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Putting negotiation on a 'principal-ed' footing: A corpus-informed discourse analysis of person deixis in diplomatic debates

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates identity politics in diplomatic negotiations at the United Nations. Drawing on theories of 'footing', 'positioning' and 'stance' and applying corpus-informed discourse analysis, it examines how and why diplomats animate and laminate different selves and identifications within debates about multilingualism between 1995 and 2022. The paper focuses on the strategic enactment of politically recognisable identities indexed via first-person pronouns. Findings reveal that those holding the same stance (e.g., voting in favour, against, or abstaining in the 1995 Multilingualism Resolution) show clear patterns of deictic anchorage in their adoption of certain positions over others. Speakers adopt footings strategically and systematically via iterative and accretive processes of pronoun and verb selection to balance competing needs and perspectives relating to their own positionality (as members of the UN, representatives of their member states, or members within alliances) and in relation to domestic and international affairs. "We" is enacted in different ways by diplomats for the rhetorical purposes of "synthetic deixis" (when speaking as a principal of the UN as an organizational body), and/or to delineate their views from those of other member states (when speaking as a principal of their political alliance or nation). The "lamination" of multiple identifications and the use of "wandering we" reveals the speaker as multiply embedded within, and speaking on behalf of, different communities and political affiliations on a variety of issues. Shifts in footing permit diplomats to navigate sensitive issues, orient to self and collective/shared interests and minimise differences, whilst also demonstrate authority and legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Political speeches serve a variety of important rhetorical and practical functions, including attempting to effect decisions and outcomes, establishing positions of opposition or alignment and, more positively, celebrating or honouring past or

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current achievements by individuals or groups (Kranert, 2017). Political oratory also enacts identity politics via the inclusion or exclusion of individuals or groups and the forging of group solidarity/identity (Reisigl, 2008).

In this paper, we extend previous research by examining the nuanced performance of identity politics in diplomatic debate at the United Nations. We argue that first person pronouns are used as tools for negotiation and persuasion and are pragmatically conditioned to construct political affiliations and multiply embedded identities. These identities are variously drawn upon by diplomats to argue for and from (and to strengthen via association) particular positions. We investigate this via an analysis of diplomatic footing and stance-taking in policy negotiations (specifically in relation to the "Multilingualism" resolution (A_RES_78_330, 2024), analysing debates extending over a 27-year period. Drawing on Goffman's (1981) idea of "production formats" and "footing", Davies and Harré's (1990) "positioning theory", Du Bois's (2007) conceptualisation of "stance" and the analytic tools of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, we examine how and why diplomats animate and laminate different selves and (group) identifications within debates. The strategic enactment of politically recognisable footings, indexed via the employment of first-person plural pronouns, allows us to identify the different roles and changes of alignment that diplomats take towards themselves, others, and the issues they discuss. We argue that footing is pragmatically conditioned in diplomatic discourse - dependent on, and offering a window into, shared stances taken by diplomats with similar political affiliations and embeddedness within groupings, e.g., membership within or alignment with a national or ideological community or perspective. The paper contributes to research on language policy in supranational settings by identifying discursive strategies used in policy negotiations when speakers straddle multiple positions. The corpus-informed discourse analysis (and in particular the use of XML tags) constitutes an innovative addition to the methodological toolkit used in the fields of language policy and planning and political discourse.

We first review pertinent literature, considering the theoretical concepts of framing, positioning, and stance (section 2.1), before proceeding to a review of relevant studies on deictic "we" (section 2.2). We then briefly describe the history of language policy at the UN (section 2.3) and proceed to the research design and reporting of findings (sections 3.0-5.0).

2. Literature review

2.1. Framing, positioning and stance

The theoretical and analytical frameworks of framing, positioning, and stance have provided insights into the complex, dynamic, and layered nature of interaction, as well as the fluidity and multiplicity of identity performance by individuals and groups. Rather than conceiving of speakers as performing static roles, they capture the inherent flexibility of individuals' interactions within and across contexts. They act as meso-level analytic tools, bridging the analysis of micro-level conversation/speech with the macro-level investigation of identity work (Georgakopoulou, 2007).

Framing refers to how interlocutors make sense of a situation and, in turn, forge alignments or "footings" (Goffman, 1981). Positioning refers to the "discursive production of selves" (Davies and Harré, 1990) in interaction, often via storied means (big or small).[1] Theories of framing, positioning, and stance determine that all utterances and texts draw on prior experiences, ideologies and textual forms in their construction and understanding. They are therefore inherently intertextual (Kristeva, 1980) and double/multi-voiced (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) (see Gordon, 2015, 2024).

Goffman (1979, 1981) introduced the metaphor of "footing" in his description of speakers' interactional positions in conversation and in speakers' self-presentations, using the term to refer to degrees of participation and changes of alignment that speakers take towards subject matter, themselves, and others, in discourse (the "production format"). Different "footings" include participant roles in interaction: "animator" (the person who speaks); "author" (the person who has selected and encoded the content to be expressed); and "principal" (the "party to whose position, stand and belief the words attest", Goffman, 1981: 226). Changes in footing can mirror shifts of perspective, power, and alignments, and involves the voicing of characters or (prior) institutional/social discourses. Therefore, through shifts in footing, speakers can strategically "animate" different selves or the words of others. The facility to "layer" multiple footings in discourse (i.e. "lamination" Goffman, 1981), reveals the multiplicity and fluidity of speaker identity. Goffman's performative framework is premised on the notion of the speaker being a rational and intentional subject,[2] able to carefully manage their persona to achieve interpersonal objectives.

Like framing, Davies and Harré (1990) introduced the concept of "positioning" to describe the fluid discursive production of self, conceiving of identity as momentarily constructed via conversations "in jointly produced story lines" (p.48). They argue that in the construction of new "stories" or "tellings", we "draw on our own subjective lived histories through which we have learnt metaphors, characters, and plot" (Davies and Harré, 1990: 52). Positioning is therefore intertextual: prior experiences and ideologies influence both our interpretation and construction of new meanings. Like framing, self-positioning is accomplished in relation to the other (van Langenhove and Harré, 1999).

[1] See Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's (2008) adoption of positioning in their account of small stories.

[2] Goffman's notion of the rational intentional being is somewhat different to others' portrayal, e.g., as described in the work of Judith Butler (1990) (see McEntee-Atalianis, 2019).

