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Authors	Grimshaw, Eean;Reijven, Menno H.
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# “We have a big crowd”: The different referents of the first-person plural in U.S. presidential candidates’ talk on entertainment-political interviews

Eean Grimshaw

Menno H. Reijven

## Abstract

During U.S. presidential elections, today, interviews at late-night talk shows are commonplace. As political and entertainment discourse co-occur in this type of communication, we refer to this genre as the Entertainment-Political Interview (EPI). Yet, research is lacking in clarifying how candidates, through their talk, appeal to their audience on these shows to realize their political goals. In this study, the different extralinguistic referents for the first-person plural (i.e. *we*, *us*, *our*) are investigated in order to understand which groups are referred to by U.S. presidential candidates, how these groups are presented and how this positions the candidate with respect to their audience in order to construct a discursive presentation of the world. Namely, even as *we* is a deictic term produced by a speaker, the referent can still be any group of people including the speaker. Investigating these genre-specific foundational group memberships is essential to understand this mode of political discourse as the discursive world projected through the talk serves as the context of interpretation for the audience.

To study possible referents of *we* in EPIs, we use the taxonomy developed by Dori-Hacohen (2014) as a starting point, as it classifies different types of *we* based on the exclusivity of the group referred to (i.e. everyone on earth (humanity *we*), a group including the speaker and hearer (general *we*), a group including the speaker but not the hearer (social delimited *we*), and a group just consisting of the speaker and hearer (conversation *we*)). The genre-specific referents of *we* are U.S. society (general *we*), desirable social groups and political teams (social delimited *we*).

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In 2000, both major candidates for the U.S. presidency visited David Letterman’s late-night talk show the *Late Show*. Back then, Letterman claimed that “the election will be decided here [on his show]” (quoted in Niven, Lichter & Amundson 2003: 118). Over the last two decades, late-night talk show interviews like those given by Letterman have become a central feature in U.S. presidential elections (Parkin 2014). During the 2016 elections, almost all presidential hopefuls visited a late-night talk show to be interviewed by the host. Such interviews are unique in that they are conducted between a late-night talk show host and a politician during an election campaign. Thus, the inherently entertaining nature of the program is blended with politics, as candidates are pressed on furthering their campaign (Parkin 2014). We refer to such interviews as entertainment-political interviews (EPIs), i.e. a type of interview defined by co-occurring entertainment and political discourse.

This genre has been studied extensively by media scholars (e.g. see Baumgartner & Becker 2018), showing how the use of entertainment affects politics. In contrast, there is a lack of studies paying close attention to the talk itself (however, see Loeb 2017). Specifically, we need to better

understand the linguistic resources politicians use to connect with their audience. One salient linguistic resource used by politicians in the EPI is the first-person plural (*we, our, us* – henceforth *we*), which is the focus of this chapter. However, the reference of *we* often remains vague (Borthen 2010). Despite *we* being a term including and centering on the speaker, the extralinguistic referent of *we* across uses can be different groups of people (Dori-Hacohen 2014; Petersoo 2007). Thus, as *we* can imply different identities through invoked group membership, politicians can exploit this pronoun, enabling various pragmatic inferences beneficial to their cause (Petersoo 2007; Bull & Fetzer 2006; Bazzanella 2002; Wilson 1990). To improve our understanding of how *we* is used by politicians on EPI, we characterize the different kinds of referents as introduced by U.S. presidential candidates' use of *we* in EPI discourse.

## **2 Literature review on in-grouping in political discourse**

Pragmatic studies of political discourse attempt to understand the production and reception of communication (Fetzer 2013). Studies have been concerned with three types of pragmatic inquiry (see Fetzer 2013). While some focus on how meaning is negotiated among different recipients, and others try to uncover the inference strategies the audience employs to uncover the speaker's intentions, a third group focuses on clarifying the context-dependent meanings of a particular genre. We engage in this last form of research. In this regard, we start from the fact that, through talk, the speaker positions themselves and their addressee(s) in a presentation of the world, providing a context for producing and interpreting utterances (Chilton 2004). At any point, this discursive world is built by articulating differences and similarities between oneself and others using deixis (Chilton 2004). One tool politicians can exploit in this respect is person-referencing – through person-referencing, identities are negotiated in discourse (Bull & Fetzer 2006). To improve the understanding of political language on the EPI, we take a closer look at the genre-specific referents of the first-person plural (*we, us, our* – henceforth *we*), as its referent often remains vague (Borthen 2010). By knowing the genre-specific referents of *we*, we improve our understanding of the discursive worlds which are projected to effectively address the audience.

Often, first-person plurals imply membership with a larger group, helping to bridge a supposed or perceived gap between the individual speaking and others (Helmbrecht 2002; Íñigo-Mora 2004). Sometimes, *we* is used by individuals to speak on behalf of the group invoked (Mühlhäusler & Harré 1990; Pavlidou 2014). Generally, first-person plural forms include both the speaker and hearer(s) as referent. Speakers thereby project commonality and in-group status with their recipients. When excluding the hearer as referent (i.e. by invoking a group the hearer is not a part of, see Dori-Hacohen 2014; Íñigo-Mora 2004), the speaker tactically distances themselves from their audience to achieve their ends (Íñigo-Mora 2004). *We* can also have various types of extralinguistic referents, including organizations like the Republican party, groups based on relationships like one's family, and gatherings (Lerner & Kitzinger 2007). In sum, the first-person plural enables speakers to refer to a plethora of different social groupings and through this, they can articulate various relationships they have (or not) with their audience.

