ideologies. Using textual and discourse analysis, their findings reveal that the occurrences of the pronouns 'we' and 'I' in the speeches of both participants differ and the uses of each pronoun in certain contexts also differ greatly.

Wageche and Chi (2016) examine how first personal pronouns in English helped Presidents Obama and Xi Jinping to speak convincingly on international podia. Their study explores the frequency of first person pronouns realised in both singular and plural forms and examines, using CDA, how the pronouns are used with modal verbs and tenses to gain and sustain rhetoric appeal. Their findings reveal that Obama uses personal pronouns selectively with more of the 'I' pronouns. Conversely, Xi Jinping uses both the 'I' pronouns and the 'we' pronouns in his diplomatic exchanges.

Wang, Xi (2021) investigates the role of personal pronouns 'we' and 'they' in building a community with shared future in president Xi Jinping's 61 diplomatic texts from 2013 to 2018. Using the systemic functional linguistics and positive discourse analysis, Wang, Xi (2021) discusses the complementarity instead of opposition of the two personal pronouns under an all-inclusive view and with diverse category. He notes that the "self' and 'other' dichotomy is substituted by a cline with 'we' and 'they' entwined.

Tecza (2018) studies the use of pronouns in modern world politics and how convincing the audience is vital to democratically gain power in international community. He observes that, in a competitive domain like diplomacy, elites use discourse not only to persuade the audience, but to manipulate them as well. His paper therefore examines the use of pronouns in the discourse of Donald Trump and his State of the Union speech together with 37 weekly speeches. Using corpus linguistics, Tecza's (2018) findings reveal that, in both the State of Union address and weekly addresses, Trump recurrently and interchangeably uses the pronouns 'we' and 'our' to refer to two groups with unequal power relations.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

This paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1) How are pronouns (first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I') used by Cameroonian diplomats?
2) What are the discursive implication of pronouns (first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I') used by Cameroonian diplomats?
3) Which of these personal pronouns (first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I') occurs frequently in the speeches of Cameroonian diplomats?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts Fairclough (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis as the main research framework. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) comes from a critical theory of language studies that considers language as a means of social interaction and practice. Fairclough (1995) holds that, in any discourse analysis, two patterns are not to be avoided. Indeed, Fairclough names such references to "communicative events" which refers to an instance of language use such as newspaper article, film, video, interview, political and diplomatic speeches, and other discourses. CDA as used in this paper is aimed at critically examining the texts of Cameroonian diplomats. It helps us to understand the speakers' ideology and thus brings out the power relationship found in their speeches.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 The data

The analysis was built on four speeches made by two Cameroon Ministers of the Ministry of External Relations to United Nations General Assembly. First, Minister Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo addressed the United Nations General Assembly on September 24, 2012 and September 25, 2016. On his part, Minister Lejuene Mbella Mbella addressed the United Nations on September 27, 2018 and September 26, 2019. Their audience were other member states of the United Nations Organisation. The speeches were gotten from the official website of the Ministry of External Relations, Cameroon (WWW.diplocam.cm). The topics discussed included tension in Africa and the Middle East, terrorism, illegal migration across the seas to Europe, global economic crisis, poverty, inequality, climate change, democracy, and the millennium development goals. They equally spoke of Cameroon's commitment in solving some of the above global issues. The total words count of the four speeches made by these two Ministers amounted to 6584 words.

4.2 Data analysis

The data for this paper were four speeches delivered to the United Nations General Assembly. The Microsoft computer search aided us in determining how 'we' appear in the speeches likewise 'I". Any other words, phrases and sentences that were not part of the speeches were deleted in order to get the exact words count. Out of the 6584 words total of these diplomats, Moukoko Mbonjo has 1517 words in two speeches, and Mbella Mbella has 5067 in two speeches. Again, out of the 44 instances of 'we' found in their speeches, Mbella Mbella used 29 and Moukoko Mbonjo used 15. Out of a total of 23 instances of 'I' used, Mbella Mbella used 17 and Moukoko Mbonjo used 06. At the end, the discursive functions of the first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I' as used in the speeches were analysed using the Critical Discourse analysis.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are divided into two parts. The first part deals with the use of 'we' and the second part treats the 'I' pronoun.

5.1 The use of 'we'

Out of 4 of speeches examined, 44 'we' pronouns are identified to have been used by Moukoko Mbonjo and Mbella Mbella.