Echoes of footing and positioning are further invoked in the concept of "stance" – defined as "a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means … through which social actors simultaneously evaluate stance objects (a person/thing; events; actions; ideas), position subjects (themselves and others [real and imagined]), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field" (Du Bois, 2007: 163). Du Bois (2007) depicts the stance act as a triangle, incorporating the stance-taker, object and intersubjective (dis-)alignment (see Fig. 1).

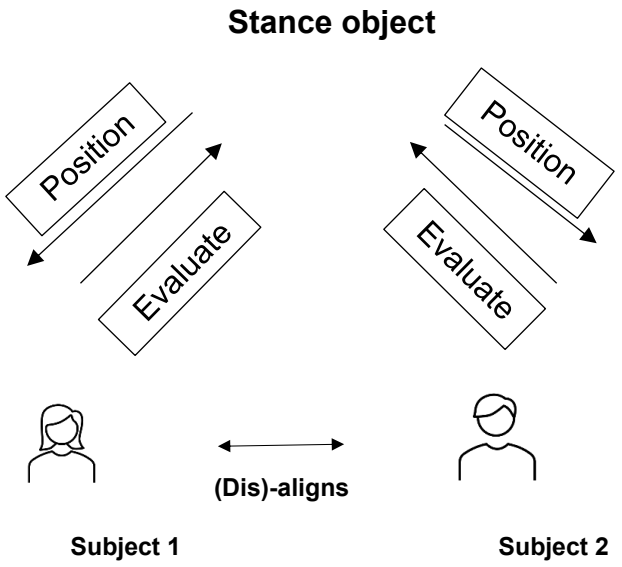

Fig. 1. The stance triangle, adapted from Du Bois (2007: 163); representation inspired by Keisling's (2022).

Whilst there is not a settled definition or consistent approach to the study of stance, or indeed an exhaustive listing of stance categories, it is understood to be socially produced and situated (Jaffe, 2009), interpreted via the repeated and habitual performance and display of, e.g., affective, moral or epistemic attitudes. Speakers can perform stance acts in discourse, communicating and reinforcing socio-culturally entrenched ideologies or stereotypes, whilst also indexing their own and others' (multiple) identities. Kiesling (2022) points out that whilst stance and identity are not synonymous, the types of stances and the nature of stance-taking (the "which" and "how") are often associated with individuals sharing the same identity. Drawing on the concept of "voice" (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), Jaffe (2009:10) asserts that previous utterances spoken by others are therefore "both resources for stancetaking as well as inevitable frameworks for their interpretation and meaning".

In this study, stance is adopted to explore the way in which diplomats adopt footings and relate to their utterances (i.e. via evaluation and positioning) and audiences (via (dis)alignment). Our analysis demonstrates how this is indexed through deixis and verbal forms.

2.2. Deictic "we"

The role of pronouns in the encoding of social identities and relationships, and in the articulation of stances or alignments, has been long established. Sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and interactional investigations of pronoun use proliferated after the seminal work of Brown and Gilman (1960), who drew attention to the marking of solidarity and hierarchy in the positions taken by speakers to one another in conversation when using pronouns derived from Latin *tu* and *vos*. Various contexts have subsequently been investigated, e.g., educational (Oliveira 2010), workplace/institutional (Chaemsaithong, 2015; Chaemsaithong and Kim, 2021; Drew and Heritage, 1992; Handford, 2014; Ruey-Yingliu, 2023), political (De Fina, 1995; Fairclough, 2000; Mulderigg, 2012; Zupnik, 1994), national (Wodak, 2009) and media (O'Keeffe, 2006). The inherent versatility of "we" in the marking of different identities (including shifts of footing and frames) and in the pragmatic encoding of speaker intentions, has revealed its contextual embeddedness and fluidity.

Personal pronouns are contextually (spatially-temporally) anchored and pragmatically significant, achieving illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects (e.g., see Bull and Fetzer, 2006; Chilton, 2004; Kranert, 2017; Mulderigg, 2012; Van Dijk, 2002). Jakobson (1957) asserted that deictics, or "shifters", "anchor" the denotational content of the proposition in the context of use. The anchorage point in deixis is the speaker's position - the "deictic centre" or "origo" (Bühler, 1934/1982). It is from this point of origin that interpretations are made in interaction, with inferences drawn from the co-participant's understanding of the original source of reference. Subjects can be interpreted as being close to, or distant from, the origo, i.e., proximal pronouns "I/we" versus distal "you/they" (Mulderigg, 2012). It is therefore through the deictic centre that speaker

roles, responsibilities and identities are performed and interpreted. Therefore, in the use of first-person plural pronoun "we", the marking of group boundaries is achieved via the inclusion or exclusion of subjects/groups from the deictic centre. Inclusively, participants are bound together, tied to the deictic centre. Exclusively, participants are set apart as distant from the origo. "We" can, for example, be used to include the speaker and all hearers present (e.g., "We're suffering in the heat today"), on the other hand, it can be used to refer to the self and others but exclude some participants who are present (e.g., "how might we assist you?"). Co-text and context are all important in interpreting the referential scope of the pronoun. Subjectivity is inscribed via pronominal use and in the related expression of attitudes and stances taken by the subject towards issues under discussion. De Fina (1995) notes that in interpreting discourse one must understand the stance of the speaker with respect to other entities, events, or social actors in the world and therefore "pronominal reference is one of the mechanisms through which the speaker [/writer] expresses both his [sic] own presence in discourse, the presence of others and the relationships that he/she entertains with these others" (pp. 383–384). For example, in the case of national newspaper reporting, "we" may be invoked by the journalist to reference national identity, supranational identities (e.g., EU, the west) and subnational countries or groupings (e.g., in the case of the UK, Scotland, Wales etc.) (Petersoo, 2007). The reader must rely on the context and co-text to interpret meaning, drawing on established and emergent categories of meaning.

