



**UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU**

Political discourse through the lens of gendered language

A critical discourse analysis of four United States politicians' speeches

English, Bachelor of Arts, Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

Bachelor's thesis

Author(s):

Viveca Lindfors

May 2024

Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Bachelor's thesis

Subject: English

Author(s): Viveca Lindfors

Title: Political discourse through the lens of gendered language: A critical discourse analysis of four United States politicians' speeches

Supervisor(s): Dr. Timo Savela

Number of pages: 28 pages

Date: 6.8.2024

Abstract

Since the publication of Robin Lakoff's "Language and a woman's place", gendered language has become a widely researched topic in the field of linguistics. This is for good reason, as gendered language is prevalent in practically any and every setting of our daily lives and works to reinforce gender stereotypes and patriarchal social order.

My research questions concerned the differences in linguistic expression between men and women as discussed by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 2012) as well as the self-oppression of women through language described by Lazar (2005). More specifically, I investigated the degree to which the self-oppression and self-repression of women through language held true in the context of political speeches.

To conduct the research for my thesis, I analysed the speeches of four American federal-level politicians. In terms of method, I focused on six linguistic features: face-building and politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman, 1967; Holmes 1995), lexicon, syntax, speech acts (Searle 1979) and emotive language, as discussed by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 2013) in relation to gender. In addition, I assessed deliberative rhetoric (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012) and Us vs Them positioning (van Dijk 1993, 1997).

The biggest differences between the men and women were found in face-building strategies. More specifically, the women claimed face or sought approval through affiliation with men. After comparing my findings, I concluded that it is possible to consciously affect the degree of self-repression and stereotyping, mainly through what Walsh (2001) refers to as the accommodation model. An even better alternative, however, would be to challenge the idea of femininity being unprofessional on a societal level.

Key words: political discourse, gendered language, discourse analysis, political discourse analysis.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Background	6
2.1	Language as a tool of (self)-oppression	6
2.2	Feminist critical discourse analysis	6
2.3	The elitist culture of politics in the United States of America	7
3	Materials and method	8
3.1	Material	8
3.2	Method	9
4	Critical discourse analysis	11
4.1	Critical discourse analysis of President Joe Biden's inauguration speech	11
4.2	Critical discourse analysis of Kamala Harris's victory speech in Wilmington, Delaware	13
4.3	Critical discourse analysis of former President Donald Trump's inauguration speech	16
4.4	Critical discourse analysis of junior United States senator Katie Britt's speech during a press conference on September 28 th , 2023	19
5	Discussion	23
6	Conclusion	26
7	References	27

1 Introduction

Since the publication of Robin Lakoff's (1973) article "Language and woman's place" in 1973, gendered language has been a widely researched phenomenon in the field of linguistics. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013, 1), "[g]ender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural."

Therefore, gendered language is prevalent in practically any and every setting of our daily lives. Gender identities, as identities in general, are performed through daily linguistic and non-linguistic practices.

We learn the norms and expectations of masculine and feminine linguistic expression through socialization, while also learning to treat men and women differently through linguistic means (Cameron [1997] 2006). An example of the unsymmetrical linguistic treatment of men and women could be the vast number of gendered insults directed at women, while lacking a male equivalent in the English language.

Those who use language as a professional tool (e.g. politicians) are aware of such gendered expectations and may use different strategies to create a certain effect in the listeners or readers in order to affect the end result of an exchange to their benefit (McElhinny 2003). However, according to Cameron (2003), they also acknowledge how reactions to the speech of a woman may always be flipped to her disadvantage regardless of whether she follows the gendered expectations or defies them, essentially denying and disputing her authority and power. Therefore, denying expressive power to women is a political act.

It is important to note the difference between sex and gender, as gender is not something one is born with but rather something one performs, or as West and Zimmerman (1987) put it, it is not something that one *is*, but rather something one *does*. The use of language is one important part of performing gender (Cameron [1997] 2006). Gender performances are fluid and unique to each speaker. Gender is, however, not the only feature that affects one's linguistic performance as other variables such as age, ethnicity, cultural background and social status may play an equally important part in shaping one's linguistic performance.

In my bachelor's thesis, I will set out to investigate how gendered language manifests in a political setting. I have laid out my research questions as following:

1. What differences can be found between American male and female politicians' linguistic expressions in the context of political speeches?
2. To what extent does the self-repression of women through language hold true in the context of political speeches?

To find answers to my research questions I will study the speeches of two American male and female politicians respectively. I have opted to focus on politicians of varying ages, political leanings, states as well as backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive look into the research topic. I will introduce my chosen subjects in more detail in section 3.1.

It is important to note right at the beginning that for the purpose of my thesis, I will treat gender as binary for the simple reason that existing research on the language used by people publicly identifying as non-binary in a political setting is still very limited. Additionally, I have narrowed down my research question to concern only men and women as the topic of non-binary language could be a whole other research question on its own. I wish to emphasize that American political culture and the language used in the context of it by those who partake in politics is still very traditional. For these reasons, I feel that the decision to focus solely on men and women is reasonable.

