



## Section 3. Gender studies

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### POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND GENDER IN POLITICS

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#### Abstract

The scientific article is devoted to the analysis of the gender dynamics in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. It focuses on instances of aggressive verbal behavior and examines the linguistic strategies employed by both candidates. Trump's confrontational tone, use of sarcasm, and repetitive assertions of superiority are analyzed alongside Clinton's composed yet assertive responses, which often incorporate irony and specific examples to challenge Trump's attacks. This study addresses how gender stereotypes impact political communication strategies, highlighting the challenges female politicians face in navigating these expectations while effectively communicating their messages.

**Keywords:** *political discourse, gender differences, aggression, communication*

#### Introduction

Gender is one of the important categories of human social life, manifested in everyday reality. Representatives of one gender are presented with a special set of behavioral norms and expectations, significantly different from the requirements for the other gender. For this, special terms and words are used, differently describing men and women. All this is reflected in special forms of manifestation of public consciousness – stereotypes. Due to the influence of stereotypes, there is an asymmetry in the criteria for evaluating women and men – leaders, managers, political figures. The ability to lead, dominate, and work in a highly competitive environment are considered tra-

ditionally male qualities. If a woman practices a stereotypical “masculine” leadership style, she is evaluated more negatively than a male leader with the same style. A man and a woman may behave in the same way, but if they both behave aggressively, women are rated as less effective leaders because such behavior is more typical of men. To be accepted by society, leaders – men and women must behave in a manner congruent with their gender role. At the same time, the role of a leader places its own demands on a person. And since according to stereotypes this role is masculine, women leaders experience the influence of the conflict between gender and leadership roles. Men and women behave differently in

stressful situations. Men cope with emotions by bringing them into action, showing verbal and behavioral aggression. Women in a similar case express emotions verbally, turning to social groups for support. In politics, showing emotions is not always appropriate, so women, just like men, try to mask their feelings. Male gender roles include more of the qualities needed to gain and maintain power. As a result, men seem more suitable for leadership roles and are more likely to become political leaders. Women, compared to men, have to overcome the pressure of stereotypes and make more effort to find themselves in a leadership position.

Political discourse is a powerful form of communication used in various contexts, such as negotiations, speeches, and appeals in mass media. It is a well-known fact that the audience of politicians is very large, and their aim is to influence the audience by making accept their viewpoints or at least share their approaches to most urgent problems. In this respect the issue of a proper utilization of language means in political discourse gains particular significance. As one of the aims of our article is to delve into the realm of political discourse through the lens of gender. Political discourse holds a distinctive position among various types of discourse and has garnered significant attention in linguistic research. It is an interdisciplinary concept intriguing linguists, political scientists, sociologists, cultural scientists, and psychologists. Thus, **the object** of this research is to investigate the gender differences inherent in political discourse, shedding light on the distinct linguistic and communicative patterns employed by male and female politicians. **The aim** is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender influences political communication, contributing to the broader discourse on gender studies and political science. **The novelty** of this study is the examination of gender differences in political discourse by combining insights from linguistics, gender studies, and political science. By focusing specifically on language use, this study offers unique perspectives on the intersection of gender and politics. The **methods** employed in this study involve a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the language used in political speeches, with

a specific focus on verbal aggression and its gendered manifestations. Content analysis is conducted to identify instances of verbal aggression, while linguistic analysis delves into the structural and rhetorical aspects of language to uncover patterns of aggression. The gender dynamics in the 2016 U.S. presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump has been analyzed. It focuses on instances of aggressive verbal behavior and examines the linguistic strategies employed by both candidates. Trump's confrontational tone, use of sarcasm, and repetitive assertions of superiority are analyzed alongside Clinton's composed yet assertive responses, which often incorporate irony and specific examples to challenge Trump's attacks.

There is no general definition of aggression in psychology. The broadest possible approach classifies as aggressive any behavior that threatens or causes harm to others. L. Berkowitz believes that only behavior that is aimed at causing physical or psychological harm to someone can be considered aggressive (Berkowitz L., 2002. 24). Another approach requires that there must be an intent to cause bodily or physical harm to others. In our research, the point of view of R. Baron and D. Richardson was adopted as a working definition of aggression. Aggression is any form of behavior aimed at insulting and causing harm to another living being who does not want to be treated in the same way (Baron R. A., Richardson R. D. 1994). Verbal aggression has recently increasingly become the object of attention (Knyazyan A., Marabyan L., 2023). The concept of aggression includes physical or verbal actions. In order to judge the strength of the aggressive impact, it is necessary to be able to assess the emotional state of the communicants at the moment of perception of the statement.