Although nuanced classifications of "we" have been developed (e.g., Bull and Fetzer, 2006; Mulhausler and Harré, 1990; Quirk et al., 1985), the scope of reference of "we" can be ambiguous (Wilson, 1990) due to its capacity to encompass all other personal pronouns, leading to "slippage" or "strategic vagueness" (Mulderigg, 2012). Such ambiguity can be useful rhetorically to reference different constituencies and ideologies (Cramer, 2010) and therefore to leave open to interpretation the perlocutionary effect of the speaker's statement, achieving certain tactical or persuasive goals. Zupnik (1994), for example, accounts for the vagueness and persuasiveness of "we" in televised political debate. Fetzer and Bull (2012) and Fetzer (2014) also report on politicians' strategic use of pronouns so that recipients interpret positive statements as addressed to them and less positive statements addressed to others. Moreover, in political discourse shifts in accountability and solidarity can be achieved through the negotiation of pronominal references (see Fairclough, 2000; Kranert, 2017; Maitland and Wilson, 1987; Mulderigg, 2012; van Dijk, 2010).

While most research on deixis has focused on political discourse, others have examined non-political institutional contexts (as noted above, e.g. Drew and Heritage, 1992). Many have examined how speakers employ pronouns to defend actions and mark preferred ideologies and alignments (e.g., see Wilson, 1990; Urban, 1986; De Fina, 1995; Fairclough, 2000; Ruey-Ying Lui, 2023). Petersoo (2007) analyses the use of "we" in Scottish broadsheet newspapers, identifying how "we" "wanders" between references to the newspaper, Scottish and British national identities, thereby leaving open the question as to whether "we" can be recognised by the readership to reproduce national identity and enact "banal nationalism" due to its ambiguity. Chaemsaithong (2015), Chaemsaithong and Kim (2021) detail the persuasive and argumentative function of first-person pronouns in opening statements and closing arguments in courtroom discourse, revealing how lawyers skillfully manage the discursive representation of the defendant/accused, themselves and the jury in order to win over their audience.

As noted, first person plural pronouns serve important persuasive and solidarity-inducing functions by encoding group membership. Indeed, the construction and naturalisation of group identities and affiliations has been noted to become not just ideological but ontological, produced by "discursive interpellation" (e.g., Gustafsson, 2013:3).[3] One might argue that we belong to numerous "real" and "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) but express our membership to these via the same deictic form - "we". Interactants may synthetically invoke group membership for interactional and rhetorical purposes. For example, whilst not being a member of an organization at the time of a particular success to which one is now referring, and therefore in no way personally responsible for the achievements described, we may invoke our current organizational identity and pride in order to refer to our organization's achievements. This is achieved through a process of what Gustafsson (2013) refers to as "unauthentic/parasitic deixis". The pragmatic and strategic manipulation of "we" for rhetorical means is well documented and important in the discourse of leadership and for other rhetorical and persuasive means (e.g., Connor-Linton, 1988; Maitland and Wilson, 1987; Urban, 1988; Wilson, 1990).

Many have addressed the role of first-person pronouns in framing ingroup and outgroup identities and interests (i.e., *we* versus *you/them*) (e.g., Fetzer and Bull, 2012; De Fina, 1995; Kranert, 2017; Maitland and Wilson, 1987; Matos and Miller, 2023; Mulderigg, 2012; Petersoo, 2007; Ruey-Ying Liu, 2023; Van Dijk, 2006; Wilson, 1990). The study of ideology is important here in determining differences between individuals and groups and the forging of group boundaries. As determined by Van Dijk (2006), group members employ discursive structures and strategies to mark positive in-group and negative out-group belonging. "We" is just one of these discursive structures, used by the speaker to assert their position in the group and to address the interlocutor as a group member. Alharbi (2018) (drawing on Van Dijk's ideological square) notes the important strategic and persuasive role of "we" in forging consubstantiality and equality amongst an audience, and in drawing attention to shared ideologies, interests, and values (see also Alharbi and Rucker, 2023). Drawing on Mülhaüsler and Harré (1990), Goddard (1995) suggests that "we" performs the metalinguistic function of "same-saying" – applying the same proposition to those included within the scope of "we" (self and other(s)). Matos and Miller (2023) also note how leaders may reconstitute "diverse audiences and communities into a single overarching identity" (p. 511),

[3] The term 'interpellation' is adopted from the work of Althusser (1972, 2012) to refer to a process in which we experience group socio-cultural values and ways and internalise them. Althusser asserts we recognise ourselves and our own complicity in our domination through ideology.

depicting themselves as the embodiment of the constructed identity, upholding and articulating their values and norms using "we" and "us". Thus, minimising difference, indexing positive affective stance, whilst downplaying speaker self-interest by emphasising the collective good.

Finally, studies of pronominal forms in combination with verb phrases also reveal how speakers construe action, authority, competence, responsibility and express stances. The application of systemic functional grammar (e.g. Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Kirkham and Moore, 2016; Kranert, 2017; Mulderigg, 2012) to examine pronominal forms alongside verbal collocates which mark mental and verbal processes of 'sensing' and 'saying', 'material' processes of 'doing', and relational processes of 'being' has been helpful in examining identity construction in (political) leadership discourse. We follow a similar approach in our analysis of diplomatic discourse about multilingualism and the establishment and revisions to the Multilingualism resolution at the UN.

2.3. Multilingualism and the UN

Our analysis is based on a corpus of debates about multilingualism ranging in time between 1995 and 2022. The first General Assembly resolution (2 (1)) on the use of languages within the organization was established on 1 February 1946. This provided a general framework for multilingualism at the UN, making Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish the official languages of all organs of the Organization (except for the International Court of Justice), whilst English and French were established as working languages. As the years progressed, Arabic was introduced (in 1974) and many UN system bodies adopted their own rules and, in some instances, increased the number of official or working languages beyond the first resolution 2 (I) (see McEntee-Atalianis, 2015, McEntee-Atalianis, 2023, McEntee-Atalianis, 2025; McEntee-Atalianis and Vessey, 2020, McEntee-Atalianis and Vessey, 2024).