My second disclaimer concerns limitations of scope. Firstly, it is important to consider that information on the funds and resources each subject may have had at their disposal to, for example hire a speech-writing team, speech coach, image manager, etc. is very limited, therefore posing a limitation to the accuracy of my findings, as such variables may result in very notable differences in the language used in a speech. Secondly, I have chosen to leave out audio-visual aspects for the same reason.

In the following sections 2 and 3, I will provide a look into the subfield of feminist linguistics that I feel will help to better understand the topic of my research, as well as introduce my materials and methods that I shall use to conduct my research. In section 4 I shall conduct my research and in section 5 I will break down my findings in more detail, as well as provide an in-depth analysis. Finally, in section 6, I will conclude my research as well as provide answers to my research questions.

2 Background

In the following sections 2.1-2.4 I aim to map out the background information that I believe to be important for comprehending the topic of my research. More specifically, I will provide a look into language as a tool of self-oppression in section 2.1, feminist critical discourse analysis in section 2.2, and finally the elitism in the political culture of the United States of America in section 2.3.

2.1 Language as a tool of (self)-oppression

According to Lakoff (2004), linguistic discrimination is a concern to women in two ways. Firstly, it concerns them in the way that they are taught to express themselves through language. Secondly, it also concerns them in the way they are generally presented in language. This two-fold discrimination leads to women being rendered subservient to men as second-class citizens (Lakoff 2004).

As indicated in the introduction, I am interested in investigating whether Lakoff's statement of the self-oppression of women through language holds true in the context of political speeches. I will specifically look for features which in this context would contribute to the female subjects to seem less powerful and authoritative.

2.2 Feminist critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse studies (CDS), formerly known as critical discourse analysis (CDA), is an approach to the study of language in social processes. According to Flowerdew and Richardson (2018, 1), "CDS draws heavily on social theories and seeks to develop a critically contextualised approach to linguistics which identifies issues of ideology, power and inequality as central to our field of studies."

Lazar (2005, 5) summarizes feminist CDS "as a political perspective on gender, concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse" and states that it "is equally applicable to the study of texts as well as talk". Some ideas and practices central to feminist CDS include for example, critiquing gendered social practices to drive social reform, linguistic manifestations of power relations and sexism, as well as the socially perpetuated victim status of women.

I personally find the feminist CDS idea of refusing to be a victim inspiring on many levels. While it may not be entirely possible to choose not to be a victim of linguistic discrimination, I believe it is possible to refuse to self-perpetuate the victim status, as according to Foucault ([1969] 1994), all discourse is of constructive nature, meaning that the narratives surrounding women and power, as narratives, in general are in constant motion and transformation.

2.3 The elitist culture of politics in the United States of America

According to Mills ([1956] 2000), the American political system is not an aristocracy as the majority of politicians do not come from a certain privileged background. He does, however, acknowledge that most politicians are part of new and old upper classes of the American society, with particular emphasis on the major cities (Mills [1956] 2000, 279). Despite the classical ideal of the American dream where anyone could become anything, one does not simply climb the social ladder and land the status of a federal level politician unless they are highly educated and well connected, which in the United States requires considerable funds, and/or a position of political or economic power.

The American political system is characterized by a two-party system and a deep ideological divide, which leads to polarization. This perpetuates a divide in attitudes, especially towards the rights and position of women and minorities, that can arguably be spotted in every aspect of political life.

3 Materials and method

In this section, I will firstly introduce my chosen material, including profiles of the politicians whose speeches I chose to examine. Secondly, I will break down my method as well as the specific linguistic features I will be looking for to conduct my analysis.

3.1 Material

In this thesis, I focus on the speeches of four American politicians. These include two former presidents, both men, and one female vice president and one female senator. Two of the subjects will be representatives of the Democratic Party, while the other two will be representatives of the Republican Party.

Firstly, I chose to study the inauguration speech of Joe Biden, the current president of the United States of America. He is a member of the Democratic Party from Delaware. Born in 1942, he is currently 81 years old. Biden is a former vice president as well as a former Senator.

I chose to study vice president Kamala Harris' victory speech. Also a member of the Democratic Party, Harris is a former district attorney from the state of California. Born in 1964, she is currently 59 years old.

Former president of the United States of America Donald Trump's inauguration speech will be the third subject of my research. Trump is a member of the Republican Party from New York. Born in 1946, he is currently 77 years old. Before his presidency, Trump was well known as a businessman and media personality.

Lastly, I will study junior United States Senator Katie Britt's speech given during a press conference. Britt is a member of the Republican Party from Alabama. Born in 1982, she is currently 42 years old. Before her career in politics, Britt had a career in business as well as law.

I shall use transcriptions of the speeches of these politicians as the primary materials for my study. I have made sure to choose politicians of varying positions, states, ages and backgrounds. I believe that this will provide a more accurate look into my topic of research.

