

## Gender Differences in Political Discourse

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### **Abstract**

*Public speakers have always had a sense of authority and power upon them, and this area was male area for a long time. Together with different social changes such as Women's Movement, women became more emancipated, participating in public sphere to a larger extent influencing thus the area of political discourse too.*

*Key question is whether gender and supposed gender characteristics and differences connected to interaction styles and public speaking affect creation of political discourse and differences in its structure between male and female politicians or they are not an important factor for political discourse. In other words, does gender affect a person's political subjectivity?*

*The thesis is that gender specific differences in language use and use of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic structures, lexical style and rhetorical strategies create differences in political discourse between male and female politicians. Can these differences help the hegemonic construction of female identity in political discourse? The aim of the paper is to analyze language differences in connection with supposed gender characteristics and place them into context of political discourse.*

**Key words:** *gender, discourse, political discourse, language, interaction, female identity*

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## 1. Introduction

From the age of ancient civilizations up to present time, language has been and will continue to be a source of power and control. For example, Aristotle makes a very important connection between language and society by calling human beings “zoon politikon”. He emphasizes cultural and social role of language, not just its communicative purpose.

Concept of politics in everyday communication is mostly presented as negative due to various social attitudes connected to politicians and their work. Politics and political discourse depend on the use of language, both for formulating their ideas and passing them onto their audience. Politicians must choose the right time and right manner in passing their ideas and beliefs onto the audience so that the process would have maximum effect. This can be done at the micro and macro level. Chilton analyses both levels: “At the micro level there are conflicts of interest, struggles for dominance and efforts at co-operation between individuals, between genders, and between social groups of various kinds” (Chilton 2004:3). This can be applied to everyday communication whereby people persuade or try to persuade other people to follow their opinions and approve their perceptions of various situations. Macro level requires specific use of language, language which will persuade masses and audience that beliefs and concepts of a certain party are right. This claim implies that there are certain strategies through which these aims are realized and they require specific use of language.

Chilton and Schaffner (1997:211-15) introduce three strategic functions, namely coercion, legitimization and delegitimization and representation and misrepresentation. Coercion includes not only linguistic acts but it is closely connected to the power of speaker and different kinds of resources connected to this power such as laws, commands, edicts or other kinds of sanctions. Legitimization and delegitimization is connected to presentation of the ‘Self’, the inner group and the ‘Other’, world outside the Self. Actions and beliefs of the inner group must be perceived as right and proper, while the actions of the ‘outer’ group must be delegitimized, made wrong and inappropriate. Different linguistic and semantic ‘tools’ are used for this purpose and shall be further discussed later.

As politics presupposes communication, it requires language use, which is also necessary to persuade the audience. This connection works both ways as language reflects conditions of the community and social changes, which again connects to the politics influencing social changes. New questions come out of these claims: what kind of language is used in politics and by politicians? What are the linguistic “tools” used? How does this specific language use operate within a wider social context?

Sunderland (2004:7) discusses this in post-structuralism discourse context, expanding the definition of discourse: “Discourses are not themselves visible. However, as a ‘way of seeing the world’ a given discourse may be recognizable to analysts and other language users through its manifestation in characteristic linguistic ‘traces’ in talk or written text, i.e. speakers’ and writers’ own words.” Different discourses can thus be connected to various social area and phenomena, i.e. gender discourse, ideology discourse, legal discourse, political discourse etc. each having its own specific features, ‘rules’ and linguistic, semantic and lexical characteristics.

Apart from political discourse, gender discourse is also brought to attention as a field which has quickly become an issue of everyday communication. Study of gender is relatively new, but views and perceptions of gender, gender differences and differences in speech between men and women were pointed out and emphasized for a long time before actual scientific study of gender. We will refer here to later work on language and gender which has produced three

frameworks: *deficit*, *dominance* and *difference*. The views of these three frameworks vary from men's language seen as a norm (Lakoff 1975), through men dominating the world and thus dominating language (Spender 1985) to men and women perceived as two different cultures (Gumperz 1982, Tannen 1991).

