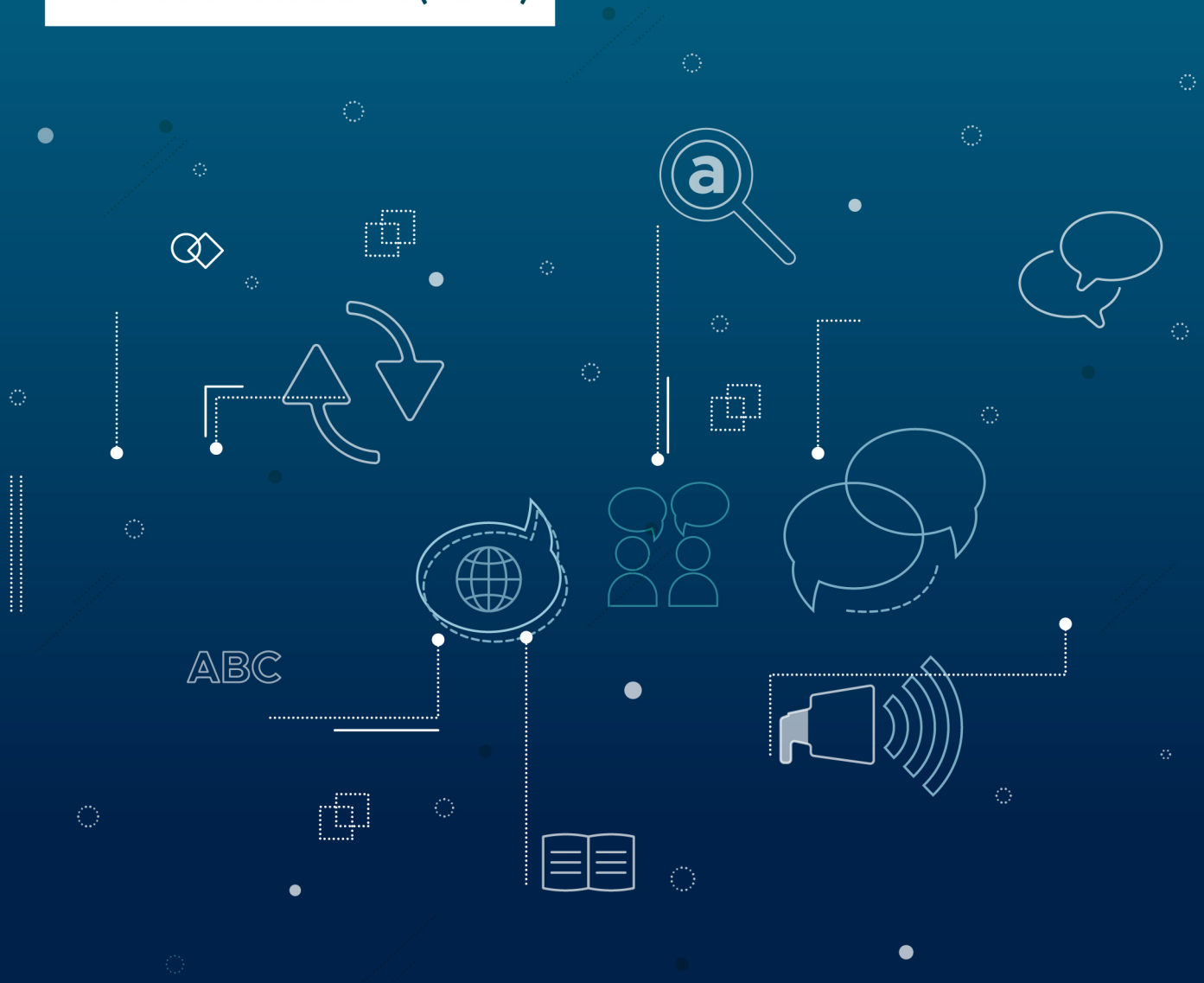




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Stylistic Analysis of Politeness and Pronoun Usage of the SONA of Fidel V. Ramos