I chose to study American politicians in particular as I deduced that the variables in American political culture were less prevalent as well as being easier to identify compared to many other

nations. Due to the persistent two-party system prevalent in American political culture, differences in rhetoric and language used in the speeches of representatives are easier to pin down and point out as resulting from party politics. I chose to study politicians operating on the federal level as I deduced that the variables resulting from regional differences should be much less prevalent in federal level politics compared to regional politics.

Considering all the aforementioned reasons, it is still, however, impossible to point out exactly which features result from party ideology, age, regional or cultural background. It is also important to consider the contextual background to fully understand the stylistic choices and rhetoric a politician chooses to employ in a given speech. For this reason, I will make sure to provide a description of the context each speech has been given in.

I have chosen to not include independent representatives as I feel that comparing the linguistic features present in the speeches of Republican and Democrat representatives better serves the purpose of my research, especially considering that independent representatives are very much the minority in the U.S. Senate. Additionally, independent representatives tend to have a hard time getting their ideas through, as they lack the support of a large party, thus making their impact very limited.

3.2 Method

I will be focusing on six linguistic features. These include facework and politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman, 1967; Holmes 1995), lexicon, syntax, *speech acts* (Searle, 1979) and emotive language, as discussed by Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003, 2013) in relation to gender.

Firstly, *facework* is important in politics as one's *face* indicates the positive social value one claims for oneself and receives from others through recognition. This is achieved through a calculated presentation of self that the presenter estimates to be most desirable in a particular social context, which is to a large extent gendered.

Secondly, politeness pertains to how faces can be threatened, damaged, maintained and repaired. Women tend to be more polite than men and therefore they tend to avoid committing *face-threatening acts*. At the same time, by opting to be more polite, women therefore also tend to come across as other oriented, affective and collaborative, as well as ineffective speakers.

Thirdly, choosing the right words is also important in politics. What is interesting, however, is that lexicon tends to vary by gender. In other words, there are certain gender related norms that influence the words one uses. Certain lexical items may be considered “feminine”, a part of a woman’s speech, and, vice versa, some items may be considered “masculine”, a part of a man’s speech.

Fourthly, syntax may be used as a tool for strategic use or omission of agents in an attempt to manipulate others without lying or in order to shift attention or blame, which makes it useful in politics. Syntax may not only reveal how the social order is gendered, but also function to maintain it.

Fifthly, speech acts account for how language is capable of changing our understanding of the world. Certain speech acts may be socially considered to be the domain of one sex more than the other. For example, compliments and apologies are considered more typically part of a woman’s speech as they are more often performed by women. Similarly, certain speech may or may not have the intended effect on others depending on their gender. In this thesis, speech acts are organized into five major categories (Searle 1979): *representatives* (e.g. claims), *directives* (e.g. orders), *commissives* (e.g. commitments), *expressives* (e.g. attitudes) and *declaratives* (e.g. declarations).

Sixthly, women are often considered to be more emotional and consequently more expressive of emotion through linguistic means. This is, however, a stereotype that has very little scientific evidence to its support. Instead, the evidence suggests that binary thinking that results in categories such as men and women is common to humans.

In addition, I will be assessing *deliberate rhetoric* (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012) and *Us vs them* positioning (van Dijk 1993, 1997). Politicians are expected to address problems and to provide solutions to those problems. This requires them to deliberate on the course of action. This involves deliberative rhetoric, which uses practical reasoning as its main tool of argumentation. Binary thinking is also common in politics. It manifests itself in political discourse when politicians evaluate themselves and others. The evaluations are typically polarized, attributing the positive with ‘us’ and the negative with ‘them’.

4 Critical discourse analysis

In the following sections, I shall conduct critical discourse analyses of the aforementioned and profiled subjects' speeches. I will highlight specific features discussed in section 3.2 with examples included. Added emphasis is marked in bold. I will end each analysis with a brief summary. I will also provide a brief description of the context each speech was given in to help the reader to make more sense of my analysis. The following section, section 5, will provide a more in-depth discussion of my findings.

4.1 Critical discourse analysis of President Joe Biden's inauguration speech

In this section, I will conduct a critical discourse analysis of President Joe Biden's inaugural speech. The transcript of the speech has been accessed through the official website of The White House (Biden 2021).

To provide a context for this speech, Joe Biden gave his inauguration speech on January 20th, 2021, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and after a tumultuous election, which is likely to have affected the central themes of his speech.

In terms of face-building strategies, Biden depicts himself in positions of power in statements, such as

- (1) Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy.

Biden also uses positioning in order to present himself as the forerunner in the fight against misinformation in the following example:

- (2) And each of us has a duty and responsibility, **as citizens, as Americans, and especially as leaders** — leaders who have pledged to honor our Constitution and protect our nation — to defend the truth and to defeat the lies.

Additionally, Biden claimed face for himself as a dutiful and dedicated leader through some of the commissive speech acts he performed in his speech:

- (3) **I give** you my word, **I will** always **level** with you. **I will defend** the Constitution. **I'll defend** our democracy. **I'll defend** America and **I will give** all, all of you.