Table 1: The use of 'we' in four speeches

Linguistic variables	Speakers	Freq.	Per.
We	Moukoko Mbonjo	15	34.09%
	Lejeune Mbella Mbella	29	65.91%
Total		44	100%

Table 1 presents how many occurrences of the first personal pronoun 'we' are identified in the speeches of Moukoko Mbonjo and Lejeune Mbella Mbella. From observation, it is noted that out of 44 occurrences of 'we' pronouns, found in the speeches of the two speakers at the United Nations General Assembly, Mbella Mbella uses significantly the first personal pronouns 'we' than Moukoko Mbonjo. Mbella Mbella uses 29 of the 44 'we' pronouns with a percentage rate of 65.91% as against Moukoko Mbonjo who uses 15 making a percentage of 34.09%. It can be submitted that Mbella Mbella engages his audience more in his speeches than Moukoko Mbonjo by using the 'we' more frequently. When we use 'we', we are making conscious effort to enable the audience to be part of the action and also to make them feel belong to the same group with us. Allen (2007:3) opines that "it is in the politician's

interest to present themselves as multi-faceted in order to appeal to a diverse audience, and a careful pronoun choice is one way of achieving this aim". One of such ways in doing this is the employment of the first personal pronouns 'we'. The 'we' pronouns as used by the authors suggested that they are not grammar, gender markers. Anchimbe (2016:515), asserts that "besides their grammatical functions, plural inclusive pronouns, especially personal (we, us), possessive (our) and reflexive (ourselves), when used in certain contexts create a sense of collective belonging that includes some defined others but not always all others".

Unlike Mbella Mbella, Moukoko Mbonjo is not necessarily bothered about his audience's reaction towards his message. He focuses on the message more than the means of transmitting it, although at certain instances, he tends to be persuasive when he uses 'we'. Malone (1997:65) holds that "'we' does important group work in creating and calling attention to identity boundaries". To this end, the two speakers are informed of the imperativeness of using 'we' to draw the audience closer to the course of action. This probably explains why they used 44 of 'we' in four speeches of 6584 words. They use this first personal pronoun to express the desires of Cameroon in a more subtle manners. Let us consider Sacks (1992:1:391) who believes that 'we' is used to express an "institutional identity". Example 1, *we must never forget that one of the greatest injustices a person can endure is to be unable to feed or clothe himself* (Moukoko Mbonjo September 2012). Example 2, *we must not lose sight of the fact that human beings, who development depends on living conditions, are at the heart of the organisation's objectives* (Mbella September 2018).

The above examples illustrate the use of 'we' to bring the other member states to the course of action. By using 'we', the speakers are making conscious effort to bring the audience closer to what is to be. *We must not forget* and *we must not lose sight* is a subtle call for all to get involve in the fight injustices and poverty in order to improve the living conditions of all. Bramley (2001: 92) opines that "*we* can be used by an individual to say that it is not just s/he (or another person) that is involved in a particular issue but someone else as well". Thus, the speakers' use of 'we' here suggests that they want to allow the audience to be fully engaged. Thus, the main function of the deployment of the 'we' pronouns is to signal collectiveness against individuality, suggesting the action should be collective rather than individual. Bramley (2001:76) asserts that "the core meaning of 'we' is collective identity or group membership". Thus, Moukoko Mbonjo and Mbella Mbella are informed of this communicative technique. This explains their use of 'we' in their addresses to the United Nations respectively.

5.2 The use of 'I'

Out of 4 of speeches examined, 23 'I' pronouns are identified to have been used by Moukoko Mbonjo and Mbella Mbella.

Table 2: The use of 'I' in four speeches

Linguistic variables	Speakers	Freq.	Per.
I	Moukoko Mbonjo	06	26.08%
	Lejeune Mbella Mbella	17	73.92%
Total		23	100%

Table 2 presents the occurrences of the first personal pronoun 'I' are identified in the speeches of Moukoko Mbonjo and Lejeune Mbella Mbella. Looking at the table, it is observed that out of 23 occurrences of 'I' pronouns seen in the speeches of the two speakers at the United Nations General Assembly, Mbella Mbella uses the first personal pronouns 'I' than Moukoko Mbonjo. Mbella Mbella uses 17 of the 23 'I' pronouns with a percentage rate of 73.92% as against Moukoko Mbonjo who uses 06 of them making a percentage rate of 26.08%.

Moukoko Mbonjo and Mbella Mbella use the 'I' pronouns to express their strong opinions and present a positive image of themselves. Bramley (2000: 27) observes that 'I' is used by individuals to express their personal identities as individuals, and that 'I' is key to the presentation of self by the individuals. Indeed, the goals of Moukoko and Mbella in using the 'I' pronouns is to assert their convictions, views and opinions, showing their superiority or why their opinion should be considered over others. Examples, *I would like, I will congratulate, I take the floor, I am sure, I express I have, I thank, I reiterate …..*

The above instances of the 'I' first personal pronouns as used in the speeches of Moukoko and Mbella indicate their position toward a particular subject. Bramley (2001:27) maintains that "'I' stands alone as marker of the speaker referring to himself/herself". By referring to themselves, the speakers addressing the United Nations, hold that their opinion is paramount and give strong signal why they should be adhered to.