In addition to resolution 2 (I), there existed at the time of the resolution's formation many provisions in resolutions of UN system bodies relating to issues of multilingualism and/or languages, but these were not marshalled into one document; rather, they were dispersed across different agenda items and discussed in different UN organs. Aware of the need to discuss multilingualism in a cross-cutting fashion and also anxious about perceived inequities in the provision of the organization's official and working languages, in the mid-1990s, a group of 18 Member States began to lobby the Secretary-General (Boutros Boutros-Ghali) (A/50/147, 1995) for the inclusion of a separate agenda item on multilingualism in the General Assembly and for a resolution on the topic. A further 29 Member States supported their request and the accompanying draft resolution (A/50/147/Add.1 and A/50/147/Add.2). Their requests were met with success; on 22 September 1995, the General Assembly decided to include multilingualism in its agenda and to consider it at regular intervals (see (A/50/PV.3, 1995) and (A/50/250, 1995)). Also, gathering further support, with a sponsorship of 68 member states, the draft resolution was also presented to the Assembly (A/50/L.6, 1995). It was adopted as resolution 50/11 on 2 November 1995 with 100 member states voting in favour, 35 against, and 29 abstentions. Biennially, since 1995 (with a few exceptions) multilingualism has appeared and been discussed as an agenda item in the General Assembly and a resolution has been debated, redrafted and adopted. Since the first resolution was established, changes to subsequent resolutions have been adopted via consensus, without the need to vote after member state discussions. Discussions in this context invariably include careful negotiations of different interests and agendas (e.g., those of the state, organization etc.), raising the question of how potentially sensitive matters are articulated.

It is within this context that framing, positioning and stance become relevant, with member states participating in these negotiations and using first person plural pronouns alongside verb choices to enact organizational identities (i.e., present different selves), manage international relations (i.e., speak on behalf of different alliances) and promote domestic/national interests (i.e., call for action on particular matters). Our research explores the "lamination" of these different footings within and across discursive interventions, while at the same time identifying the stances adopted with respect to multilingualism in relation to these different participant roles and identities.

3. Research questions

With this context in mind, we examined the following research questions:

i) who is the *principal* on whose behalf the Member State representative is claiming to speak when discussing the multilingualism agenda item/resolution?
ii) which stance objects and acts emerge when Member State representatives "speak for" specific communities (e.g. as a member of the UN/language alliance groups/their state)?
iii) how does footing relate to the stances diplomats take within their nested levels of belonging when voting on and/or arguing for/against changes to the (multilingualism) resolution and/or language practices within the organization?

4. Data and method

We examine a dataset consisting of official records of General Assembly discussions relating to multilingualism. First, agenda items and speeches relevant to the multilingualism resolution were identified in the documents housed in the United Nations Digital Library (UN iLibrary). The time period targeted includes the date of the original discussion and vote

(22 September 1995) until 2022 (the most recent data at the time of data collection). All documents were downloaded, but only the content relevant to multilingualism (which was clearly delineated in specific sections) was extracted into separate files, which were then used to compile the corpus. Each text file was labelled for year, UN document number, member state speaker, and the language used. Accounting for these details allowed us to examine a broader range of trends within the data (more on this, below). In total, the corpus consists of 57,500 words from 55 member states in all six official languages of the United Nations (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Corpus composition by member state.

Member state	Word count	% of total
France	8214	14.3 %
Senegal	3138	5.4 %
Tunisia	3119	5.4 %
United States of America	2536	4.4 %
Spain	2378	4.1 %
50 other member states	38,115	0.1–2 % each
Total	**57,500**	**100 %**

Each instance of a first-person plural pronoun (*we, our, us, ourselves*) was given an XML tag to account for the details relating to the pronoun. XML tagging allows specific coding to be searchable with corpus linguistic software, such as SketchEngine (http://www.sketchengine.eu/), allowing researchers to cross-examine different targeted aspects of their analysis (Potts and Weare, 2018). In our case, the tags included information about the year, the member state, and the language. Also, each instance was tagged for that member state's vote on the 1995 Multilingualism Resolution (i.e., voting in favour, against, abstain, or non-voting).

Each first-person plural pronoun was also tagged for the relevant position adopted. Positions included the Member State ("MS") (i.e., denoting member state identity), the United Nations ("UN") (i.e., denoting the identity of the United Nations), and sociopolitical alliances ("ALL") (e.g., denoting membership in an alliance such as "The Group of Friends of Spanish"). Initial pronoun tagging for these positions was undertaken manually by a research assistant, and this was subsequently checked by both authors of the paper, ensuring consistency across all tags and achieving inter-rater agreement. If the position adopted did not fall into the three aforementioned categories, it was coded as "other". Equally, positions that were ambiguous (e.g., if the context did not allow for disambiguation or if the anaphoric chain of references did not lead to a proper noun and the action could not clearly be interpreted as taken by a specific source) – as well as instances where there were disagreements between coders – also led to a coding of "other" (68 were coded "Other", comprising 6 % of the total pronouns examined).

Since this paper constitutes part of a larger project for which the corpus was formatted and annotated, the full tagset included the items described in this paper as well as other items addressed in another paper (see McEntee-Atalianis and Vessey, forthcoming). Specifically, tags accounted for the year of the speech (e.g., 2005), the member state (e.g., Republic of Korea), language used (e.g., English), and the position adopted (Member State, United Nations, Alliance, Other) (see Example 1). To ensure the intelligibility of data extracts in this paper, tags are simplified in later examples.

Example 1. 2005_A-59_PV.104_Republic of Korea_English

> Along with like-minded countries, <TAG YEAR = "2005″ MS = "Republic of Korea" LANG = "EN" PR = "MS"> we </TAG> sincerely hope that the next draft resolution on this matter will take on board these aspects and thus become more balanced.

In addition to the tags shown in Example 1, file names were annotated in the corpus program to account for language, member state, year, and vote. This enabled us to navigate through the data in ways that allowed us to target the research questions in this paper, as well as the broader aims of the larger project (see McEntee-Atalianis and Vessey, forthcoming).

Our methodology involved the use of corpus linguistic tools to inform our discourse analysis. To answer Research Question 1, we examined which identity categories were predominant in the data, scrutinizing how speakers positioned themselves as Member States, as representatives of the United Nations, and/or as speaking on behalf of sociopolitical alliances. For this, we determined which tags occurred most frequently, using corpus linguistic techniques and the SketchEngine program, and identified correlations between these frequencies and the voting records.

To answer Research Question 2, we used inductive thematic coding (Saldaña, 2021; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009) to determine which themes (stance objects) were raised when particular positions were adopted. Themes point to issues which are of national interest (when "we" MS is used) as opposed to those raised for strategic sociopolitical alliances and/or organizational reasons (i.e., where "we" ALL or "we" UN are used). Some of the themes overlap (with different stances taken); some themes are prioritised over others; and some are taken exclusively according to different identity ("principal") positionings.