Keep everything I do in your service, thinking not of power, but of possibilities, not of personal interest, but the public good.

and:

- (4) **I will** be a president for all Americans. All Americans. And **I promise** you **I will fight** as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did.

Other types of speech acts found in the speech include directive speech acts, for example:

- (5) **I ask** every American to join me in this cause.

and

- (6) To all those who did not support us, let me say this: **Hear me out** as we move forward. **Take a measure** of me and my heart.

In terms of syntax and lexicon used in the speech, Biden chose to openly name social justice issues within the nation:

- (7) And now a rise of **political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism** that we must confront and we will defeat.

Biden used plenty of deliberative rhetoric in his speech, mainly to deliberate on the current social and political challenges within the nation and what is needed to overcome them, for example:

- (8) **To overcome** these challenges, **to restore** the soul and **secure** the future of America requires so much more than words. It requires the most elusive of all things in a democracy: Unity. Unity.

and

- (9) **We'll press forward** with speed and urgency, for **we have much to do** in this winter of peril and significant possibilities, **much to repair, much to restore, much to heal, much to build, and much to gain.**

To summarize, Biden's speech includes many features discussed by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 2013) that characterize a stereotypically masculine speech. One of the main strategies Biden uses for face building are the many commissive speech acts he performs in

his speech. Biden also performs multiple directive speech acts. In addition, his speech includes plenty of deliberative rhetoric, which is common in political speeches (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012).

One of the central themes in Biden's speech is unity, so it is no surprise that the speech does not include Us vs Them positioning. Moreover, the speech is also practically void of emotion language.

4.2 Critical discourse analysis of Kamala Harris's victory speech in Wilmington, Delaware

Similarly to the previous section, I shall conduct a critical discourse analysis of vice president Kamala Harris's victory speech. The transcript of her November 7, 2020 speech has been accessed through The Washington Post (Harris 2020).

For context, Harris is the first female vice president of the United States, which she alludes to many times during her speech. It is therefore likely that she puts a heavier emphasis on gender than is typical to expect in the context of a political speech. I suspect this may have also affected the prevalence of gendered linguistic features in her speech. This speech was given right before Joe Biden gave his inauguration speech after being elected as President, thus Harris mentions Biden quite a few times and aligns her message with his.

In terms of face-building strategies, Harris relates herself with the people of United States of America:

(10) Because **we the people** have the power to build a better future.

This serves to create an image of her being one of the people, thus making her more relatable to the public. Harris spends a considerable portion of her speech talking about newly elected President Joe Biden, essentially showering him with praise and presenting him as a virtuous figure.

(11) And **Joe is a healer, a uniter, a tested and steady hand, a person whose own experience of loss gives him a sense of purpose that will help us**, as a nation, reclaim our own sense of purpose.

By stating that she was chosen by him as the vice president, Harris claims positive face for herself. However, perhaps the most interesting feature about the face-building strategies

Harris uses in her speech is that she affiliates herself with the perceived victims of the social context within the nation: the underprivileged demographics, more specifically women and minorities, especially black women. What is interesting about this is that while simultaneously affiliating herself with the underprivileged demographic, in the next sentence she affiliates herself with the very top of the political elite. I feel that one would not be wrong to call this a juxtaposition.

- (12) Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty and justice for all, including the Black women, who are often, too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy. **And I stand on their shoulders.** And what a testament it is to Joe’s character that he had the audacity to break one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country and **select a woman as his vice president.**

Like Biden, Harris also claims face through commissive speech acts. She makes statements through which she presents herself as a caring and dutiful person:

- (13) And to the American people: No matter who you voted for, **I will strive** to be a vice president like Joe was to President Obama — **loyal, honest and prepared,** waking up every day thinking of you and your family.

Other speech acts performed by Harris include verdictive speech acts, for example:

- (14) We have elected **a president** who represents the best in us. **A leader** the world will respect and our children can look up to. **A commander** in chief who will respect our troops and keep our country safe. And a president for all Americans.

In this example, and in example 11, Harris evaluates President Joe Biden’s character, attributes and competence as a political leader.

The choices Harris made in terms of syntax and omission are quite interesting. Some of the major themes in Harris’ speech include the social justice issues of racism and sexism and the gradual overcoming of them in the American society. Harris chose not to omit the term “racism” from her speech:

- (15) To root out **systemic racism** in our justice system and society.

However, she did choose to omit the term “sexism” although she very clearly spoke on the issue at multiple points in her speech:

- (16) And so, I’m thinking about her and about the generations of women — Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native American **women who throughout our nation’s history have paved the way for this moment tonight. Women who fought and sacrificed so much for equality, liberty and justice for all,** including the **Black women, who are often, too often overlooked,** but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy.

The following citation includes another example of the omission of the term “sexism”, which Harris replaces with “one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country”:

- (17) And I stand on their shoulders. And what a testament it is to Joe’s character that he had the audacity to break **one of the most substantial barriers that exists in our country** and select a woman as his vice president.