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine polite expressions and pronoun usage in the SONAs of former President Fidel V. Ramos from 1992 to 1997. It employed a qualitative-descriptive research design, using the SONA of the former president as the corpus. The texts of the corpus were downloaded from the internet. To analyze the data, the researcher utilized discourse analysis to identify the polite expressions and the meanings of the personal pronouns in the SONA. The results of the study indicate that former President Fidel Ramos used polite expressions in his SONA, such as introductory remarks before he began his speech. Additionally, the phrase “Maraming Salamat po” is evident in his concluding statement. Furthermore, the study identified the usage of the pronouns: we, our, us, I, me, and my. It was revealed that the usage of “we” and “our” was particularly notable, occurring 659 and 676 times, respectively. The former president’s politeness is evident in his use of polite expressions. It can also be inferred that he is not self-centered, as he demonstrates a sense of unity with the people whenever he speaks, as shown by his usage of the pronouns “we” and “our.” By using these pronouns, he indicates that he is part of the community rather than an individual separate from the people.

INTRODUCTION

Literature plays a vital role in a person’s life as it reflects the ideas, cultures, and personalities of individuals or groups. To determine the message embedded in a literary piece, it is important to analyze it. The analysis of a literary piece is not new; it has been employed by people to unearth hidden messages.

One method of analysis is stylistics. Stylistics deals with the lexicon, morphology, and phonology of a literary piece, as every word and sound has meaning embedded in it. Moreover, stylistics focuses primarily on the author’s style, as reflected in the work.

Many aspects of stylistics are worthy of study, but this paper deals mainly with the polite and impolite expressions used by former President Fidel V. Ramos in his State of the Nation Address (SONA), which he delivered from 1992 to 1997. By analyzing the polite expressions used in the SONA, one can determine the personality of the former president.

In the field of stylistics, politeness is a key area of study, as discussed in detail by Brown and Levinson’s model. This model occupies a central position with the concept of face and the accompanying concepts of face wants and face work. They point out that maintaining face consists of taking a line while interacting socially; a line is a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts, i.e., what a person says and does, showing how they understand themselves, the current situation, and how they evaluate their partners. It can be said that people always take a line, regardless of whether they intend to do so. Furthermore, people are expected to behave in a way consistent with their image (self-projection); if this is the case, they are said to be in face or to maintain face. If, however, they behave in a way

inconsistent with the expected behavior associated with their image, they are said to be out of face or in the wrong face, i.e., they are suffering a loss of face. Losing face means publicly suffering a diminished self-image.

Furthermore, Levinson and Brown, as cited by Short, state that politeness is a universal phenomenon that affects linguistic and other social behaviors. People want others to be polite to them because they recognize the same need in themselves, and if they don’t pay attention to the politeness needs of others, they are unlikely to be very efficient in getting things done.

The State of the Nation Address, or SONA, is delivered by the president every year, outlining the plans, programs, and accomplishments of the administration for that year. The SONA, like any literary piece, is composed of words, and it is important to choose words wisely, as they reflect the president’s personality.

Numerous studies have been conducted on polite expressions and pronoun usage by stylistics researchers, but few have focused on the State of the Nation Address. This paper aims to identify the polite expressions and pronoun usage in the State of the Nation Address delivered by former President Fidel V. Ramos from 1992 to 1997.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective communication—whether in daily conversations or formal settings—depends not just on expressing clear ideas but also on how we use language features like politeness and pronouns. Research shows that these elements play significant roles in how our messages are received and understood. By examining everything from students’ letters of request to political speeches, we see

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how strategies for politeness and the choice of pronouns can shape our interactions, reflect our identities, and persuade audiences.