To identify stance acts, we further examined each instance of each type of "we", using verb typologies from systemic functional linguistics to identify patterns. Specifically, we manually determined if "we" occurred with "material" verbs of action, "verbal" verbs of spoken or written communication, "mental" verbs of interior processes of cognition or affect, "behavioural" verbs of conscious conduct, and "relational" verbs of identification or description. The focus on verb types is common practice in systemic functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis, where the verb is recognized to be central to the analysis of participant roles in discourse, which in turn helps to reveal ideological viewpoints (Koller, 2020; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; see also Fetzer and Bull, 2012; Kirkham and Moore, 2016; Kranert, 2017; Mulderigg, 2012). With each verb collocate labelled, we were able to use SketchEngine to search for and extract the text containing each position tag (i.e., UN, MS, ALL) and identify if these positions tended to align with particular verb types (i.e., material, verbal, mental, behavioural, or relational). Thus, we established the patterns between identity categories and particular verb types, construing positionality with respect to the stance object (e.g., via material verbs construing agency, mental verbs construing competence, etc.). The aim of this step was to determine if the adoption of particular verb forms aligned with different forms of self-reference (Kranert, 2017). Together, these features in the discourse reveal similarities and differences in stance acts and stance taking.

Finally, to address Research Question 3, we turned from patterns across the corpus to the qualitative analysis of individual acts. Here, we focused on individual examples to highlight the dynamic nature of positioning and stance taking, as speakers adopted multiple positions towards different stance objects within a single intervention.

5. Findings

5.1. Positioning via pronouns

A total of 1109 instances of first-person plural pronouns were identified in the corpus, of which 140 (12 %) were used for sociopolitical alliance positioning (e.g., a language alliance such as membership within 'La Francophonie' or 'Arabic Group of Friend'), 446 (40 %) for Member State positioning, and 455 (40 %) for United Nations positioning (see Fig. 2). The remaining 68 pronoun codes refer to other positions. In other words, the tendency across most of the data is for speakers to adopt a Member State or a United Nations position.

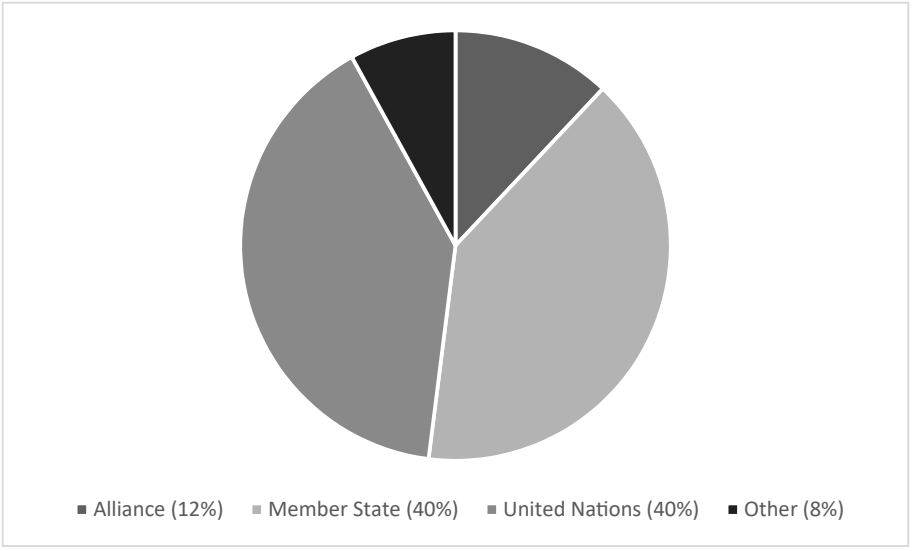

Fig. 2. Distribution of first-person plural pronouns.

Looking specifically at data from speakers voting in favour of the 1995 resolution, the split between Member State and United Nations positioning is not evenly distributed (see Table 2). Within the "Yes" vote, the majority of statements arguing in support of the resolution adopt pronouns expressing United Nations positioning (43.7 %), as opposed to Member State (33 %) and alliance positioning (16.3 %). Meanwhile, if we examine data from the "No" vote, the majority of the pronouns show a Member State position (57.1 %) (vs. United Nations position (35.7 %) and alliance position (2.4 %)). Finally, examining the data from delegations that abstained on the 1995 vote, 74 % of the pronouns reference Member State positioning (as opposed to 24.6 % for United Nations positioning) (see Fig. 3). Thus, speakers voting in favour of the 1995 resolution tended to adopt a footing whereby they animated the "principal" of the United Nations in their interventions. For those that voted against or abstained from voting on the resolution, these participants tended to animate the "principal" of their Member State.

Table 2
Voting patterns and positions taken (for/again/abstain).

Vote	Position adopted	Number of tags in dataset	% of tags
For (44,385 words; 77.2 % of corpus)	United nations	362	43.7 %
	Member state	272	33 %
	Alliance	135	16.3 %
	Other	57	7 %
	TOTAL	**826**	**100 %**
Against (10,098 words; 17.6 % of corpus)	Member state	120	57.1 %
	United nations	75	35.7 %
	Alliance	5	2.4 %
	Other	10	4.8 %
	TOTAL	**210**	**100 %**
Abstain (3017 words; 5.2 % of corpus)	Member state	54	74 %
	United nations	18	24.6 %
	Alliance	0	0 %
	Other	1	1.4 %
	TOTAL	**73**	**100 %**
Total corpus: 57,500 words	**Overall total**	**1109**	**100 %**