As for their conversational style differences, women are connected to their feminine side, acting sympathetic and listening to their interlocutor, they are supportive in conversation, accept the topic and help it with various linguistic tools. On the other hand, men are connected to their 'primal role' of showing strength and problem solving, whereas their conversational style is seen as public, which would possibly mean an advantage in public speaking. Sunderland (2004:170) claims that gender can be constructed through specific use of discourse, thus meaning intentionally constructed, not visible from certain 'characteristics' as earlier research proposes. Each person could create a wanted perception of themselves, also being able to create a gender for themselves.

Matching of political discourse to gender discourse should be observed through media created identities of politicians. Not only do the media mediate the identities of public figures to their mass audiences, they also have an active role in creating these identities, which Bucholtz and Hall (2005:588) call *emergent identities*. According to them identity is viewed as "the emergent product, rather than the pre-existing source, of linguistic and other semiotic practices, and therefore as fundamentally a social and cultural phenomenon." Identity is therefore not considered as a characteristic of an individual, it is a product which emerges gradually during discursive interaction, and can be modified at any stage of it. The creation of a political identity involves the collaboration of media and politician but the emergent identity does not necessarily correspond to the self of the politicians when they are not in the media. The emergent identity is not simply determined by politicians, but is a joint product, as the media search for an identity they can sell to the public. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005:606) put it, identities are understood to be "in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations."

It remains to see through the analysis of discourse samples how gender identity functions in relation to discourse and how it is constructed in the context of political discourse.

## **2. Method and Material**

The method we are going to apply in the analysis of political discourse examples is Critical discourse analysis (CDA). Van Dijk (2005:1) defines it as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context." Fairclough (1995:5) states that CDA is special because it explores the tension between socially shaped language use and socially constitutive language use, rather than opting for one or the other. As CDA addresses social problems, it deals with power, dominance and inequality between social groups.

Different ideologies use different linguistic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic and other tools to explain their goals. Discourse and language used for creating discourse can be seen as a mirror image, a reflection of ideology which created it. This is the reason why discourses can be recognized, analyzed and positioned within a certain social context or social group. Political discourse can be seen as a presentation of politics behind it and thus it carries its main characteristics and agendas in it. All of these can be recognized, analyzed and explained through

interpretation of discourse and it is crucial to look at power and power relations from this perspective.

For this purpose we have analyzed six speeches delivered by six politicians. There are three speeches delivered by male politicians and three speeches delivered by female politicians and they are ordered chronologically. Politicians are from Croatia and the United States of America, namely: George Bush, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Ivo Josipović, Jadranka Kosor and Franjo Tuđman. All of the speeches were delivered upon important occasions where some kind of action or social change was included and had to be passed onto the wider audience. Focus of this analysis will be political discourse as such, paying special attention to gender differences in political discourse, if there are any present. The goal is also to show how different language elements and strategies found in these examples help to promote politics behind the discourse, and whether the discourse differences, if they exist, are based on gender. The speeches are analyzed through the following categories: syntactic structures (word order, topicalization); semantic structures (explicit and implicit, detail and level of description, e.g. what is said and what is actually meant, what is not said but is in the discourse); lexical style (positive and negative words, use of pronouns, use of specific vocabulary); rhetoric (understatement and overstatement, euphemisms, repetition, metaphors); pragmatics (assertion and denial; assertive and directive speech acts); ideological square (description of the 'inner' and 'outer' group) and gender (supposed gender characteristics and differences in interactional styles).

The key question is whether gender and supposed gender characteristics and differences connected to interaction styles and public speaking affect creation of political discourse and differences in its structures between male and female politicians or they are not an important factor in political discourse. This paper will try to analyze these differences in connection with supposed gender characteristics and place them into context of political discourse.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Discussion will follow categories of analysis identified in the previous chapter aiming at differences mentioned.