Since *we* can be used to invoke many different types of group memberships and relationships with the audience, *we* is often used by politicians in a strategic manner. Specifically, politicians can use *we* strategically to accept or deny their individual responsibilities for political actions (to be) committed (Pyykkö 2002; Bull & Fetzer 2006). Sometimes, *we* can be used to both encourage feelings of solidarity, and to identify and designate both supporters and enemies (Fairclough 2002;

Íñigo-Mora 2004; Skarzynska 2002; Wilson 1990). Through their pronominal choices, politicians can position themselves with respect to their colleagues, sometimes based on their similarities, but sometimes based on their differences (Íñigo-Mora 2004; Maitland & Wilson 1987). Moreover, *we* can also be used to introduce political ideologies – like nationality (Petersoo 2007) – into the conversation to form solidarity and separation. Hence, the first-person plural is a potentially powerful device for politicians (e.g. Bull & Fetzer 2006; Pykkö 2002) to strategically craft a discursive world wherein they position themselves, their interlocutor(s), and others. By presenting various group memberships and connecting with the audience through various collectives, politicians can realize their political goals (Pavlidou 2014; Petersoo 2007; Wilson 1990).

Despite being a central linguistic force in political discourse (Pykkö 2002), a determination of the exact meanings of *we* in context – that is, the precise groups referred to – is not a straightforward task (Borthen 2010). In general, pronouns are conventionally classified as function words – i.e. carrying only grammatical, not semantic meaning (cf. e.g. Hudson 2000; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik 1985). However, in use, pronouns take on discursive meaning given the noun (phrases) they substitute (Fontaine 2006; Pykkö 2002; Hudson 2000; Quirk et al. 1985). Thus, void of explicit reference, *we*, being a grammatically cohesive device, derives its situated meaning from the specific context it is used in (Borthen 2010). Referents of the first-person plural can thus only be pragmatically inferred through considering the co-text.

Regarding *we*, scholars have developed taxonomies clarifying potential referents: a common distinction is between inclusive *we*, referencing both speaker and hearer (*we* instead of you and I), exclusive *we*, referencing speaker and a group not including the hearer (*we* meaning we without you), and a royal *we* referencing only the speaker, as traditionally used by a sovereign (Fontaine 2006; Íñigo-Mora 2004). Some scholars have developed more extensive taxonomies. For example, Quirk et al. (1985: 350–351) identified eight subtypes of *we*. However, their taxonomy arguably lacks detail regarding clarifying the potential referents for *we*. As we are interested in the uses of the first-person plural by presidential candidates to categorize themselves, having only three types of *we* where they are the deictic center of a collective is too limited. To understand the variety of referents potentially invoked through *we* by presidential candidates to position themselves in a discursive world, we need more than a generic (i.e. all human beings), rhetorical (i.e. a specific group of which the speaker is a member) and an inclusive authorial *we* (i.e. just the speaker and hearer). The other forms of *we* identified by Quirk et al. (1985) either refer only to the speaker, only to the addressee or to a third party.

Dori-Hacohen (2014) offers a more refined taxonomy than Quirk et al.'s (1985) given his recognition of additional types of potential referents for *we* which center on the speaker as part of a collective. Through examining what groups callers refer to in Israeli radio phone-in programs, Dori-Hacohen (2014) identifies seven types of groups potentially referenced by *we*. As we focus on types of *we* which can be used by the presidential candidate visiting the late-night talk show to categorize themselves, two types as proposed by Dori-Hacohen (2014) are not relevant to our inquiry: the vocal *we*, which is used when quoting a non-present party, and the program *we*, which can only be used by the host to refer to their own show. The other five types of *we* (Dori-Hacohen 2014) can be used by the caller to categorize themselves as a member of a group. Four of these types are inclusive, and thus refer to both the speaker and the hearer. First, the humanity *we* (cf. Quirk et al.'s 1985: “generic *we*”) used to refer to all people on Earth. Next, there is the general *we*, which is used to refer to a collective which includes both the speaker and hearer (cf. Quirk et al.'s 1985: “rhetorical *we*”). For example, American society includes both the presidential

candidate, the host of the late-night talk show and the audience, but would not encompass all of humanity. This type of *we* has two subtypes. It can be open general if only the collective is invoked (e.g. ‘we Americans have opportunities’), but also opposing general if the group invoked is positioned in contrast to another group (e.g. ‘we Americans will beat the Dutch’). Fourth, the conversation *we* (cf. Quirk et al.’s 1985: “inclusive authorial *we*”) is used by interlocutors to manage the conversation at hand, referring to just speaker and hearer and no one else. The fifth type is the delimited social *we*, which is an exclusive form of *we*. It is used by the speaker to reference a group that the hearer is not a part of (e.g. ‘we as Americans have opportunities you do not have’).

Although *we* has been widely studied in political discourse (e.g., Dori-Hacohen 2014; Fontaine 2006; Íñigo-Mora 2004; Maitland & Wilson 1987; Petersoo 2007), such research has not yet considered the EPI. Given the rising prominence of EPI in American political discourse (Parkin 2014), studying this genre is vital to understanding political communication in the United States. To better understand how politicians use this genre to connect with the electorate, the first-person plural is one particularly salient, powerful resource. Therefore, we pose the following research questions: (1) What are the different referents of *we* in EPI discourse? And (2) how may these findings have implications for tightening or expanding the current taxonomies of *we*?

### 3 Data and methodology

In order to study various possible referents of *we* as used by presidential candidates on EPIs, we collected recordings of four episodes of broadcast late-night talk shows: two visits by Donald Trump and two by Hillary Clinton during the 2016 U.S. presidential election cycle available online.<sup>2</sup> Collected episodes were transcribed following Jefferson’s (2004) transcription system, but simplified to improve readability. The dataset we filtered from these materials consists of 95 instances of the first-person plural (i.e. *we*, *our*, *ours*, *us*), used by the presidential candidate with them at the deictic center (i.e. we excluded all such pronouns and determiners if they were part of direct quotes).

