

If *we have to do better* then do we have to do better?

Let's take a look at pronouns as they're used in political speech with other words.

You may not have noticed it but the first word of the first sentence in this blog had a pronoun in it; that is *let's = let + us*.

The 's of *let's* is a very interesting example of how pronouns can shift meaning depending on their context.

Let's often means LET YOU + I. However, in this blog, *Let's* meant YOU but not I. And contrast that with *let us*, which might mean LET I + *someone else but not YOU*.

Pronouns sure can be slippery.

In the political debates prior to the first elections, the most interesting pronoun + verb combination that I have come across is the tri-grams of *we have to* and *you have to*.

It seems that Obama was very much a *we have to* person and seldom a *you have to* person. Clinton was also more of a *we have to* person but much less so than Obama. Critically, Clinton was also much more of a *you have to* person than Obama.

For Obama, 13% of all his responses contained *we have to*, whereas only 1% contained *you have to*. For Clinton, 9% of all her responses contained *we have to*, whereas 4% contained *you have to*. And if we include the semantically similar *you've got to* then Clinton has another 2% and Obama 1%; whereas both candidates score equally at 7.5% for *we've got to*.

When we use RSA (see link under *webroll*) to compare the similarity value of these two phrases, we find that Obama's *we have to* and *you have to* are valued at .306, whereas Clinton's comparison is .531. As such, we can see that for Clinton, *we have to* and *you have to* mean much the same thing. For Obama, there seems to be quite a difference in value between these two phrases.

But so what?

Well, we could argue that the *so what* is really about inclusive and exclusive. Is Obama using *we have to* to convey the idea that *he will do it but all of us are important*? Are Clinton's *you have to*'s coming across as bossy and burdensome to the public? This is something that *we have to* look at more closely later.

In the meantime, here's a quick look at the nearest neighbors (see link on RSA in the *webroll*) for *you have to* and *we have to* for Obama and Clinton. Note that Clinton's nearest neighbor for both phrases is the hesitant, *well*. Notice also how few words the two candidates have in common for these phrases – I have highlighted those that are common

– and typically they don't co-occur for the same phrase. Clearly there's a lot going on here ... if you have any ideas, *you have to* tell us.

Clinton

**You have to
well**
Bin Laden
both
together
administration
look
start
yes
you've
affordable

**We have to
well**
plan
try
costs
energy
working
years
clear
security
help

Obama

You have to
education
army
cap-and-trade
children
cost
parents
service
ask
behind
bill

We have to
insurance
well
issue
john
nuclear
getting
iraq
point
war
administration