In the study conducted by Quraishi (2009), he analyzed the relationship between politeness and effectiveness in communicating ideas by examining the letters of request made by Afghan learners, where they are perceived as polite when writing letters. He found that there is a strong relationship between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness, but these are two separate skills that need to be learned. It is implied, then, that as language learning progresses, learners acquire pragmatic and linguistic knowledge. The findings of this study also reveal that, although effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are related, they are not a single skill. Some learners possess both qualities, while others do not. That is, some learners are capable of communicating their ideas effectively; however, they lack pragmatic knowledge. Moreover, Beuckmann, in his study regarding politeness and the realization of speech acts in the Japanese context, found that there were significant differences in the usage of politeness expressions between L2 learners and Japanese native speakers (JNS), with JNS tending to use more polite and respectful forms toward senior individuals and professors. Regarding speech act realization, different strategies were employed between L2 learners and JNS. In conclusion, acquiring pragmalinguistic forms is not easy for beginners, even after one year of studying abroad.

Llorica and Sosas (2022) examined ten parent-teen conversations using Brown and Levinson's politeness framework. Filipino teens use all four politeness strategies: positive, negative, off-record, and bald-on-record, with positive politeness being the most common. Teens often use camaraderie-building tactics like compliments and terms of endearment to stay close to their parents. Negative politeness shows up in hedged requests, while off-record strategies include indirect hints. Bald-on-record is used for urgency or clarity. These patterns reflect goals like solidarity and deference, influenced by upbringing and culture, explaining both respectful and blunt interactions.

In a similar note, Selgas (2022) studied 185 student responses to teachers' Google Classroom announcements, and four politeness strategies were identified: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record. Positive politeness was most common (58.38%), followed by negative (35.14%), bald-on-record (4.32%), and off-record (2.16%). Female students tended to use more positive and bald-on-record strategies, while males used more negative and off-record strategies. Students often showed agreement, gratitude, and solidarity (positive politeness), used hedges and apologies (negative politeness), asked direct questions (bald-on-record), and occasionally left indirect hints (off-record). The study highlights the role of relational context, cultural differences, and pragmatic needs in shaping these communication strategies, noting that students maintained polite communication despite pandemic challenges.

Another aspect of stylistic analysis is the use of pronouns in a literary piece. The researcher assumes that pronoun usage reflects the authority and personality of the former president. When the president delivers his State of the Nation Address (SONA), we might not notice the use of personal pronouns in his message. According to Beard (2000), as cited by Hakansson (2012), personal pronouns make up a significant part of political speeches because they can indicate whom the speaker identifies with. The pronominal choices in political speeches are also interesting because they significantly influence the overall effect. Moreover, Allen (2007), as cited by Hakansson (2012), argues that politicians present themselves as being able to identify with the wants, interests, and needs of the audience. They present themselves this way to be perceived as good politicians, i.e., suitable leaders of the nation. The manner in which politicians present themselves in their speeches—by referring to themselves, their audience, and also their opposition—can effectively persuade the audience to agree with them. When giving speeches, politicians tend to highlight their positive aspects and the negative aspects of their opponents. One way of achieving this is by intentionally using specific personal pronouns that refer to oneself or others.

In the study conducted by Hakansson (2012) on the use of personal pronouns in political speeches, he collected speeches from Bush and Obama and found that the pronominal choices of the presidents do not differ significantly. The results also indicate that the pronoun "I" is used when the speaker wants to speak as an individual rather than as a representative of a group. "You" is used both as a generic pronoun and as a way for the president to address Congress without speaking on their behalf. The pronoun "we" is used to invoke a sense of collectivity and to share responsibility; in most cases, it refers to the president and Congress. "They" is used to separate the speaker from others; the individuals referred to by "they" varied greatly between the speakers. The study also showed that the pronominal choices and the referents of these pronouns vary significantly depending on the context of the speech.

Furthermore, Hakansson (2012) argued that personal pronouns constitute a significant part of political speeches because they can provide insight into whom the speaker identifies with. The pronominal choices in political speeches are also noteworthy because they significantly influence the overall effect. Politicians present themselves as being able to identify with the wants, interests, and needs of the audience. They present themselves this way to be perceived as good politicians, i.e., suitable leaders of the nation. The manner in which politicians present themselves in their speeches—by referring to themselves, their audience, and also their opposition—can effectively persuade the audience to agree with them. When giving speeches, politicians tend to highlight their positive aspects and the negative aspects of their opponents. One way of achieving this is by intentionally using specific personal pronouns that refer to themselves or others (Allen, 2007).