I suspect this to have been a conscious choice, perhaps in order to avoid agitating her listeners. This omission that essentially functions to avoid negative reactions or gendered attack from the public is a form of self-repression.

Harris included some deliberative rhetoric in her speech. In the following example she deliberates on the courses of action required to combat the current global and national crises:

- (18) Because **now is when the real work begins.** The hard work. The necessary work. The good work. The essential work to save lives and beat this pandemic. To rebuild our economy so it works for working people. To root out systemic racism in our justice system and society. To combat the climate crisis. To unite our country and heal the soul of our nation.

In this citation Harris deliberates on the courses of action required to combat the current global and national crises.

Harris uses quite a lot of emotion language in her speech. For example, in this citation, Harris uses words to describe emotions, as well as words to describe the character traits of her listeners, the American people:

- (19) And I know times have been challenging, especially the last several months — **the grief, sorrow and pain, the worries and the struggles**. But we have also witnessed your **courage**, your **resilience** and the **generosity** of your spirit.

Harris uses the word “love” multiple times in her speech:

- (20) And a man with a big heart who **loves** with abandon. It’s his **love** for Jill, who will be an incredible first lady. It’s his **love** for Hunter, Ashley and his grandchildren, and the entire Biden family.

My attention was also drawn to the use of the word “healer” to describe President Joe Biden, as mentioned by Harris in example 11. In my view, “healer” is a rather atypical word to describe a political leader. While neither “love” nor “healer” are overtly feminine words, they arguably do carry a certain feminine connotation in the context of a political speech.

In contrast to Biden, I would argue that Harris’s speech follows the characteristics of what would be stereotypically considered as a woman’s speech. She uses plenty of emotion language, while including very little deliberative rhetoric. The strategies she uses for creating face for herself are particularly interesting, as she simultaneously affiliates herself with the underprivileged demographics and the political elite. She does not truly credit herself for her own accomplishment and omits certain words from her speech, such as sexism and racism.

4.3 Critical discourse analysis of former President Donald Trump’s inauguration speech

This section is dedicated to the critical discourse analysis of former President of the United States of America Donald Trump’s inauguration speech from the year 2017. The transcript of the speech has been accessed through Vox (2017).

To provide context for this speech from January 17, 2017, the overall effect of Trump’s speech is nothing but confusing, considering the context it was given in, as well as the content of the speech. By running for President and eventually being elected puts him at the very top of the executive branch, thus making him part of the political as well as economic elite. The very fact of him belonging to the economic elite of the United States, while making promises of taking the power away from the political and economic elites and returning it to the ordinary American people, is highly contradictory.

In terms of face-building strategies, Trump uses statements where he presents himself in powerful positions. He presents himself as the liberator of the working and middle classes from the political elites in the following statement:

- (21) Today's ceremony however, has very special meaning, because today, we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another, but **we are transferring power from Washington, DC, and giving it back to you, the people.**

Trump's other face-building strategies include deliberative rhetoric, for example:

- (22) America will start winning again, winning like never before. **We will bring back our jobs. We will bring back our borders. We will bring back our wealth. And we will bring back our dreams.**

With such short statements about what will be done, he gives an impression of effectiveness, while making complex issues seem simple. In this example, it is also noteworthy that he wishes to bring back the dreams of the American people, which can be understood in reference to the American Dream, that people have the freedom of opportunity to achieve personal success.

Trump assesses other politicians in quite harsh terms throughout his speech. Although he does not use downright insults in these verdictive speech acts, the language he uses in those instances could certainly be considered as unpolite:

- (23) We will **no longer accept** politicians who are all talk and no action, constantly complaining but never doing anything about it. **The time for empty talk is over.**

Trump performed plenty of other verdictive speech acts throughout his speech, which he used to assess the perceived state of affairs and lack of action of other politicians to fix them:

- (24) For too long, **[those in politics] have reaped the rewards of government while people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth.**

To follow up the harsh verdictive speech acts, Trump performs many commissive speech acts, with strong statements about what he will do for the American people. For example:

- (25) **I will fight for you** with every breath in my body. And **I will never ever let you down.**

In the following citation he promises on behalf of his whole administration to do their work to the best of their ability:

- (26) We will face challenges. We will confront hardships, but **we will get the job done.**

The following statement is, perhaps, the clearest example of such back-to-back speech acts:

- (27) And the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. **This American carnage stops right here and stops right now.**

Trump uses plenty of Us vs Them positioning during his speech, although sometimes in rather confusing and contradictory ways. He positions the listeners and the political institutions against each other. What makes this odd is the fact that although he promises change, Trump himself is still part of those political institutions:

- (28) The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories.