Our analysis follows procedures used by Dori-Hacohen (2014) and Íñigo-Mora (2004) in categorizing each one of these 95 instances based on the group referenced in concert with the speaker. We first determined whether the *we* used includes or excludes an interlocutor. Second, we focused on the exclusivity of membership of the group referred to, i.e. determining who else is part of this group. These steps enabled us to categorize the types of *we* based on Dori-Hacohen’s (2014) taxonomy (see Table 1). Note that our upcoming discussion excludes the humanity *we* as no instance was present in our data (which are also generally rare, see Dori-Hacohen 2014). We also do not discuss the conversation *we* as this *we* always refers to the presidential candidate and the talk show host. In the EPI, candidates use this *we* to engage with ongoing interaction, including participation in activities with the host.

<INSERT TABLE 4.1 HERE>

Table 4.1: Number and types of *we* per presidential candidate

Categorizing all instances of *we* based on Dori-Hacohen’s (2014) taxonomy still left us needing further specifications of the referent of *we* as used in context. As the referent of *we* is always informed by the local context, our categorization had to include determining the specific referents

within a situated interaction (like Petersoo 2007). Therefore, in a third step, we focused on the surrounding discourse to determine the social context of the referenced group, further specifying the precise group referenced by *we*. Following Fontaine (2006) we also considered the mood and voice of verbs used in concert with *we* to better understand the referent. This enabled the specification of locally relevant referents of *we* for EPI discourse. Based on these types, we were also able to refine Dori-Hacohen’s (2014) taxonomy of possible reference groups for *we*. We did not conduct a quantitative analysis as this study is decidedly qualitative and aims at elucidating the various possible referents of *we* within the context of EPI discourse.

In the next section, we present our analysis. First, we discuss the general *we* and show that its genre specific referent is the American society. Second, we present the possible referents for the social delimited *we*. For both, we also show what kind of subtypes should be recognized. Lastly, we discuss the functions these types of *we* have in EPI discourse.

## 4 Analysis of types of *we* in EPI

### 4.1 The general *we*

Being a type of inclusive *we*, the general *we* refers to both the speaker and the hearer (Dori-Hacohen 2014). Additionally, the general *we* refers to a group of people, but a more restrictive group than all of humanity (i.e. the humanity *we*, see Dori-Hacohen 2014). This *we* can be expressed in two ways. Sometimes, this *we* can be invoked by explicitly introducing an opposing group (i.e. the opposing general *we*, see Dori-Hacohen 2014). However, this general group can also be referred to without resorting to making explicit who is excluded from the group (i.e. the open general *we*, see Dori-Hacohen 2014). In this section, we elucidate which groups are specifically referred to by U.S. presidential candidates (i.e. the genre specific referent) in EPI discourse from our data through the general *we*.

Our first excerpt is taken from Jimmy Kimmel Live!. During the interview, Kimmel asks Clinton whether she would want to deport Trump. When Clinton reacts that she would only deport violent people, Kimmel jokes that Trump’s “second amendment comment” (not shown here), which refers to the suggestion made by Trump that people could stop Clinton from nominating judges based on their second amendment rights, would fulfill this criterion. Trump’s comment is then classified by Clinton as part of Trump’s “alternative universe.” Next, while critiquing Trump’s creation of an “alternative universe” to frame the campaign, Clinton responds as follows (excerpt 1).

(1) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. HC Well, you know, that’s another part of the
2. alternative universe. Look. This is such a serious
3. time in **our** country.
4. **W**[e ((have)) so many opportunities
5. JK [Not really (0.3) not really ((laughing))/(1.1)
6. AU [((laughing))/(1.3)
7. HC [and there’s so much **we** can do and
8. JK Yeah.

Clinton notices that it is “such a serious time in *our* country” (1:2-3), thus referring to the U.S. as the country that she affiliates with as a citizen. As it would be possible to substitute *our country* with *the country of both of us* (Kimmel also lives in the U.S.), the first-person plural is inclusive. Moreover, as Clinton’s comment was raised in response and as a complaint to Trump’s creating an “alternative universe” (1:2), she is implying that Trump is not taking “our country” seriously and is not addressing real problems. The fact that it is “a serious time in our country” is not only relevant to the two interlocutors, but to the U.S. society on the whole. Consequently, this first-person plural possessive determiner does not just refer to Clinton, Kimmel and the studio audience, but also to most of their television audience. Thus, this is a general *we*-reference which refers to U.S. society.

This general *we*-reference – including Clinton, Kimmel, the present and remotely watching audience, as well as U.S. citizens not actually watching the show – is used again later (1:4; 1:7). Clinton follows her “serious time” comment by noticing that “we [have] so many opportunities” (1:4) and that “there’s so much we can do” (1:7). Across these three instances, the group referenced through “we” is not positioned as an active agent. For Clinton, these “opportunities” (1:4) and things “we can do” (1:7) are states of affairs, referencing the possibilities people have during “this serious time in our country” (1:2-3). As above, it was “a serious time” for U.S. citizens, the U.S. citizenry is also subject of these “opportunities” and “things we can do.”

By sharing with her fellow U.S. Americans her impression about the general state of their nation, Clinton does not make an explicit call for action by the citizenry. While this may encourage people to get involved themselves, Clinton does not directly order or request them to do so as she simply talks about the situation “*in* our country” (1:3) and the potentials in regard to positive change (i.e. “opportunities” and “can do”). Thus, Clinton uses these instances of *we*-reference in excerpt 1 in a manner void of action (see Helmbrecht 2002: uses of *we* referring to a nation are usually not used because the group is too big as to talk about collective action). Through these tokens of *we*, Clinton also self-categorizes as a member of the larger U.S. American society positioning herself as part of the same collective as the electorate. Moreover, Clinton does not order others in the collective to act, thus she portrays an egalitarian relationship between herself and the American citizenry through her use of *we*.