The study of Kaewrungruang and Yaoharee (2018) analyzed the use of first-person pronouns in the final 2016 U.S. presidential debate between Trump and Clinton. They conducted a textual and discourse analysis of the candidates' two-minute responses across six topics. Out of the 5,022 words sampled, there were 315 instances of "I" and "we." Overall, "we" (55%) appeared more frequently than "I" (45%). Trump used "we" more often (103 times compared to 62 times for "I"), while Clinton favored "I" (79 times compared to 71 times for "we"). The context of usage varied by topic: Trump frequently used "we" in discussions about the economy, national debt, immigration, and foreign policy, using it to create a sense of solidarity with the public or to align with a party agenda. He used "I" more in discussions about his qualifications for office and the Supreme Court. Clinton's frequent use of "I" was often to convey personal opinions, assert leadership, and project her individual political identity, using phrases like "I want" and "I think." However, she used "we" on topics like immigration and the Supreme Court to invoke collective responsibility. The authors interpret these pronoun choices as intentional rhetorical strategies: "we" fosters togetherness and shared goals (inclusive) or aligns the speaker with a group (exclusive), while "I" highlights personal views, authority, or accountability. The study concludes that these subtle shifts in pronoun use reflect differing persuasive goals and political ideologies: Trump's emphasis on "we" highlights collective mobilization and nationalism, while Clinton's focus on "I" underscores personal competence and leadership.

The use of personal pronouns is also evident in the political speech of Pres. Donald Trump was studied by Nasuha and Ekawati (2021) who examined how Donald Trump used personal pronouns in his speech to the 74th UN General Assembly. Through qualitative content analysis, they discovered that Trump frequently used "I," "you," "we," and "they" (and their variations) to convey authority, solidarity, distance, and responsibility. Quantitative analysis showed that "we" (both inclusive and exclusive) and its variations were the most commonly used pronouns, followed by "they," "you," and "I." Functionally, "I" and its forms (such as "my" and "me") highlighted Trump's personal authority, promises, experiences, beliefs, and acknowledgments. This usage served to assert leadership, commit to policies, and personalize claims. "You" (and "your/yourself") was used in different ways: to address the UN audience, to single out specific groups like Venezuelans or migrants, or generally to avoid confrontation.

"We" (inclusive) was used to create a sense of togetherness and shared responsibility with listeners, while "we" (exclusive) aligned Trump with his nation or allies, excluding the audience to emphasize collective identity and national interests. "They" (and its forms) was used to mark otherness, separating outgroups or distancing responsibility, such as referring to receiving countries or migrants. Sometimes it was used neutrally to refer to groups or phenomena.

The authors concluded that Trump's choice of pronouns strategically reflected ideological positioning: "I" built individual credibility and commitment; "we" fostered solidarity or coalition identity depending on inclusivity; "you" navigated address and politeness; and "they" constructed otherness and reduced speaker responsibility. Together, these studies show that politeness strategies and pronoun choices are not mere linguistic features but key resources for negotiating solidarity, authority, and distance. It reveals that while politeness and the ability to convey ideas effectively are related, they are distinct skills that require intentional learning and practice. Additionally, the strategic use of personal pronouns in political discourse allows politicians to connect with their audiences and differentiate themselves from others. They underscore the need to teach pragmatics explicitly and the importance of analyzing stylistic choices in discourse and persuasion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach to identify the polite expressions and meanings of personal pronouns in the State of the Nation Address (SONA) of Fidel Ramos. The six SONAs delivered by former President Fidel Ramos from 1992 to 1997 served as the data for the study, as they are the only SONAs delivered in English in recent years. Discourse analysis was employed to identify the polite expressions and the meanings of the personal pronouns used in Ramos's SONAs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On Polite Expressions

The State of the Nation Address (SONA) was respectful and polite, as it included words that demonstrated the President's politeness toward the people and the members of the Senate and Congress. It is expected that in the SONA, the President will use polite expressions, as he will outline his plans and the accomplishments of his administration in the present and for the years to come. The table below shows the polite expressions and their frequency of usage in Fidel V. Ramos' SONA.