Trump also positions the United States against other countries, posing the others as threats:

- (29) **We must protect our borders** from the ravages of other countries making **our products, stealing our companies,** and destroying **our jobs.**

In terms of syntax and lexicon, Trump uses emphatic words as descriptors, such as “carnage” in example 27 and “ravages” in example 29, and openly talks on issues such as radical Islamic terrorism, choosing not to omit the sensitive terms from his speech. What is interesting, however, is that while he speaks openly about many relevant issues, such as poverty, gang violence and border control, he opts to completely omit sexism and women’s issues although they were a hot topic during the campaign and the election.

Trump’s speech includes practically no emotion language. His speech is much more action-focused, mainly through the statements as well as the verdictive and commissive speech acts that he performs. Although it seems to be part of his style of rhetoric to first harshly criticize

and then present simple solutions, by doing this he oversimplifies complex issues and thus creates a somewhat false image of himself as someone who has all the solutions.

In summary, I would describe Trump's speech as what would be considered stereotypically a man's speech. Interestingly, while Trump's speech is similar to Biden's in the sense that it has a lot of masculine features of speech, the speeches are still very different in other aspects.

Mostly Trump's speech consists of deliberative rhetoric and commissive speech acts concerning what should be done and what will be done. I suspect that the simple promises to fix complex issues are also employed as a strategy to build face and create an impression of effectiveness.

4.4 Critical discourse analysis of junior United States senator Katie Britt's speech during a press conference on September 28th, 2023

In this section, I will conduct a critical discourse analysis of junior United States senator Katie Britt's speech during a press conference on September 28, 2023. The press conference was held to call on the Biden administration and demand urgent action concerning the crisis at the southern border of the United States. The transcript of the speech has been accessed through the official website of U.S. senator Katie Britt (2023).

For face-building strategies, Britt used, among others, Us vs Them positioning, for example:

- (30) Democrats say we have no solutions. I guarantee you, if you take a look at this group up here, we have put forth solution after solution after solution.

Britt links herself with the group that she is referring to in this citation, which consists of her Republican colleagues joining her in the press conference. With this statement about offering solutions, she claims face as someone who belongs to a group of effective problem solvers.

Another face-building strategy Britt used was linking herself with her fellow Republican representatives after characterizing them with positive attributes:

- (31) I followed up with a trip with John Cornyn, because they care.

In terms of politeness, Britt uses quite informal language throughout her speech, for example:

- (32) **Guys** I would've never seen the border firsthand if **this woman** (Senator Blackburn) didn't know that I needed to see it immediately upon entering the United States Senate.

I suspect that the use of the word “guys” may be either a conscious or unconscious means to claim face as someone close to their audience. The use of more informal and direct language may or may not also have been a conscious choice to boost her perceived effectiveness as a speaker by her audience. It may have also been an attempt to appeal to her male audience. It comes off as a means to signal that she is “one of the guys” and to seek acceptance from men.

Britt performed some verdictive speech acts where she used quite harsh words to assess the lack of actions of President Joe Biden, while also insinuating that he is cowardly:

- (33) We know what policies work, President Trump had secured the border. We know what to do, we just have to have a leader who has the courage to do it, and I am so sick of Joe Biden lecturing us about the soul of America.

The following citation contains an example of Britt using Us vs Them positioning combined with a verdictive speech act in order to insult President Joe Biden:

- (34) **We are** standing here **ready** to do this, and **what he put forth** in the supplemental **is an absolute joke**.

As also discussed in previous paragraphs, Britt refers to the listeners as “guys” on multiple occasions in her speech. “Guys” is undoubtedly a very informal and atypical word to use in the context of a political speech. However, I would not consider the word a masculine lexical item, but rather an epicene pronoun, which, supports the idea of her trying to appeal to her male audience.

Britt does not omit sensitive words, such as “rape” from her speech:

- (35) Because when a woman sits there and she tells you not just about being **raped**, but how many times a day she's **raped**, when she tells you about having to lay in that bed while they come in and out and in and out, it's disgusting and it's despicable.

As discussed in earlier paragraphs, Britt performs many verdictive speech acts, to assess the current state of affairs, as well as to assess the actions and character of President Joe Biden. For example, she stated that:

- (36) Folks, you look at the number of **people that have died at the border because Joe Biden has made it more and more enticing to come here.**

Britt also performed a directive speech act, commanding her listeners to hear what she has to say:

- (37) Let me tell you.

Britt uses plenty of deliberative rhetoric throughout her speech, to explain to her audience the necessary courses of action:

- (38) We have to actually change the policies.

She also deliberates on what is required of President Joe Biden as a leader:

- (39) **He needs to** have the heart to actually **listen to people**, he needs to have the **compassion** to actually hear those stories, the **willingness** to work with people, and Joe Biden needs the courage to take decisive action.

As already mentioned, Britt's speech is marked by Us vs Them positioning. Throughout her speech, Britt contrasts between Republicans (Us) and Democrats (Them). She depicts Republicans as being resourceful and proactive and Democrats, in contrast, as being inefficient and passive, for example:

- (40) Make no mistake, this is a result of failed policies. We could fix this. We can't [merely] throw money at this and fix it. We have to actually change the policies.

Additionally, Britt uses Us vs Them positioning to contrast between former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden in example 33.