Moving on to excerpt 2 from an EPI between Donald Trump and talk show host Jimmy Fallon, we notice how Trump also uses the general *we*. On the one hand, like Clinton, Trump’s uses of *we* do not ascribe action to the referent, like Clinton. On the other, Trump instead creates a hierarchical relationship between himself and the rest of American society. Excerpt 2 comes following a remark by Fallon where he raises that people note Trump and Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, seem rather close. Such a remark from Fallon could raise doubts as to whether Trump would have the best interests of Americans in mind when elected president. In turn, Trump rebuts this challenge as follows (see excerpt 2).

(2) JF-DT:09/15/16

1. DT            I just think if **we** get along with Russia that’s not a
  2.                bad thing, and you know getting along with other
  3.                countries,
- [3 lines omitted]

7. I'm going to make great deals for **our** country
- (0.2) I'm interested
8. in **our** country I'm interested in (0.2) the success
9. of **our** country and right now I mean you you see
10. (0.2) what's happening you see what's happening just
11. generally speaking and (0.3) **we** have a long way to go

Excerpt 2 is part of Trump's answer to the question about his relationship to Putin. After emphasizing that he does not "know him [Putin]" (not shown), Trump explains that it is "not a bad thing" "if *we* get along with Russia" (2:1-2), or "with *other* countries" for that matter (2:2-3). The juxtaposition of *we* with "Russia" and "other countries" suggests that this *we* refers to America. More specifically, like Dori-Hacohen (2014), we believe this means that the references of *we* are not to the politicians of these respective countries but their societies. After all, any citizen could say that 'it is not a bad thing if *we* get along with Russia.' In this instance, however the American government acts (e.g. "getting along"), this is also how the American people act.

Next, Trump produces three instances of *we*-reference through mentioning "*our* country" (2:8-10). These uses of *we* are to be classified, like Clinton's above, as general *we*-references with the U.S. society as referent at large. First, Trump wants to "make great deals *for* our country" (2:8). As when a head of state makes a deal for their country, all its citizens will benefit from it in some way. Second, Trump states that he is "*interested in* our country" (2:9) and "in the success *of* our country" (2:9-10). Similarly to the "great deals" (2:7) to be made on behalf of the country, "success of our country" (2:8-9) would also be experienced by all U.S. citizens. Lastly, Trump claims that "*we* have a long way to go" (2:12) regarding achieving the "success of our country." Again, here it is all American citizens who have a long way to go until this prosperity is experienced by them.

On the one hand, Trump's use of the general *we* in excerpt 2 is similar to Clinton's uses in excerpt 1, as both are void of action (e.g. Helmbrecht 2002): "Getting along with Russia" (2:1) is a desirable and potential future state of affairs, while "having a long way to go" (2:12) is the status quo for Americans. In the other instances (2:7; 2:8; 2:9), Americans, would Trump be elected, can experience the effects of Trump making "great deals," being "interested in our country," and "interested in the success of our country." In each of these instances, where the referent of the *we* is all of American society, Trump refrains from mentioning collective action.

On the other, by juxtaposing "I" and "our" (2:7-10) within his utterances (e.g. "I'm going to make great deals for our country;" "I'm interested in our country"), Trump implies that he is going to be acting for or on behalf of "our country", i.e. serving it. In contrast to Clinton, Trump's general *we* not only references the general state of affairs in the country as experienced by its citizens, but places him in a hierarchical position with regards to the rest of the group being referred to. Thus, the general *we* in EPI can be used in two ways: to create an egalitarian relationship between the politician and their society or a hierarchical one. In our data, instances of such hierarchical *we*-referencing only appears in Trump's discourse, not even once in Clinton's.

To conclude this section, the general *we* refers to "U.S. society" in EPI discourse. The referred to group is inclusive by referencing both the presidential candidate, host as well as the U.S. citizenry. This type of the *we* is not ascribing action to this collective (following Helmbrecht's (2002)



observation that any nation-*we* is too big to act collectively). Instead, the world is described discursively in terms of its current state and possible potentials. Moreover, presidential candidates can use this type of *we* in two distinct ways: egalitarian and hierarchical. For an overview of the distribution of egalitarian and hierarchical uses of the general *we* in EPI, see Table 2.

<INSERT TABLE 4.2 HERE>

Table 4.2: Number and types of the general *we* per presidential candidate

## 4.2 *The delimited social we*

In contrast to the general *we*, which in EPI refers to the entire U.S. American society, the delimited social *we* is characterized by the speaker referring to a group of which they are a member, but their interlocutor is not. Using the delimited social *we*, the speaker talks as “representative” of the group they invoke (Dori-Hacohen 2014). In our data, we have identified two subtypes of this type of *we*-reference. On the one hand, such uses of *we* can refer to groups whereof membership is appealing to the audience, i.e. in our specific case of EPIs, the voter, like *family*. We call this the association-*we* (see 4.2.1 below). On the other hand, this type of reference may also refer to the presidential candidate’s political team (thus: political team-*we*, see 4.2.2 below). Both groups not only exclude the host but also (the vast majority of) the audience witnessing the conversation.

### 4.2.1 The association *we*

We call the first subtype of the delimited social *we* the association *we*, as it presents the candidate as a member of a particular (social) group which they supposedly want to be associated with. In such cases, invoking this membership is expected to contribute to their being perceived positively by the electorate. A group often referenced through this type of *we* is *family*, as shown in excerpt (3).

(3) JF-DT:01/11/16

1. JF           Are you a grandpa?
2. DT           I am. (.) in fact my daughter  
                  [6 lines omitted]
9. DT           she [Ivanka] is she is going to have her third baby, in
10.             two months so **we** are very happy about that. And **we**
11.             are proud.