Syntactical level of analysis shows no differences between male and female politicians. They both equally use strategies of different word order, topicalization, different tenses, personal, possessive, relative and indefinite pronouns fitting them into aimed purposes of discourse such as emphasizing certain parts, erasing identity, positively evaluating actions of in-group etc. What is especially emphasized in this respect is the use of forms of address, i.e. the use of 'we' and 'you' to refer to the audience, soldiers or all the people together on one side against the 'enemy', e.g.:

*'My fellow citizens, on my orders, to all the men and women of the United States armed forces now in the Middle East, the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on **you**, I want Americans and all the world to know, for **your** sacrifice **you** have the gratitude and respect of the American people'* (Bush)

*"Siguran sam da će današnja presuda biti poticaj, **Naši** generali nisu krivi za zločine koji im se stavljaju na teret, **svi zajedno smo** opet ovdje; bili ste žrtve nepravedne optužbe; nosili ste teret nečijih tuđih zločina."* (Josipović)

*"Obraćam **Vam** se u ovom dramatičnom i sudbonosnom trenutku Hrvatske, Na **našu** se domovinu sručio val neprijateljske velikosrpske soldateske; **Mi** smo željeli mir u slobodi i demokraciji, To smo pravo izvojevali na našim prvim demokratskim izborima..."* (Tuđman)

*“Mi smo snaga koja jamči, nećemo posustati, obećala sam da će Hrvatska završiti pregovore do kraja lipnja 2011., Ja želim jak HDZ koji će biti uvijek spreman slušati glas svojeg naroda, Jer sam ja predsjednica Hrvatske demokratske zajednice, a HDZ ispunjava svoja obećanja.” (Kosor)*

*“How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction[...] and we will not turn our back on that, nor will we rest until those responsible for these attacks are found and brought to justice” (Clinton)*

*“I traveled last week to the region, I consulted widely with our many friends and allies, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with you, we want to help the Palestinians to lay the political foundations of a successful state; we supported the free and fair election in January 2005” (Rice)*

Semantic levels of discourse show slight differences in usage. There are more implicatures found in female political speeches which can be connected to female need for being superpolite and not using harsh vocabulary, but it could also be connected to characteristics traditionally pinned to female gender speech style. Condoleezza Rice’s discourse is especially good example of this implicit meaning use as in her political speech much more is implied than said explicitly:

*I realize that the continuing problems of security are also a great challenge for many Palestinian-Americans living in Gaza and the West Bank – and for so many others, including many of you, who travel there often, who work for greater tolerance and understanding, and who invest your time, and your knowledge, and indeed your capital in the Palestinian territories. People like you have a vital role to play in the Middle East, and I will continue to do everything in my power to support your good work.”*

Hillary Clinton and Jadranka Kosor also imply a lot, especially when it would be insulting to do otherwise:

*Neki ne mogu oprostiti što se više ne ide u Beograd po dozvolu i što novac koji mi ovdje zaradimo ne ide u Beograd.’ (Kosor)*

*But let me be clear – there is no justification for this, none. And as long as there are those who would take innocent life in the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace. (Clinton)*

Male politicians also tend to use detailed descriptions, language feature not characteristic to supposed male gender speech style:

*A campaign on the harsh terrain of the nation as large as California could be longer and more difficult than some predict and helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country will require our sustained commitment. (Bush)*

*Siguran sam da će današnja presuda biti poticaj da gradimo Hrvatsku koja voli svoje ljude i brine se o njima, ali da se brine i o tome da svatko nevin bude oslobođen i svatko tko je počinio zločin da ga kazne. (Josipović)*

This is especially seen in Tuđman’s speech whose descriptions are at times purely poetic with usage of archaic Croatian words: *No oni nisu mogli – niti će ikada moći – ubiti našu žudnju za slobodom i potrebom da živimo u ljudskom dostojanstvu, u miru sa sobom i sa slobodnim narodima Europe. Za ovo pravo i za svetu svoju zemlju spremni smo i mrijeti.* Not to get confused, both male and female use combination of implicit and explicit meaning and detailed descriptions but some cases like Tuđman’s are particularly unusual for perceived gender speech styles.