While Britt's speech is very emotionally charged, it does not include much emotion language, nor words describing emotions. Instead, she centres her speech around assessments and deliberative rhetoric.

In summary, I would argue that Britt's speech does not follow the stereotypical characteristics of a woman's speech. Although Britt used affiliation as a face-building strategy, she also credited herself for the positive actions that she has taken. Throughout her speech Britt uses quite informal words to refer to her listeners and does not hesitate to make harsh assessments

of the actions of others. She also outright commands her audience to listen and chooses not to omit possibly sensitive words from her speech.

5 Discussion

This section provides a more in-depth look at the findings of my thesis. Instead of assessing the politicians and their speeches separately, this discussion contrasts the findings, with particular emphasis on gendered language.

In my view, the feminist idea of self-repression of women that occurs through language materialized to a certain extent in the case of Kamala Harris' inauguration speech. Harris claims face through her affiliation with Joe Biden. She accords Biden with many positive attributes and then talks on being chosen by him as vice president, yet she never credits herself for the accomplishment. I feel that this is rather unfortunate, considering that one of the major themes of the speech was the gradual overcoming of sexism within the nation.

Britt also claimed face through affiliation with her fellow Republicans, whom she presented in a positive light. Britt also used affiliation through the frequent use of the word "guys" which I understand as her way to try to indirectly communicate that she is "one of the guys" and therefore should be taken seriously. Essentially, I interpret this finding as Britt seeking acceptance from her male audience by adhering to masculinist discursive norms and attempting to talk more like a man.

The findings showed that both women used affiliation with men as a face-building strategy. Additionally, Harris used the acceptance and approval of Joe Biden as a credential, whereas Britt sought acceptance and approval from her male audience. However, both Harris and Britt employed other strategies for face building as well. Harris utilized commissive speech acts, while Britt relied on deliberative rhetoric.

To contrast this, the men, Biden and Trump, did not use affiliation as a face building strategy. Instead, they mainly used commissive speech acts as well as positioning themselves in a certain way through statements. This is definitely a finding that plays into stereotypes and could be something arising from internalized sexism on Harris's and Britt's part.

The differences in face-building strategies may also be linked with politeness. The strategies performed by the men could, in fact, be interpreted as bragging if performed by women and thus be considered impolite.

The motives behind women politicians' face-building strategies make for an interesting speculation. I theorize that the decisions to attempt to claim face through men may be a result

of the historical exclusion of women from public life based on the ideology of female inferiority. Tsakiropoulou-Summers and Kitsi-Mitakou (2019) argue that female inferiority is an ideological construct with roots going as far back as the ancient Greek democracies. The system of American political institutions, as many political institutions around the world, subscribed to this ideology, and thus were built in such a manner that perpetuates women's exclusion from public life. According to Kann (1998, 1), the founders of the country sought "to create and sustain a republic based on male governance and female subordination."

Although times have changed and women are now allowed to partake in public life in the Western world, the pushback against women's participation is still heavily present and is typically explained through pseudo-scientific claims of biology having effects on emotionality, logical thinking and morality, among other things. I argue that this is a factor that could account for the perceived need of women politicians to prove their credibility while operating in a male-dominant environment through affiliations with men or the acceptance of men.

As for politeness, Britt stood out the most as not falling into the stereotype of the polite but ineffective speech of women. As speculated earlier, it may have been a conscious choice on her part to act more masculine and use more informal language in order to create an impression of effectiveness. Trump used some rather harsh words to assess other politicians as well as the state of affairs. Some of the language he used definitely crossed the line to impolite territory. It seems to me that the choice of such language may not only be a part of his personal speaking style, but also a conscious choice to create an impression of effectiveness and authority.

While Biden, Trump and Britt appeal to the listeners' emotions, they do not use much emotion language to do so. In contrast, Harris expressed more emotion through choices of words.

It may be that the differences between the stylistic choices of the women arise from different strategies of negotiating masculinist discursive norms. After conducting my research, I believe that Britt's speech would fall into what Walsh (2001) refers to as the accommodation model, which, pertains to a strategy of women embracing existing masculinist discursive practices, which are considered normative within the public sphere. In contrast, Harris speech rather follows what Walsh (2001) refers to as the critical difference model, which is to

challenge the status of masculinist norms in the public sphere, promoting the more cooperative discourse style, which research shows to be favoured by women.

Biden, Trump and Britt used plenty of deliberative rhetoric, whereas Harris used significantly less deliberative rhetoric than any of the other subjects. This finding could be a form of self-repression on Harris' part and the lack of deliberation about concrete action arguably plays into the stereotype of women being ineffective speakers.

Britt and Trump used much more Us vs Them positioning compared to the other subjects. This finding could be the result of party politics, but I suspect it may also have been deliberately employed by the subjects as a face building strategy in order to separate themselves from their political opponents and through the contrast present themselves in a more positive light.