Responding to Fallon’s question of whether Trump is “a grandpa” (3:1), and some overlapping talk (omitted lines), Trump shares that his daughter Ivanka “is going to have her third baby” (3:9) and that “*we* are very happy about that and [...] proud” (3:10-11). Thus, Trump positions himself as a member of a small social group, i.e. his family, which excludes Fallon as well as the audience. By starting his response turn with “in fact” (3:2), Trump suggests that the public might not be aware of this new development in his family, as they are not a part of Trump’s family. Their exclusion from Trumps family explains their lack of knowing.

This *we*, although excluding the audience, may still appeal to many people, as, conventionally, the vast majority will self-identify as members of a similar group-category. Thus, particularly in America, a country where family values rank high in importance, it reflects positively on a speaker

to affiliate with such a social group membership as everyone can empathize with it. By sharing that he “cares,” is “happy” and “proud,” Trump invokes group-specific family-tied behaviors (Sacks 1972), demonstrating his belonging to that social group. By sharing this piece of news with the audience, and specifically by showing his happiness (if not pride) over his daughter expecting her third child, Trump enables the electorate to empathize with him as they would experience the same.

The importance of associating with one’s family becomes clear in excerpt (4), where Clinton repairs an instances of “his” (Kimmel’s referring to her husband Bill Clinton) into *we*. Aware that it is publicly known her husband was accused of marital infidelity during his presidency, Hillary Clinton stresses her family as a unit – specifically herself and her husband as a married couple and as grandparents – the constant expected from any potential president of the United States. Immediately prior to excerpt (4), Kimmel starts to talk about the Democratic National Convention. He starts this topic with talking about Bill Clinton’s look as if “he ha[d]n’t seen balloons in his life” (not shown) when balloons were falling down upon the podium. Next, Kimmel shows a picture of Clinton and her husband’s hotel room.

(4) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. JK and this is e this is his hotel room after the
2. [it’s a
3. HC [Yeah that’s **our** hotel room. He actually a (0.6)
4. don’t tell anybody he took a ballo[on for **our**=
5. JK [(Laughs))/(1.0)
6. HC =granddaughter. She she could you know she is too
7. little she wasn’t there the night before ar ar **our**
8. nephew and **our** niece were so (0.8) Bill took one of
9. the balloons and the next morning (0.6) **we** played
10. with Charlotte and the balloon. So the balloon
11. fantasy and excitement continued.

When Kimmel talks about “his [Bill Clinton’s] hotel room” (4:10) during the Democratic National Convention, Clinton, in her responding turn, references “*our* hotel room” instead (4:3). This suggests that Clinton is concerned with showing her relationship with him. This bond is reiterated in subsequent lines, as Clinton produces the same *we*: “our granddaughter” (4:4-6), “our nephew and our niece” (4:7-8) and “we played with Charlotte and the balloon” (4:9-10). In each of these cases, Clinton shares insights into her role as a wife, grandmother and aunt, cultivating her family relationships and engaging in salient group-specific family activities to strengthen her perceived membership and identification with family values. As with Trump in excerpt (3), Clinton’s use of *we* excludes the host and audience from belonging to her family group, yet used by Clinton to connect with the electorate.

Association with social groups through using the delimited social *we* does not always have to be with *family*. In excerpt (5), Clinton’s *we* references both herself and her previous opponent in the Democratic primary, Bernie Sanders, who was highly popular amongst many Democratic voters whom Clinton would have to convince to vote for her in the general election.

(5) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. JK When's the last time you spoke to Bernie Sanders?
2. (0.2)
3. HC Oh? at the convention.
4. JK At the convent[ion that was the last time he does[n't
5. call you and go
6. HC [right [right
7. Oh no well I mean we are really working hard together
8. he is doing (0.3) a lot for the campaign. I'm very grateful

Following their discussion of which major politicians will vote for her, Kimmel asks Clinton when she had last spoken to Sanders (5:1). Following Clinton's "oh" (5:3), which indicates her surprise over this question (Heritage 1984), Kimmel questions Clinton's relationship with Sanders by asking "he doesn't call you?" (5:4-5). Next, through a delimited social *we* (5:7), Clinton references herself and Sanders as a collective: "I mean *we* are really working hard together" (5:7). Namely, both the audience and host are again excluded from this *we*-reference (as neither are "working hard together" with Sanders). Moreover, in this fragment, Kimmel has referred to Clinton through a singular "you" and also invoked Sanders. When using *we*, the topic of talk continues to be about the interactions between Clinton and Sanders, and thus it is only them two who are "working hard together," subsequently clarified as Clinton explains that Sanders is doing a lot for her campaign.

This instance represents an association *we*, as given Sanders's popularity amongst Democrats throughout the primaries, Clinton should clearly want to gain his endorsement. Hence, Clinton wants to associate with him. Yet, Clinton also expresses hesitation when associating herself with Sanders through using *we* (i.e. her pause (5:2), and discourse markers such as "oh" (5:3); and "oh no well I mean" (5:7)). We suggest this is likely because too eagerly affiliating with Sanders, who identified as a 'democratic socialist,' might alienate more centrist voters whose support Clinton also needs to win the election.

In sum, the delimited social *we* can imply one's membership with various social groups. In EPIs, membership with such groups may reflect positively on potential voters. To establish such in-group affiliations, speakers invoke certain 'normal' category-bound activities (Sacks 1972): it is normal for a member of a family to be "happy" and "proud" about a "daughter" having "a baby"; it is normal to share a "hotel room" with one's husband and normal to "play" with one's granddaughter. Similarly, as with Sanders and Clinton, "working together" is the required activity regarding a political endorsement. This subtype of delimited social *we*, the association *we* as used by presidential candidates invokes exclusive social groups that voters are expected to appreciate.