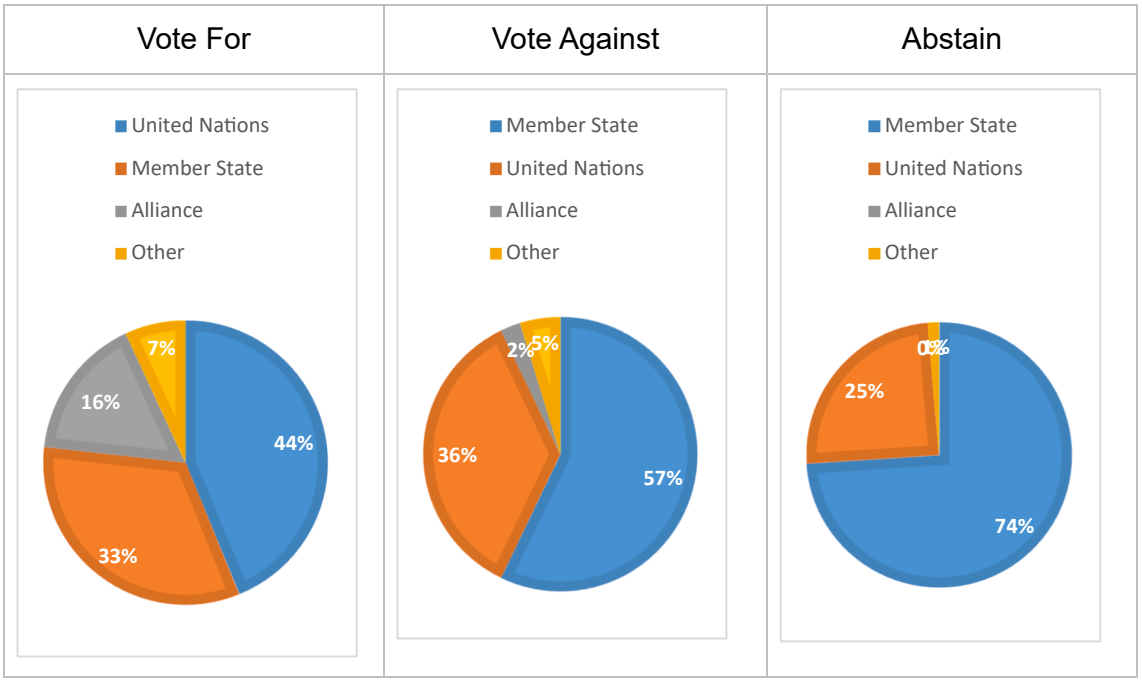

Fig. 3. Voting patterns and positions taken (for/against/abstain).

5.2. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis shows two main themes (/stance objects) occurring across the data, with varying subthemes (see Table 3 and Table 4). The first theme is the (draft) resolution, which was discussed by all participants. The second theme was multilingualism more broadly, which was discussed by all participants except for those adopting an alliance position, who generally did not mention multilingualism. Within these broad themes, multiple subthemes emerged as discussion points, including: the genre of the resolution ('Genre'); the content of the resolution ('Content'); the process of negotiating and working towards an agreement in relation to the resolution ('Process'); the objectives of the resolution ('Objectives'); expressions of appreciation towards the work of the Secretariat and member states responsible for sponsoring and developing the text of the resolution for discussion and debate ('Appreciation'); the benefits and challenges of multilingualism for the UN and member states ('Benefits'; 'Challenges'); the quality of multilingualism for the UN and member states ('Quality'); respect for multilingualism and the languages of the UN and member states ('Respect'); principles and practices of multilingual (in)equality at the United Nations, e.g., disparity in languages available on the Internet; provision of interpretation and translation ('(In)equality'); proposed initiatives and incentives to enhance multilingualism within the UN ('Initiatives/incentives').

Table 3
Theme 1: Draft resolution (summary).

Vote (For, Against, Abstain)	Position: Member State, United Nations, Alliance	Theme 1: Draft Resolution				
		Genre	Content	Process	Objectives	Appreciation
For	MS	X	X	X		X
	UN		X	X	X	X
	ALL		X	X	X	X
Against	MS		X		X	X
	UN	X	X	X	X	
	ALL		X		X	
Abstain	MS		X	X		X
	UN	X	X	X	X	X
	ALL	No data				

Table 4
Theme 2: Multilingualism (summary).

Vote (For, Against, Abstain)	Position: Member State, United Nations, Alliance	Theme 2: Multilingualism						
		Benefits	Challenges	Quality	Respect	(In)equality	Appreciation	Initiatives/incentives
For	MS	X	X	X		X	X	X
	UN	X	X			X	X	
	ALL	X	X			X	X	
Against	MS	X			X	X	X	
	UN	X	X			X	X	
	ALL							
Abstain	MS				X			
	UN							
	ALL	No data						

With respect to Theme 1 (the (draft) resolution), all participants discussed the content of the resolution, but those voting against or abstaining tended to address the subtheme 'Process' to a lesser extent than those voting in favour. When "No" voters did address the process of developing and negotiating the resolution, they exclusively animated a United Nations position, whereas normally they tended to adopt a Member State position. This pattern seems to emerge because the UN position is adopted when speakers assert authority over the organizational processes and procedures, and this is achieved primarily by using "We [UN]" alongside a modal verb, usually one of obligation. The adoption of the UN position to invoke a call for action is common across all voting patterns (i.e., voting for, against, and abstention), as can be seen with respect to Benin (a "Yes" voting country) in Example 2 and Papua New Guinea (a "No" voting country) in Example 3.

Example 2. 1995_A_50_PV.34-EN_Multilingualism_MS Benin_French (emphasis added)

We [UN] *must* therefore act urgently to achieve ever greater democratization of international life.

Example 3. 2001_A_56_PV.90-EN_Multilingualism_Papua New Guinea_English (emphasis added)

We [UN] *must* refrain from micromanaging the Organization. These are matters on which the Secretary-General must be required to report.

The adoption of the United Nations position to call for action is also evidenced by the use of material (action) verbs alongside "We [UN]". 42 % of "We [UN]" occur with a material verb, whereas for both "We [MS]" and "We [ALL]" the dominant pattern is the use of mental (verbs of cognition, affect, or perception) and verbal (verbs denoting speaking or communication) processes (see Table 5).

Table 5
Verb types used according to position.

Position (total occurrences)[4]	Verb type	Frequency	% of total
We [UN] (143)	Material	60	42 %
	Mental	38	27 %
	Relational	23	16 %
	Behavioural	12	8 %
	Verbal	10	7 %
We [MS] (289)	Mental	199	69 %
	Verbal	45	16 %
	Material	21	7 %
	Relational	13	4 %
	Behavioural	11	4 %
We [ALL] (91)	Mental	43	47 %
	Verbal	29	32 %
	Behavioural	8	9 %
	Material	7	8 %
	Relational	4	4 %

These patterns help to explain why speakers shift in footing. With a Member State position, speakers animate national interests, whereas with a United Nations position, they assert authority over organizational matters. By laminating these positions, the speakers use footings strategically and rhetorically to discuss and balance competing needs and perspectives relating to domestic and international affairs. We can observe relevant shifts in Example 4, where Japan (which voted against the resolution), alternates between United Nations and Member State positions to both call for action ("we [UN] *must*"; "we [UN] have *to*") whilst representing national interests via the use of mental verbs ("We [MS] *consider*").