Table 1: Polite Expression on Fidel V. Ramos' SONA

Polite Expressions	Frequency of Usage
Opening address/greetings Ex: Mr. Senate President; Mr. Speaker; Vice President Joseph Estrada; Chief Justice Andres Narvasa; the distinguished members of the Senate and the House of Representatives; Your Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps; honored guests; fellow workers in government.	4
Ladies and gentlemen of the Congress	24

I submit.../we shall be submitting.../I will soon submit...	9
“Maraming salamat po...”	6
I commend/I thank/I am truly grateful/let me acknowledge	1

The table above shows that four out of six SONAs delivered by former President Ramos included an opening address to the officials of the government present in the joint session. When the President addresses other officials present in the joint session, it signifies respect for the leaders of the Senate and Congress. Furthermore, it indicates that he acknowledges democracy, as he is not the sole ruler of the country; he also has companions in the legislative body to enact laws that will benefit the people. This further demonstrates that he respects the authority of his fellow leaders in the body. By using these words, the President underscores his respect for the rule of democracy in the country. It also highlights that the members of the legislative body are worthy of respect and have a role to fulfill in the political affairs of the country. This implies that the President is not autocratic or self-centered, as he requires the help of the legislators to lead the country effectively.

According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution, the role of the legislative department is to enact laws that assist the President in carrying out his responsibilities. According to the Philippine Information Agency, there is a clear relationship between the executive and legislative branches, as the legislature enacts laws and the executive carries them out. Without one branch of government, the other cannot fulfill its duties and responsibilities.

On the Use of Pronouns

Table 2: Frequency Usage of Pronoun “we”

Pronoun	Frequency of Usage
We	659
SONA 1992	81
SONA 1993	129
SONA 1994	124
SONA 1995	104
SONA 1996	95
SONA 1997	126

It can be seen in Table 2 that in the SONA of former President Ramos, the pronoun “we” has the greatest frequency of usage, as it was used 659 times in the SONA delivered by Fidel Ramos from 1992 to 1997.

With the frequency of usage of these pronouns, it is evident that the former president is not self-centered; he shows that he is one with the people. The president does not single himself out or detach from the group, as he expresses attachment to them since his power comes from the people.

Excerpts:

1. *Today, we begin our joint and complementary efforts to discharge the government’s sworn duty to our people and our country.*

(SONA 1992)

2. *It is true that in some of our concerns—as in the economy—the forward movement has barely begun.* (SONA 1993)

3. *We have demonstrated our capability to manage our economy towards stability and sustained growth—earning the respect of the global economic community and making it unnecessary for us to depend on the IMF’s “Seal of Good Housekeeping.”* (SONA 1996)

In the above excerpts from the SONAs of the former president, the pronoun “we” is used when he refers to himself in relation to the people. It can be seen that he is not detaching himself from the populace since his power and authority come from the people themselves. This is consistent with Hakansson (2012), who argues that the use of the pronoun “we” as a way for the speaker to refer to himself indicates that he is speaking as a representative of a group or organization, rather than as an individual.

Karapetjana (2011), as cited by Hakansson (2012), adds that “we” is an important pronoun in political speeches in the sense that it expresses ‘institutional identity,’ i.e., when one person speaks as a representative of or on behalf of an institution. “We” is sometimes used to convey the image of a political party as a team, and, therefore, a shared responsibility. The use of the pronoun “we” can be divided into two categories: the inclusive “we,” which refers to the speaker and the listener/viewer, and the exclusive “we,” which refers to both the speaker and the listener or listeners. “We” is also sometimes used by politicians to avoid speaking about themselves as individuals and instead suggest that others are involved, perhaps to lead negative attention away from the speaker in question. By using the pronoun “we,” the speaker includes others in the utterance, creating a group with a clear identity and making others responsible for potential issues as well. The advantage of using the pronoun “we” in political speeches is that it helps share responsibility.