In terms of syntax, my most interesting finding concerns the omission of certain terms. Particularly in the case of Harris' speech, I found it interesting that she decided to omit the term "sexism" but not the term "racism" from her speech, although sexism was one of the biggest themes in her speech. I suspect that sexism itself may be the reason she decided to use omission for fear of the usage of the word leading to negative responses in her listeners.

In contrast to Harris, Trump and Britt openly talked on issues such as terrorism and rape, choosing not to omit the sensitive words from their speeches. I suspect that their choices both to omit and not to omit have been conscious, yet the reasonings and motives behind the choices remain a speculation.

6 Conclusion

To answer my first research question, differences between the men and women arose particularly when it came to face-building strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987; Goffman, 1967; Holmes 1995). My findings, however, were not as simple as allocating features and strategies to “feminine” and “masculine” categories. When conducting my analysis, I felt that while plenty of stereotypes and gendered expectations for linguistic expression were upheld, many were also challenged.

To answer my second research question, after conducting my analysis I would argue that the self-repression and self-oppression of women through language (Lakoff 2004) unfortunately did hold true to some extent in the case of Kamala Harris’ victory speech. However, it held less true in the case of Katie Britt’s speech. Although Britt did not break any substantial barriers in her speech, in this particular comparison between her and Harris, the accommodation model that she employed seemed to work in her favour and allowed her to get her message across without self-repression. It seems to me, based on my thesis, that it is equally possible to at least attempt to consciously affect the degree of self-repression and stereotyping through linguistic strategies as it is to fall victim to them. However, an even better alternative to this would be that society as a whole challenged the idea that femininity and feminine self-expression are unprofessional and less acceptable in public life than masculinity.

Although analysing multiple linguistic features à la Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 2013) definitely posed a challenge, I believe it also gave me a more comprehensive look into the topic of my thesis as well as provided more accurate answers to my research questions. I feel that although my thesis accomplishes to merely scratch the surface of the topic of gendered language in the context of politics, the findings offer some insight to the issue. After completing my research, I was left feeling that there is much more to be researched not only in this topic in particular, but generally in the connections between gender and the linguistic strategies employed by politicians.

7 References

Primary materials:

Britt, Katie E. 2023. “Impassioned Plea for Action on Border Security.” Transcript of speech delivered in Washington, DC, September 28, 2023.

<https://www.britt.senate.gov/news/press-releases/u-s-senator-katie-britt-makes-impassioned-plea-for-action-on-border-security/>

Biden, Joseph R. 2021. “Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.” Transcript of speech delivered in Washington, DC, January 20, 2021.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/>

Harris, Kamala D. 2020. “Victory Speech.” Transcript of speech delivered in Wilmington, Delaware, November 7, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-transcript/>

Trump, Donald J. 2017. “President Trump’s inauguration speech, annotated.” Transcript of speech delivered in Washington, DC, January 20, 2017.

<https://www.vox.com/a/president-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-annotations>

Secondary materials:

Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Cameron, Deborah. 2003. “Gender and Language Ideologies.” In *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, edited by Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff, 447–467. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Cameron, Deborah. [1997] 2006. “Performing Gender Identity: Young Men’s Talk and the Construction of Heterosexual Masculinity.” In *On Language and Sexual Politics*, by Deborah Cameron, 61–74. London: Routledge.

Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2003. *Language and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eckert, Penelope, and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2013. *Language and Gender*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Foucault, Michel. [1969] 1994. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London. Routledge.

Flowerdew, John, and John E. Richardson. 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Fairclough, Isabela, and Norman Fairclough. 2012. *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. London: Routledge.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
- Holmes, Janet. 1995. *Women, men and politeness*. London: Longman.
- Kann, Mark E. 1998. *A Republic of Men: the American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics*. New York: NYU Press.
- Lazar, Michelle M. 2005. "Politicizing Gender in Discourse: Feminist Discourse Analysis as Political Perspective and Praxis." In *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*, edited by Michelle M. Lazar, 1–28. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 1973. "Language and woman's place." *Language in Society* 2, no. 1: 45–80.
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 2004. *Language and a Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*, edited by and Mary Bucholtz. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McElhinny, Bonnie. 2003. "Theorizing Gender in Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology." In *The Handbook of Language and Gender*, edited by Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff, 21–42. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mills, C. Wright. [1956] 2000. *The Power Elite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Searle, John R. 1979. *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tsakiropoulou-Summers, Tatiana, and Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou. 2019. "Introduction: the ideological construct of the 'inferior female'." In *Women and the Ideology of Political Exclusion: From Classical Antiquity to the Modern Era*, edited by Tatiana Tsakiropoulou-Summers and Katerina Kitsi-Mitakou, 1–29. London: Routledge.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. *Elite Discourse and Racism*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- van Dijk, Teun A. 1997. "Discourse and Ideology." In *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by Teun A. van Dijk, 379–407. 2nd ed.. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Walsh, Clare. 2001. *Gender and Discourse: Language and Power in Politics, the Church and Organizations*. Harlow: Pearson.
- West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2: 125–151.