Example 4. 2001_A_56_PV.90-EN_Multilingualism_Japan_English (emphasis added)

> Given all of these problems, **we [UN]** *must* question whether this draft resolution would serve the purpose of multilingualism in its true sense. **We [MS]** *consider*, rather, that it could, despite the intention of its proponent, inadvertently work against that purpose. I must also point out that my delegation has learned that many countries want to have more time to study this draft resolution carefully. I see no reason why **we [UN]** *have* to consider this draft, which contains so many decisive elements, at the very end of the year and with little time to debate this issue.

The thematic analysis also shows that most participants addressed the objectives of the draft resolution, and those who voted in favour of the resolution also expressed appreciation for this. Such positive sentiment is expressed via the adoption of the Member State position illustrated in Example 5, where Mexico (which voted in favour of the resolution) endorses the resolution, using mental (e.g., *believe*) and verbal (e.g., *urge*) processes.

Example 5. 1995_A_50_PV.34-EN_Multilingualism_MS Mexico_Spanish (emphasis added)

> **We [MS]** *believe* that the draft resolution before **us [UN]** contains the minimum measures necessary to ensure the use, on an equal footing, of the official and working languages of the Organization. **We [MS]** *believe* that this will contribute to strengthening the multilingual character of the United Nations. **We [MS]** *support* and endorse the initiative taken by the sponsors of this text, and **we [MS]** *urge* all Member States to do the same.

With respect to Theme 2 (multilingualism), subthemes are more diverse. For example, many speakers raise the issue of the benefits of multilingualism, respect for multilingualism, and appreciation (e.g., for the Secretary General's commitment to multilingualism, satisfaction about the increase in the number of translators, etc.). These subthemes occur most consistently in speeches made by those voting in favour. In Example 6, Lebanon (which voted in favour) positively evaluates multilingualism and adopts a United Nations position to endorse the resolution, highlighting its benefits for the organization and international community via the use of a modal verb of ability (can) and a material process ("do […] a great service").

Example 6. 1995_A_50_PV.34-EN_Multilingualism_MS Lebanon_French (emphasis added)

> It is by restoring the effective and harmonious use of languages within **our [UN]** Organization that **we [UN]** *can* do the international community a great service and provide every opportunity to delegations and representatives to understand and express concepts and values in all their fullness in their mother tongue or the language of their choice, with the sole aim of better realizing the purposes of the United Nations Charter.

[4] Note that Table 5 includes only 523 instances of the nominative case (*we*), whereas the total 1109 instances of the first-person plural form include all cases (i.e., *we, our, us, ours*).

Although "Yes" voters contributed the most in the debates about the resolution (i.e., 77.2 % of the corpus total; see Table 2), the thematic analysis showed that "No" voters, in discussing multilingualism, also raised the subthemes of: benefits, challenges, respect, (in)equality, and appreciation. Such is the case for Japan, which voted against the resolution, and which adopts a UN position and a modal verb of obligation ("we [UN] *should*") to caution against simplistic misunderstandings of multilingualism that can result in the penalization of, and discrimination against, some cultures (see Example 7).

Example 7. 1995_A_50_PV.47-EN_Multilingualism_Japan_English (emphasis added)

> The draft resolution before **us [UN]** is of great interest and great importance to my delegation as well as to many others. My delegation supports the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity in this Organization. It believes that multilingualism is one important factor in doing this. However, **we [UN]** *should* all be aware that there are numerous cultures not associated with the six official languages. Personnel who come from those cultures should not be penalized and unduly discriminated against. Fairer treatment of these people would serve the overall objectives of cultural diversity.

Finally, the thematic analysis reveals that those who abstained from voting rarely raised the subject of multilingualism in their interventions, perhaps because they contributed the least content to the debate (only 5.2 % of the corpus total; see Table 2). Nevertheless, when they did discuss multilingualism, it was to demonstrate their respect for it. Such is the case for Singapore in Example 8, where the representative alternates between Member State and United Nations positions to address the importance of multilingualism. Following a pattern discussed previously (see Table 4), the United Nations position is accompanied by a modal verb of permission (*may*), and a material process (*take any action*), whereas the Member State position is adopted to issue advice via a verbal process (*suggest*).

Example 8. 1995_A_50_PV.34-EN_Multilingualism_MS_Singapore_Mixed (emphasis added)

> **We [MS]** *suggest* that before **we [UN]** *take any* action on this draft resolution, the Secretariat should clarify the points I have raised and all delegations should be given more time to reflect on the Secretariat's answers. The United Nations has operated for 50 years with its present language arrangements. A pause for reflection will do the Organization no harm. On the other hand, **we [UN]** *may* well regret precipitate action.

5.3. Footing and stance

As shown in the preceding sections, footings and stances shift and change within a single intervention, and often within a single sentence. A speaker may shift between a footing in which they animate national interests (i.e., as the "principal" of the Member State) and a footing where they express their organizational membership (i.e., as the "principal" of the United Nations) – thereby "wandering" (Petersoo, 2007) between affiliations. This is also achieved intertextually by drawing on other perspectives and voices, which can be seen in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, drawing on an intervention from Malaysia. With the view of addressing the difficulties faced by individuals whose L1 is not an official language of the United Nations, Malaysia requested two amendments to the proposed resolution. However, in Example 9 these amendments are rebutted by Côte d'Ivoire, a sponsor of the proposal, and this rebuttal is achieved in part via shifts in footing. Using a Member State footing to express concerns (via mental processes such as "think") and a United Nations footing to express action (via material processes like "adopt"), the speaker navigates between the different allegiances relevant to this context. Furthermore, drawing on an alliance footing ("ALL"), the speaker also addresses a wider implied membership of shared experiences relevant to a grouping (African nations) larger than that of the individual member state.

Example 9. 1995_A_50_PV.49-EN_Multilingual_Cote d'Ivoire_French (emphasis added)

> **We [MS]** *think* that if **we [UN]** adopt Malaysia's proposal **we [UN]** would be taking a very regrettable step backward, because it would sanction the very monolingualism that **our [UN]** Organization has striven to avoid ever since it was set up.
>
> […]
>
> With regard to African countries - including mine, where **we [ALL]** speak almost 40 'mother tongues' I cannot even begin to imagine how **we [ALL]** would slot **ourselves [ALL]** into the United Nations framework.
>
> […]
>
> My delegation therefore cannot accept those two proposed amendments, but I can say that **we [MS]** do accept the Australian proposal in document A/50/L.14.