The table above shows that the pronoun “our” is also

Table 3: Frequency Usage of “our”

Pronoun	Frequency of Usage
Our	676
SONA 1992	89
SONA 1993	107
SONA 1994	105
SONA 1995	97
SONA 1996	151
SONA 1997	127

used in the SONA of the former president. Just like the pronouns “we” and “our” connote ownership of a collective identity or group. This pronoun was used by the president when he referred to his ownership of

himself and the people.

Excerpts:

1. *I see our task not in terms of any specific problem but in the light of the purposes of the union enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution...* (SONA 1992)

2. *The first year [of my presidency], we devoted ourselves to putting our house in order—...* (SONA 1994)

3. *Have we improved the lives of our people during our terms? Are our people better off today than they were five years ago?* (SONA 1997)

In the excerpts above, “our” was used to define ownership of a collective group or identity. In the three sentences extracted from the SONAs of the former president, it can be seen that the pronoun “our” connotes ownership of the Ramos administration and the Filipino people. The former president does not speak only of himself but of all his administration. It can be concluded that Ramos is not self-centered; instead, he involves his fellow workers in the government.

The pronoun “us” is the objective pronoun counterpart

Table 4: Frequency usage of “us”

Pronoun	Frequency Usage
Us	71
SONA 1992	14
SONA 1993	16
SONA 1994	9
SONA 1995	7
SONA 1996	14
SONA 1997	11

of “we.” Just like the pronoun “we,” it connotes the oneness of the speaker with his audience. The speaker wants to be identified with the group.

Excerpts:

1. *Third, let us improve our institutional and professional capability...* (SONA 1992)

2. *A year ago, our people asked us for a new beginning.* (SONA 1993)

3. *Let us not delude ourselves...* (SONA 1995)
 The pronoun “I” connotes self-centeredness, authority, and power.

Table 5: Frequency usage of “I”

Pronoun	Frequency Usage
I	157
SONA 1992	37
SONA 1993	27
SONA 1994	23
SONA 1995	25
SONA 1996	24
SONA 1997	21

It can be observed that “I” was used 157 times in the six SONAs of former President Ramos, which is less than the usage of “we” and “our.”

Bramley (2000), as cited by Hakansson (2012), states

that in political speeches, the pronoun “I” can be used by the speaker to convey his opinion. This usage makes the speech more subjective, shows the authority of the speaker, and can express compassion towards the audience, as well as narrate a story. The issue of subjectivity might lead some politicians to avoid using “I.” Another function of the first-person singular pronoun “I” in political speeches includes giving a sense of immediacy, suggesting that “I” captures the moment. It can also be used to create a relationship with the audience, as using “I” makes the speech seem more personal. “I” might also indicate commitment to the audience and personal involvement in issues; it gives the speaker a personal voice that distances him from others. This means that it cannot always be expected that the other members of his party agree with the speaker’s opinions when the pronoun “I” is used. The advantage of using “I” is that it shows personal involvement, which is especially useful when positive news is delivered. The disadvantage is that it clearly identifies who to blame when something goes wrong. It can also be perceived as an attempt by the individual speaker to place himself above or outside the shared responsibility of his colleagues.

Excerpts:

1. *I strongly urge your approval of this medium-term Philippine development plan.* (SONA 1993)

2. *...I submit for the Congressional record. I also submit today the proposed 1996 General Appropriations Act with my budget message.* (SONA 1995)

3. *...I officially proposed in 1994 the demilitarization of the South China Islets claimed by six littoral states, and the cooperative development of their resources.* (SONA 1997)

Based on the excerpts taken from the SONAs, the use of “I” connotes authority and power from the president. President Ramos used “I” to show that he is responsible for his given tasks, which is supported by Hakansson (2012), who argued that the most captivating reason for politicians to use the pronoun “I” is to portray themselves positively and highlight their personal qualities.