The 'I' pronoun also show the fact that the speakers are in position of authority and make them controllers of the moment. Sacks (1992:1:32) thinks that 'I' ties the speaker's speech to other segments of the speech. Accordingly, the 'I' pronoun, as used in their texts, does not only index them, but bring the talk to the now moments, thus giving subjectivity and denoting the speakers' strong position.

The two diplomats, in addressing the United Nations, use the 'I' pronoun as a demonstration of their involvement as representatives of the Cameroonian people, especially when positive news is announced or when they want to show Cameroon's strong engagement in promoting peace, fight against poverty, climate and terrorism. Håkansson (2012:10) notes that "the pronoun 'I' is not used as a substitute for the speaker's name; it is the way for him to refer to himself". In this light, the two speakers are not only referring to themselves, but also indeed referring to Cameroon and its stance on the issues raised. For instance, *I reiterate* as used in one of their speeches does not necessarily refer to the speaker underscoring on something, but it implies that it is the point adopted by his country, Cameroon.

6. DISCUSSION

The focus of this paper is on the use of first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I'. At the United Nations General Assembly, the main audience is the member states and the general public. Addressing this large audience, Ministers Moukoko Mbonjo and Lejeune Mbella Mbella are conscious that they must use certain linguistic markers in order to be understood or sound convincing. By so doing, they make use of the first personal pronouns, 'we' and 'I'.

They thus use 'we' significantly compared to 'I' to bring their audience closer to the action and feel a sense of belonging. In their talks, they stated what the international community is supposed to do to combat terrorism, fight to alleviate poverty and meet the millennium development goals. They equally discussed Cameroon position on boiling global issues like climate change and democracy. By making use of these pronouns, the speakers were informed of the necessity to sound persuasive in order to make the member states come together for a common course. The use of 'we' was intended to appeal to the audience for a collective course, to bring the audience closer to the action advocated for. The 'we' was equally used as an institutional identity to subject that it was not only the appeal of the Cameroonian government but also that of all member states. They therefore suggested a collective identity and beckoned on all to be fully engaged in respect for human rights and rule of law, fight against terrorism, poverty and climate which are global threats. For example, '*we must.. .'* is a glaring demonstration of using 'we' to signal collective effort. On the other hand, the first person singular pronoun was used to signal a certain level of assertiveness and strong convictions, views, and opinions on the part of the speakers and the country they represent. For example, 'I *reiterate'* is a strong conviction from the speaker and his country.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the discursive functions of the first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I' in the diplomatic discourses of Moukoko Mbonjo and Lejeune Mbella Mbella, Cameroon's Ministers of External Relations. Their speeches were delivered at the United Nations General Assembly between 2012 and 2019. The findings revealed that two speakers used the pronouns differently. On a general note, it was observed that the two speakers used a total of 44 'we' pronouns and 23 'I' pronouns. Pronouns particularly, the first personal pronouns 'we' and 'I' have been shown in this study to have strong linguistic functions; they give the audience a sense of belonging and also, the speakers portray their strong convictions, views and opinions to assert why theirs should be considered. Their differences in the usage of these pronouns express the different philosophies they have. The findings equally revealed that the diplomats used these pronouns differently. Mbella Mbella used 29 of the 44 'we' pronouns while Moukoko used 15 of them. In terms of percentages, Mbella Mbella total 65.91% and Moukoko 34.09%. For 'I' pronouns, Mbella Mbella used 17 and Moukoko used 06 making a percentages of 73.92% and 26.08% respectively. The presence of these pronouns could be considered as deliberate discursive techniques geared towards convincing the audience to take a particular course, and to assert the strong convictions, view and opinions.

Answering the first question on how are pronouns used by Cameroonian diplomats, the findings revealed that they used these pronouns differently. Mbella Mbella used 29 of the 44 'we' pronouns while Moukoko used 15 of them. In terms of percentages, Mbella Mbella total 65.91% and Moukoko 34.09%. For 'I' pronouns, Mbella Mbella used 17 and Moukoko used 06 making a percentages of 73.92% and 26.08% respectively.

Answering the second question on what discursive implication of the use of first personal pronoun, the findings revealed that they were discursive technique geared towards convincing the audience to take a particular course, and to assert strong convictions, view and opinions.

Lastly, in answering the third question on which of the first personal pronouns occurred more

frequently, the paper demonstrated that the 'we' pronouns were used frequently than the 'I' pronouns.

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