These examples show that speakers shift positions throughout their interventions in order to adopt distinct footings and address different themes. These strategies illustrate the dynamic nature of diplomatic stancetaking, whereby speakers strategically promote domestic and international priorities in the context of organisational language policy.

6. Discussion & conclusion

This paper extends research on political discourse by examining the enactment of identity politics in the genre of diplomatic debate. It shows how personal pronouns are used as an instrument of negotiation to mark different political

affiliations and identities; and when combined with verb phrases, to denote stances on political issues. Diplomatic identities are not singular, stable or fixed, rather they are multiple and "wander" (Petersoo, 2007) according to the participants addressed, affiliations indexed, and the stances taken towards different stance objects (see also Chaemsaithong, 2015, Chaemsaithong and Kim, 2021; Ruey-Ying Liu, 2023 in their discussions of institutional identities).

Our analysis shows that, unlike politicians (e.g., see Bull and Fetzer, 2006), diplomats use pronouns rarely as a form of equivocation (i.e., employing them indeterminately), but rather to attribute stances to the groups to which they belong, and for whom they are speaking, at any moment. They therefore animate and laminate their concerns and opinions in terms of the "principal" they represent (be that their nation state; a political or language alliance, or as a member of the UN). Inclusive and exclusive forms are consistently selected when speaking from the position of "we" (UN) and "we" (Member State); these patterns reveal that those adopting the same position adopt similar stances with regard to shared stance objects. Thus, habitual stances taken when speaking from the same principaled-anchored footings, demonstrate allegiance to particular ("imagined") identities and community memberships (a pattern similarly observed by Wilson, 1990; Inigo-Mora, 2004). Arguably, the employment of 'wandering we' (Petersoo, 2007), allows speakers to carefully maintain diplomatic relations and assert identity politics as they negotiate disagreement. Diplomats reference different constituencies and leverage this for tactical and persuasive purposes. For example, the use of "We [UN]" alongside modal and material (action) verbs functions doubly to compel the organization towards action and serves as a "proximization strategy" (Mulderigg, 2012), since the agent responsible for the perlocutionary effect strategically includes all other member states alongside the speaker - with "we" implying consensus.

First person pronouns are therefore invoked to establish 'same-saying' (Goddard, 1995) and consubstantiality (Alharbi, 2018), however the nature of the performed consubstantiality differs according to the scope of referent "we". The adoption of the United Nations footing tends to occur where member states call for action, and especially in terms of following established procedures in the adoption of the resolution, marked by modal and material (action) verbs. In adopting this footing, member state representatives downplay self-interest, instead emphasising the collective good (see for similar findings Matos and Miller, 2023). At the same time, the adoption of the Member State footing tends to occur especially in cases where a delegate voted against (or abstained from) the multilingualism resolution. It is in such cases where speakers stress concerns for speakers of languages that would not be accounted for within the multilingualism resolution as originally proposed (as in Example 7). In other words, the "principaled" and "wandering" (Petersoo, 2007) use of "we" is employed strategically and rhetorically to include/exclude certain constituencies in the marking of selective stances and is pragmatically conditioned within this genre. These shifting roles, alignments and stances within interventions ultimately reveal different "imaginings" of the UN itself. For example, those in favour of the resolution (and adopting a UN footing) see the UN in terms of its initial language policy (i.e. supporting a limited language regime - six official languages and two working language) as opposed to those (often adopting a MS footing) who see it as an organization that should represent all languages internationally.

Therefore, our analysis shows that "we" is enacted in different ways by diplomats for the rhetorical purposes of "synthetic deixis" (when speaking as a principal of the UN as an organizational body), and/or to delineate their views from those of other member states (when speaking as a principal of their political alliance or nation). The "lamination" (Goffman, 1981) of multiple identifications and the use of "wandering we" (Petersoo, 2007) reveals the speaker as multiply embedded within, and speaking on behalf of, different communities and political affiliations on a variety of issues. This fluidity of identification belies the complex management of relationships and the need to orient to different values and obligations held by different communities and representatives. More specifically, UN diplomats must work hard to represent their nation, whilst also attending to responsibilities and duties which transcend the nation as international actors functioning within and dependent on transnational and global networks and organizations. Orientation to their embeddedness within larger (trans/international) communities is necessary to legitimise their status as organizational members. Member State representatives cannot therefore appear to be totally self-serving but must reconcile the needs and demands of the different groupings to which they belong. Their work demands sensitivity and awareness of the responsibilities and duties they have to different communities (national, political alliances, international), manifested via the explicit articulation and recognition of the views and values of others and historical understandings of positions taken. All groupings must be acknowledged and positively evaluated and legitimized, at the same time as denoting political differences. This is achieved by the skillful and dexterous movement between shared and exclusive identities and stances. The enactment of hybrid identities facilitates the balancing and acknowledgement of national or alliance interests with responsibilities to the larger international/organizational order. It also enables the speaker to appeal rhetorically (often via intertextual reference, e.g., to prior agreements or resolutions) to shared values (as an organizational membership – 'we' UN) and to soften the presentation of opposing views e.g., when forwarding the position of their nation state ('we' MS).

Using rigorous corpus and discourse analyses, our study shows how group identities and footings, marked via iterative and accretive processes of pronoun and verb selection, become established as a result of "discursive interpellation" (e.g., Gustafsson, 2013: 3), and invoked to enact persuasive and rhetorical goals in order to forge and argue for consubstantiality and equality in organizational practices. We argue that the performance of different speaker affiliations and identities, even within the same intervention, permits diplomats to navigate sensitive issues and orient to self and collective/shared interests, serving also to minimise differences, acknowledge shared aims and mark positive stances, whilst also demonstrating authority and legitimacy. The study points to the importance of corpus linguistic tools in investigations of deixis and diplomatic discourse. We acknowledge that due to limitations of space we were unable to report on subtle differences in the

use of singular and plural pronouns, however future work on diplomatic negotiation and identity politics calls for further analysis of these, as well as additional in-depth transitivity analyses and exploration of deixis beyond first person pronouns.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Lisa McEntee-Atalianis: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rachelle Vessey:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation.

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We have nothing to declare.

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Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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