Lexical style also shows common characteristics as there are no significant differences in the use of vocabulary. Vocabulary and words are equally strong in discourse for both male and female politicians, and vocabularies are usually connected to war, peace, freedom, slavery, terrorism, family relations etc.:

*...troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you, meet that threat now with our army, air force, navy, coastguard and marines, decisive force' (Bush)*

*I can only tell you that I, too, have a personal commitment to that goal because I believe that there could be no greater legacy for America than to help to bring into being a Palestinian state for a people who have suffered too long, who have been humiliated too long, who have not reached their potential for too long... (Rice)*

*Usprkos tomu što je demokratski svijet stao na stranu Hrvatske, agresori, ne samo da nisu obustavili svoje napade već su ih iz dana u dan, iz mjeseca u mjesec pojačavali rabeći sve bezobzirnija, razornija i neljudskija sredstva sile i uništavanja. (Tuđman)*

*Dan kada smo dobili i sudsku potporu, da je pravda pobijedila i da naši generali nisu krivi za zločine koji im se stavljaju na teret. (Josipović)*

What is different is greater tendency in female political discourse to make contrasting images with help of this vocabulary, especially good examples are Clinton's and Rices's speeches, full of such images. Male politicians are prone to using strong vocabulary, in Tuđman's case even poetic, but not contrasting as much as female politicians. Kosor's lexical style is also interesting because of usage of vocabulary connected to war while delivering speech upon future elections. Her lexical style is also quite aggressive even if measured against criteria of male gender speech style:

*Naši neprijatelji ne mogu nam oprostiti pobjednički duh. Nema što nam nisu radili kako su nas blatili kao što su radili i Franji Tuđmanu jer misle da će nas tako skršiti. E neće!'*

As far as rhetoric is concerned, use of metaphors, understatements and overstatements, and repetition are equal in discourses of both male and female politicians. These rhetorical strategies are equally present and serve similar purposes, depending on the context of speech.

*A campaign on the harsh terrain; our nation enters this conflict; we will meet that threat'. (Bush)*

*...the United States must be a force for peace and progress in the world, that these aspirations are worth striving and sacrificing for. (Clinton)*

Such strategies are of great help for different presentations of in- and out-group in ideological square, this showing to be their main purpose in the six speeches. Rice's case is especially interesting as she uses these strategies for creating compassion and sympathy but actually only creating this illusion in order to make better contrasts and present in-group's actions in positive light:

*I believe that there could be no greater legacy for America than to help to bring into being a Palestinian state for a people who have suffered too long, who have been humiliated too long, who have not reached their potential for too long, and who have so much to give to the international community and to all of us.*

There is a combination of assertive and directive speech acts in all speeches delivered. Usually many assertive speech acts precede one or two directive speech acts. This is done for creating an image of state of things which is usually chaotic and then calling in action through

directive speech acts. All of the examples show equally strong directive speech acts and equally descriptive assertive speech acts, not depending on gender at all.

It follows certain pattern, respected by both male and female politicians in the discourses analyzed. Difference is in creating contrasting images and implicit and explicit meanings used to create positive and negative presentations:

*The friendship between our countries, borne out of shared struggle, will not be another casualty of this attack. A free and stable Libya is still in America's interest and security, and we will not turn our back on that, nor will we rest until those responsible for these attacks are found and brought to justice. (Clinton)*

*In this conflict America faces an enemy that has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality. (Bush)*

Use of disclaimers is common to both male and female politicians with difference in their creation.

*When it was time for parliamentary elections earlier this year, we again supported the Palestinians' right to choose their own leaders, and as you know, a plurality of voters cast their votes for Hamas. (Rice)*

*Mi smo željeli mir u slobodi i demokraciji, a nametnut nam je prljavi i razorni rat. (Tuđman)*

Sometimes, disclaimers can be found only at the level of implicit meaning. Male politicians are prone to standard use and creation of disclaimers, while female politicians tend to 'mask' this into implicit meaning and sometimes even in the following paragraphs.

Focus on gender differences, gender talk and interactional styles showed interesting results. Male and female politicians mix these styles; there was not a politician with clear male or female gender speech style. Male politicians tended to use characteristics of female gender speech style and vice versa, at times even abandoning their 'supposed' gender speech style.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Discourse analysis, more precisely political discourse analysis has shown gender differences as very interesting leaving enough space to be perceived through various aspects. Thesis from the beginning has been confirmed as there are differences between male and female politicians in political discourses, differences connected to different interactional styles and different use of syntactic, rhetoric, semantic, lexical, pragmatic and ideological structures.