Moreover, it can be seen that the pronoun “I” was not used excessively in the SONAs to avoid the appearance of self-centeredness. It was used only when the president wanted to emphasize his authority and power to the people, as clearly demonstrated in the excerpts above.

The pronoun “me” was used 22 times in the SONA, demonstrating speaker-centeredness. The personal

Table 6: Frequency usage of “me”

Pronoun	Frequency of usage
Me	22
SONA 1992	2
SONA 1993	7
SONA 1994	4
SONA 1995	2
SONA 1996	1
SONA 1997	6

pronoun “me” is the objective counterpart of the personal pronoun “I,” and just like “I,” it connotes self-centeredness and ownership on the part of the speaker.

Excerpts:

1. *Let me sum up its highlights before I move on to our legislative program for this third session. (SONA 1994)*

2. *Finally, let me say a few words... (SONA 1995)*

3. *Let me underline the points briefly... (SONA 1996)*

Regarding the usage of the pronoun “me” in the SONA, it can be seen that aside from showing speaker-centeredness, it also demonstrates authority and a willingness to take full responsibility by the president. When the president uses this pronoun, it indicates that he is serious about fulfilling his duties and that he possesses the power and authority granted to him. Since “me” is an objective pronoun, it can be inferred that the president is taking full responsibility for his actions and the authority bestowed upon him.

The table shows that “my” was used 29 times in the six SONAs of former President Ramos, and this personal

Table 7: Frequency usage of “my”

Pronoun	Frequency of usage
My	29
SONA 1992	7
SONA 1993	2
SONA 1994	7
SONA 1995	2
SONA 1996	2
SONA 1997	9

pronoun connotes ownership of the speaker. By using this pronoun, the president emphasizes his ownership and authority over certain matters. It can also reflect his accomplishments throughout his administration.

Excerpts:

1. *Let us manifest together, my beloved countrymen and countrywomen... (SONA 1996)*

2. *For my part, let me assure you—... (SONA 1997)*

3. *One of my first moves was to issue Memorandum Order No. 27... (SONA 1993)*

The pronoun “my” in the above excerpts demonstrates the authority and assurance of the president to the people that he is fulfilling his promises. “My” is a subjective pronoun that refers to the speaker alone; however, in the case of the SONA, it denotes the authority granted to him by the people as he fulfills his promises. Moreover, it emphasizes the accomplishments of the president throughout the year.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of the study shows that there are polite expressions used by former President Fidel Ramos in his SONA such as introductory remarks before he began his speech, the use of ladies and gentlemen of Congress which connotes that the president is respecting the

legislative body; the use of the phrase: I am submitting/I respectfully submit shows that the president is respecting the rule of law and the authority of the Congress, the use of I commend which shows that the former president knows how to realize the efforts done by the Congress and lastly, the usage of “Maraming Salamat po” after the end of his speech shows that he is thankful enough to the people.

Moreover, the study found out the usage of the pronouns: we, our, us, I, me, and my. It was revealed in the study that the usage of we and our was highly notable, as they were used 659 and 676 times, respectively. The pronouns we, our, and us can be grouped accordingly, as they connote that the president is one with the people as he speaks collectively of the group. The pronouns I, me, and my were used 157, 22, and 29 times, respectively, in the SONA. This group of pronouns connotes authority and power as the president speaks about what he will do as the chief executive.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that the former president is polite, as evident in the usage of polite expressions. Furthermore, it connotes that he is respecting the rule of law and the policies of the democratic government. It can be inferred that he is not self-centered, as he shows oneness with the people whenever he speaks, as evident in his usage of the pronouns, we and our. Using these pronouns means that he is not self-centered and always refers to himself as part of the people.

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