#### 4.2.2 The political team *we*

The second subtype of the delimited social *we* in EPI discourse is the political team *we*, which introduces one of the presidential candidate's political teams into the interaction (e.g. their campaign; their future administration; their party). While this kind of *we*-reference thus excludes the host and audience, in contrast to the association *we*, the political team *we* is not used to relate

to the audience. Instead, the political team *we* introduces an explicit separation between the candidate and one of their political teams on the one hand and the out-group on the other.

This exclusion of the audience from the presidential candidate's political team is shown in excerpt (6). Here, Clinton talks about the policies she wants to pursue if elected president. Following their discussion on rumors Trump has spread about Clinton's health to undermine her bid for the presidency, Kimmel and Clinton engage in a short activity where Clinton's health is tested through her opening a jar of pickles. In the subsequent conversation Clinton uses the delimited social *we*.

(6) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. HC I do feel sometimes like this campaign has
2. entered into (0.2) an alternate universe (0.2) and
3. so I'm out here talking about hey (0.2) here's how **we**
4. can create a lot more good jobs here's how **we** can
5. help young people pay off their student deb[ts=
6. AU [(applause)]/(2.6)
7. HC =here's how **we** can make college more affordable
8. here's what **we** do about healthcare lots of issues
9. prescription drugs mental health addiction (0.3)
10. I'm out here talking about all of this (0.3) and then
11. I have to sort of step into the alternative reality

The prior discussion of Clinton's health including the joking activity of opening a jar of pickles is qualified by Clinton as part of Trump's "alternate universe" (6:2). In contrast to this "alternate universe," Clinton uses a delimited social *we* to talk about her political aims. She outlines what her campaign platform seeks to change in the U.S. to help Americans. Clinton uses *we* to talk about her future policies, including "creating a lot more good jobs" (6:4), "helping young people pay off their student debts" (6:5), "making college more affordable" (6:7), and what to "do about healthcare" (6:8). The exclusive nature of this *we* is confirmed through saying "we do" (6:8): as only Clinton's political team can *do* this, and not the larger American society. Yet, the *we* is also not referring to Clinton's campaign team, as most of the volunteers canvassing for her will not be part of Clinton's political team that can accomplish these things, should she be elected. Thus, Clinton's proposals can only be enacted by her and her potential future administration, not the general public or Kimmel. As her future administration does not (yet) exist, this is not a possible referent. Instead, were Clinton to win the election, her cabinet officials would be taken from the Democratic party. Thus, her social delimited *we* refers to politicians of the Democratic party and Clinton outlines what they, with her, can accomplish for the American people.

Trump produces a similar referent for *we* in excerpt (7). After Trump is asked by Fallon about why he pursues the presidency, he responds as follows.

(7) JF-DT:09/15/16

1. DT if you wanna help people there's no better position to
2. do it (0.3) from than the presidency so **we** can do a
3. lot here

Trump claims that in order “to help people” (7:1), “the presidency” (7:2) is the best position to hold: from there, “*we* can do a lot” (7:2-3). Only Trump’s political team, not all U.S. Americans, will gain access to work immediately with Trump, if he is elected president, and, thus, “can do a lot” (7:2-3). Similar to Clinton’s use in excerpt (6), Trump’s future administration does also not yet exist, the group of people who can do something if Trump wins the election are those cabinet officials taken from the Republican party. Hence, this *we* explicitly introduces a separation between Republican politicians who can execute Trump’s proposals and the U.S. American public at large. In fact, both Trump and Clinton use the delimited social *we* in advocating for and promising future actions, if the public elects them president. In these cases, *we* only refers to a limited social group which can help the candidate to implement their envisioned policies, which are, on the long run, going to benefit the people they are addressing.

However, this type of *we*-reference is not only used when candidates talk about their future policies, and thus to refer to their party platform who can execute their plans, if elected, but also when presidential candidates address current activities they are undertaking which are being organized and supported by their campaign team. After Fallon talked about Clinton getting sick on the campaign trail, he inquires whether Trump has been close to getting sick. First, Trump evades the question by talking about the material Fallon’s desk is made of. Next, he affirms that he has not been sick at all, and continues as shown in excerpt (8). Here, Trump explains that “right after this [appearance on Fallon’s show]” (8:1-2), he is about to give a speech to a large crowd of his supporters. Through saying that *we* are “making a speech” (8:2-3), he positions himself and his campaign team separate from the crowd who will attend his speech.

(8) JF-DT:09/15/16

1. DT I’ve really been uh **we**’re going in fact right after
2. this I’m going up to New Hampshire **we**’re making a
3. speech up in New Hampshire **we** have a big crowd and I
4. uh just got back from Ohio and **we** were in
5. Pennsylvania, Florida **we**’re all over

Talking about the campaign activity he will engage in after this interview with Fallon, Trump shares that “*we*’re going” to “New Hampshire” to “make a speech” (8:1-3). As Fallon will not travel with him, this is an exclusive use of *we*. By using *we*, the activity Trump engages in, i.e. “making a speech” in New Hampshire, is presented as a group activity that he is participating in. For this speech, they will “have a big crowd” (8:3). As this “speech” activity is not done by this “big crowd”, but *for* them, this “big crowd” is not included as referent for the *we* either. Like the “big crowd”, the audience watching the EPI is also not part of this *we*, as while the team staging the speech travels “all over” (8:5), the ordinary citizen does not do this to support Trump. Hence, the *we* invoked by Trump is exclusive, referring only to his political team and himself.