Bush can be seen as an aggressive speaker, he uses strong vocabulary and claims property and right to act against the enemy. He also uses a lot of metaphors, overstatements and euphemisms, rhetorical and also often literary resources, which can be connected to perceived female gender speech style. His discourse aims at problem-solving, he lectures about the events and crisis' preferable values for American citizens which are also characteristics of male gender interactional speech style. Bush takes leader position through constant use of pronoun *I*. His style is oppositional, again perceived style connected to male gender speech style. Bush's political discourse can be described as mainly having characteristics of male gender speech style but also showing traces of female gender speech style.

Kosor's political discourse shows some characteristics specific to male gender speech style, such as strong vocabulary, aggressive performance, emphasis of independence and open oppositional beliefs in relation to other parties. She claims her position and status freely which is

obvious from her discourse. There are also some of the characteristics of female gender speech style, such as frequent aiming at sympathy and emotions in the audience making connections to glorious fatherly figure of the past - Franjo Tuđman. Her discourse shows combination of male and female gender speech style, with greater number of characteristics specific to male gender speech style.

Tuđman's political discourse shows characteristics of male gender style such as lecturing to the audience and maintaining status and authority. Discourse of his political speech is full of problem-solving, with clearly defined problem and offered solutions. There is a great deal of independence vocabulary and claiming independence, also a supposed characteristic of male gender speech style. Interesting and unusual feature of Tuđman's political discourse is use of language which is at times poetic, almost as in heroic poetry with metaphors and archaic Croatian words. There are also parts supposed to evoke emotions in the audience, emotional parts describing Croatian battle and history which could be perceived as characteristics of female gender speech style. Such political discourse can be seen as consisting of elements of male gender with a significant amount of characteristics connected to female gender speech style.

Clinton's discourse has characteristics of presidential style, claiming her status and position of a ruler from the beginning, which are supposed characteristics of male gender speech style. There are parts of discourse which could be labeled as intimate, full of sympathy and supportive, but in this case it seems as a carefully chosen strategy to provoke emotional reaction from the audience. A striking feature of this political discourse is her aggressive manner of talking about future actions and strong vocabulary while condemning actions of the out-group. Both of these are perceived as characteristics of male speech gender style, and her political discourse can be defined as having more male gender speech style characteristics than female gender speech style characteristics.

Josipović's political discourse does not show many characteristics of supposed male gender speech style. He shows sympathy and support, creating intimate and private atmosphere, and makes connections between past and present, this way also making a connection between Croatian people and liberated generals. Overall impression is quite emotional, which is done through constantly showing respect, gratitude and talking about troubled past. This emotional component is also perceived as characteristic of female gender speech style. Josipović does not try to claim his status nor is he acting in an oppositional way, characteristics connected to male gender speech style. His political discourse can be labeled as having numerous characteristics of female gender speech style outnumbering male gender characteristics, although delivered by a male president.

Rice's political discourse shows characteristics of clear male gender speech style. From the beginning to the very end of discourse she establishes her position and status, using report to talk about state of things and lecturing on changes that have to be made. She shows clear opposition to the out-group and aims at problem solving through many directive speech acts in her discourses. Only elements of supposed female gender speech style are connected to creating intimate, supportive and sympathetic image of American government, but this is done out of rhetorical purpose solely and its aim is to achieve as positive representation of in-group as possible.

What is especially interesting is that binary division cannot be made as speech styles and gender characteristics overlap in all speech samples. Some male politicians show characteristics of female gender speech style in their political discourse and vice versa. Generally, the examples



of political discourse analyzed cannot be clearly labeled as either male gender speech style or female gender speech style.

It can be concluded, however, that overlapping and mixing of gender characteristics in connection with different contexts and occasions are the result of emergent identities, i.e. identities created in those particular situations or contexts and it is not clear how much they can be a result of female or male politician's style. However, it is obvious that female politicians more frequently use the discourse strategies which are typical for male politicians than vice versa. We can connect it to the idea that you are not a successful politician if you do not show strength in your speech, as well as in the actions. The factors which influence and provoke such mixing of gender characteristics in political discourse can be grounds for further research in this field.

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