In our data, both presidential candidates use a subtype of the delimited social *we*, the political team *we* to refer to the various political teams they employ to become a successful president. Sometimes, they talk about their plans and what their future administration can do for the American people. Then, the delimited social *we* refers to their larger party platform, as politicians from their party will become a part of their administration, and their party’s members of Congress will vote

supportively of their plans. Thus, it is their party which can change Americans' lives. At other points, presidential candidates talk about their current political team, which works at getting them elected. In such instances, presidential candidates speak as the spokesperson for their volunteers and staff, and other politicians who spend time to convince voters to cast their vote for a specific presidential candidate. In these cases, presidential candidates talk about the current activities they are engaged in to reach the voter. In contrast to the association *we* which positions the presidential candidate as having desirable social relationships, the political team *we* refers to the people who are working to help the presidential candidate to become successful at benefiting the American citizenry.

#### 4.2.3 Summary: Types of the delimited social *we* in EPI

In EPI discourse, the delimited social *we* has two types of referents: socially valued groups and political teams. Regarding the former, associations can be made with, for example, one's *family* or popular political movements. Membership invoked through the association *we* is reinforced with the doing of stereotypical activities. In contrast, the political team *we* concerns either the current campaign activities, or strives towards future policies. The activities conducted by these groups are/can be done *for* the U.S. citizenry. For an overview of our corpus, see Table 4.3.

<INSERT TABLE 4.3 HERE>

Table 4.3: Number and types of the delimited social *we* per presidential candidate

#### 4.3 Relations between the different types of *we*

In Sections 4.1 and 4.2, we identified three types of referents for *we* which are relevant to EPI discourse. In the EPI, the general *we* refers to U.S. society. The delimited social *we* has two subtypes of referents: valued social groups and political teams. The general *we* is used by candidates void of action. Specifically, while the general *we* refers to the U.S. electorate at large, presidential candidates do not presume this collective as active agents (see Helmbrecht 2002). For the former subtype of the delimited social *we*, instances of association *we* are tied to category-bound activities. In the latter subtype, the political team *we* is tied to actions done or as can be done for the electorate. In this section, we focus on the placement of different kinds of *we* in the larger discourse.

As noted above, the general *we* is used in EPI discourse to talk about the current U.S. social environment. In our first excerpt (1), the general *we* was produced after Clinton's criticizing Trump's "alternate universe" invoking the political team *we* (excerpt (6)). In excerpt (9) we have reproduced the two previous excerpts in full (1 & 6), including the discourse in between, in order to shed full light on the logic underlying the use of *we*-references.

(9) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. HC that's so funny (0.4) no I mean I
2. I I do feel sometimes like this campaign has
3. entered into (0.2) an alternate universe (0.2) a:nd so
4. I'm out here talking about hey (0.2) here's how **we** can
5. create a lot more good jobs here's how **we** can help
6. young people pay off their student

7. deb[ts=  
8. AU [(applause)]/(2.6)  
9. HC =here's how **we** can make college more affordable here's  
10. what **we** do about healthcare lots of issues  
11. prescription drugs mental health addiction (0.3)  
12. I'm out here talking about all of this (0.3) and then  
13. I have to sort of step into the a:ternative  
14. reality  
15. JK mhm  
16. HC and (0.3) you know (0.5) answer questions about am I  
17. al[ive (0.2) and how much longer will I be alive  
18. and the like  
19. AU [(laughing)]/(1.0)  
20. JK [I think it would be (1.9) if you were elected  
21. presid[ent=  
22. HC [yes  
23. JK =how great would it be if your first act (0.5) was to  
24. deport Donald Trump to Mexi[co (1.7) is that (0.2) can  
25. the president do that  
26. AU [(cheering and  
27. appla[use)]/(7.2)  
28. HC [(laughing)]/(1.9) No (0.3) ha well I  
29. (0.1) I am not into deporting (0.2) anybody except  
30. violent people  
31. JK Okay al[right well that second amendment  
32. comment may have=  
33. AU [(applause)]/(1.5)  
34. JK =quali[fied ya know  
35. HC [Well you know that's another part of  
36. the alternative uni[verse I I (0.4) eh you look  
37. this is such a serious time in **our** country=  
38. JK [(laughing)]/(0.5)  
39. HC =**W**[e so many opportunities  
40. JK [Not really (0.3) not really ((laugh[ing)]/(1.1)  
41. AU [(laughing)]/(1.3)  
42. HC [an there's so much **we** can do and= (0.3)

Following Kimmel's continuous invocation of Trump's "alternative universe" (not shown) including suggesting Clinton might drop dead at any moment, Clinton lists those policies she wants to talk about in her campaign (9:4-14), rather than addressing rumors about her health, part of Trump's "alternative reality (9:13-14). As discussed above following excerpt (1), these four uses of the *we* are of the delimited social type. Specifically, the political team *we*, as Clinton refers to her team which can make such policies (9:4-11) a reality, should she win the presidency. In turn, Clinton contrasts talking about policy with her having to "step into the alternative reality" (9:13-14) to deal with such rumors as concern her health. Then, Kimmel asks Clinton whether she wants to "deport Donald Trump to Mexico" (9:23-24). Kimmel does not take Clinton's call to step out

of Trump’s “alternative universe” seriously. Despite the audiences “cheering and applause” (9:26-27) Clinton responds that she is only into deporting “violent people” (9:30). Kimmel protests that Trump’s “second amendment comment” (9:31-32) showed he is “violent” (9:30-32). Thus, he attempts to still avoid Clinton’s call for political talk. However, after Clinton qualifies such comments as again part of Trump’s “alternative universe” (9:36), she remarks that “this is such a serious time for our country” (9:37) and that “we [have] so many opportunities” (9:39). Clinton’s invocation of the general *we* reiterates the importance and relevance of talking about real issues. Thus, the general *we*, void of collective action, can be used by presidential candidates to provide relevance for their political answers. In excerpt (9) Clinton’s use of the general *we* to reference the current U.S. social environment helps justify why she should not talk about the “alternate universe”. Through her use of the general *we*, Clinton provides a common ground which is a foundation for her political talk.

As another example of providing support for the acceptability of their answer through a general *we*, consider excerpt (10), where Clinton supports her preference to run against someone other than Donald Trump.

(10) JK-HC:08/22/16

1. HC = I would be absolutely **I mean I think that you**
2. **know** all of the presidents that a a I have seen
3. during my lifetime that I’ve read about in history
4. **we** had great ones and not so great ones- but I don’t
5. think **we**’ve ever been confronted with somebody who
6. (1.0) **we** see right now in the midst of this election
7. (0.6) is unqualified and temperamentally unfit

Immediately prior to this excerpt, Kimmel asks Clinton whether she “would prefer to be running against somebody boring” (not shown). Clinton responds that someone “qualified” and “temperamentally fit” would be her preference. Next, she provides grounds for her preference (introduced by “I mean”, “I think that” and “you know” (10:1-2)). According to Clinton, “all of the presidents” she has “seen” (10:2) and “read about” (10:3) have met certain standards Trump falls short of: “*we* had great ones and not so great ones” (10:4), but never have “*we*” “been confronted” (10:5), like “*we* see right now” (10:6). All these instances of *we* are the general *we* type – as Clinton and all U.S. Americans “had great and not so great ones” (10:4) and “[are] confronted with somebody [Trump] (...) right now” – in Clinton’s justification for why she would “prefer” to be running against someone else. Thus, Clinton uses the general *we* to explain what is confronting U.S. society (Trump), as a means of supporting the acceptability of her earlier political response – that she “absolutely” (10:1) wants to run against someone qualified.

While the general *we* is used as support for the relevance of political answers, instances of the social delimited *we* are primarily invoked to first respond to the questions on EPI. Given that presidential candidates are themselves usually the topic of discussion on EPIs (Eriksson 2010), candidates use the delimited social *we* to talk about themselves: via the association *we* (as a member of various social groups) or via the political team *we* to express ideas for the country (as the spokesperson for their campaign).



## 5 Conclusion

As we have shown, on EPI, there are two types of *we* that have genre-specific referents: the general *we* (with the U.S. citizenry as a referent) and the delimited social *we*, which we subtype into the association *we* and political team *we*. The general *we* is commonly used void of action, which softens the call-out by presidential candidates for the U.S. public to take action. Candidates use this type to share information regarding the state of the social environment in terms of the state of affairs (i.e. facts) and opportunities (i.e. potentials). Structurally, the use of the general *we* is providing relevance for their political responses. Additionally, the presidential candidate, may use the general *we* whilst portraying themselves in a hierarchical or egalitarian relationship to the electorate.

The social delimited *we* is used by the candidates in our data in two ways, i.e. to associate with desirable social groups, and to introduce their political team. Regarding desirable social groups, candidates invoke group-specific activities to strengthen their perceived membership. Even though the audience is generally excluded from these groups, they belong to such groups (e.g. *family*) themselves as well. Such associations are thus likely to invoke appreciation with people who value membership to such groups. When invoking their political team, candidates talk about what they can do if elected (with their party) and what they are currently doing to become elected (with their campaign team). In these cases, politicians separate themselves from their audience in a rather explicit manner, by emphasizing that they, as spokesperson for their political team, would do these things to benefit others – their voters. While the association *we* is particularly important on the EPI for showing the candidate's personal side, the political team *we* is needed to show their political identity. The general *we* is often used to make relevant the use of the political team *we*.

Studying the referents of *we* in EPI is important as it provides us a window through which we can begin to understand the discursive world created by politicians through this venue. The lack of the humanity *we* is not unexpected as the U.S. president will never, and is not supposed to, represent everyone on Earth. Instead, presidential candidates use a general *we* with as referent U.S. society to refer to a group including themselves as well as their audience. Thus, candidates position themselves as a member of the group they will have to lead. While sometimes, the politician invokes an egalitarian membership stressing common understanding, at other times they show a hierarchical relationship where they serve their group. Additionally, part of presidential candidates discursive presentation of the world are also their various associations, including through invoking family and popular politicians. However, at other times, candidates need to show that they act for their voters, and invoke their political team.

We recognize that our study has its limitations: we have showed qualitatively what possible referents are invoked in EPI discourse, rather than investigating their distribution quantitatively. A future quantitative study utilizing a larger dataset would be highly beneficial to better understand the types of *we*-references employed in the EPI-genre. Other politicians should be included as well in this endeavor, as the types of referents for *we* used may depend on idiosyncratic preferences of a specific presidential candidate. Accordingly, we suggest that in additional research of *we*-references on EPIs, other primary candidates from 2016 might be included. Given the 2020 U.S. presidential election period has been launched – featuring a large number of Democratic candidates

of whom many already appeared on late-night talk shows – there are opportunities at hand to conduct such additional research of *we*-references on EPIs. Moreover, the types of *we* identified in this study only indicate possible referents on EPIs and would need first to be proven relevant to other political discourses (e.g. journalistic interviews, debates, speeches).

In summation, this survey of first-person plural pronouns and determiners as used by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump as two U.S. presidential candidates on EPIs contributes not only to the understanding of the contextual and relations of use of the first-person plural but to a venue for political communication that has increasing importance in the U.S.A., the Entertainment-Political Interview. As presidential candidates' visits to late night shows have become commonplace in U.S. political discourse, it is desirable to better understand the use of presidential candidates discursive resources of this genre. The first-person plural is a rich linguistic device which offers politicians various ways to negotiate their social identity and create a discursive world. In addition to an improved understanding of this genre, our examination advances Dori-Hacohen's (2014) taxonomy through subdividing two additional uses of the general *we* (egalitarian and hierarchical) and two subtypes of the delimited social *we* (association and political team).

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<sup>2</sup> Trump's interview on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* on 01/11/16 and 09/15/16; Clinton's interview on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* on 09/16/15 and on *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* on 08/22/16.