### Results and discussion

There is perhaps no better way to understand human behavior as a whole than to analyze the differences between males and females. Men and women talk differently. They speak in particular ways and those ways are associated with their gender. These gender differences can be noticed in different domains, as well as in politics (Knyazyan A., Hakobyan V., 2018). Language is a powerful tool re-

flecting societal dynamics and cultural norms. It is deeply influenced by one's gender, shaping vocabulary, emotional expression, intonation, language style, turn-taking, and more. Understanding how gender affects language usage is key to appreciating the varied ways in which we communicate. Gender was introduced into the political contest during the presidential elections in the United States in 2016 (Grebelsky-Lichtman T., Katz R., 2019). Hillary Clinton was the first female candidate to be nominated by one of the two main political parties. Clinton's opponent was Donald Trump. This was the first instance of mixed-gender televised political debates in the presidential campaign and the first time when gender issues were the main topic of political and public discourse. The initial presidential debate occurred on Monday, September 26, 2016, at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York. Donald Trump spoke for 45 minutes and 3 seconds, while Hillary Clinton spoke for 41 minutes and 50 seconds. This debate set a record, attracting 84 million viewers across 13 TV channels and 23 million on digital platforms. However, that was not the only record. The courtesy standards of the past were violated with 68 interruptions combined. Trump interrupted Clinton 51 times, while she interrupted him 17 times.

The second debate took place on Sunday, October 9, 2016, at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, in "town hall meeting" format. Trump's behavior was characterized by aggressive body language and verbal threats, including following Clinton around the stage. There were fewer interruptions compared to the first debate. Clinton interrupted Trump once and the moderators four times, whereas Trump interrupted Clinton 18 times.

The third presidential debate took place on Wednesday, October 19, at the UNLV campus in Nevada. Normally, candidates sit during this debate, yet Clinton and Trump decided to stand at podiums. Clinton spoke more than Trump for the first time, but Trump continued his pattern of frequent interruptions. This time he interrupted Clinton 37 times, while she made nine interruptions. Several parts from the debates that contain aggressive verbal behavior are analyzed in the examples below.

TRUMP: And look at her website. **You know what?** It's no different than this. She's

telling us how to fight ISIS. Just go to her website. She tells you how to fight ISIS on her website. **I don't think General Douglas MacArthur would like that too much.**

HOLT: The next segment, we're continuing...

CLINTON: **Well, at least** I have a plan to fight ISIS. (Interruption) HOLT: ... achieving prosperity...TRUMP: **No, no**, you're telling the enemy everything you want to do. [Interruption]CLINTON: **No, we're not. No, we're not.** TRUMP: See, you're telling the enemy everything you want to do. **No wonder you've been fighting – no wonder you've been fighting ISIS your entire adult life.** (Interruption) CLINTON: That's a – that's – go to the – please, fact checkers, get to work (First presidential debate, 2016). Trump's tone is confrontational and accusatory. He uses rhetorical questions "*You know what?*" to engage the audience and create a sense of shared understanding. As General Douglas MacArthur lived in a different era Trump's tone and context suggest that his statement "*I don't think General Douglas MacArthur would like that too much*" is intended to be subtly mocking or dismissive of Clinton's approach rather than genuinely concerned about General's hypothetical disapproval. Clinton's "*Well, at least*" was an irony to contrast her position against Trump's criticism, suggesting that she believes her plan to fight ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is superior. *Denials* may also cause verbal aggression. "*No wonder you've been fighting – no wonder you've been fighting ISIS your entire adult life*"- here Trump uses sarcasm, and the repetition reinforces his point: he implies that Clinton did not or could not stop ISIS, though she has been fighting them her whole life; because she is telling the enemy her plans. Accordingly, defeating ISIS is impossible under Clinton's rule. Trump's *interruptions* challenge Clinton's credibility, while Clinton's interruptions aim to defend her position and challenge Trump's accusations. HOLT: All right. You have two minutes of the same question to defend tax increases on the wealthiest Americans, Secretary Clinton. CLINTON: I have a feeling that **by the end of this evening, I'm going to be blamed for everything that's ever happened.**

TRUMP: **Why not?** (Interruption)

CLINTON: **Why not? Yeah, why not?**  
(LAUGHTER) **You know, just join the debate by saying more crazy things.** Now, let me say this, it is absolutely the case...

TRUMP: **There's nothing crazy about not letting our companies bring their money back into their country.** (Interruption)

HOLT: This is – this is Secretary Clinton's two minutes, please. TRUMP: Yes. (Interruption)

CLINTON: Yeah, well, let's start the clock again, Lester (First presidential debate, 2016). Clinton uses hyperbole *"I'm going to be blamed for everything that's ever happened"*, which exaggerates the potential scope of blame, drawing attention to the perceived unfairness of the situation. Trump's use of "Why not?" is brief but provocative, challenging Clinton's assertion and inviting further confrontation. "You know, just join the debate by saying more crazy things," counters Trump's interruption with sarcasm, suggesting that his remarks are irrational or nonsensical. The tone of Trump's interruptions is brash and defiant, reflecting his disregard for the moderator's authority and his willingness to challenge Clinton directly. Clinton's tone is more composed but still assertive. The use of imperative sentences "Now, let me say this" and "let's start the clock again" and her responses to Trump's interruptions with sarcasm maintain control over the conversation. TRUMP: I think we have to get NATO to go into the Middle East with us. In addition to surrounding nations, **we have to knock the hell out of ISIS.** And we have to do it fast. **When ISIS formed in this vacuum created by Barack Obama and Secretary Clinton, and believe me, you were the ones that took out the troops.** (Interruption) CLINTON: Lester, we've covered this ground. TRUMP: **No, wait a minute. When they formed, when they formed, this is something that never should have happened. It should never have happened.** Now you're talking about taking out ISIS. **But you were there, and you were Secretary of State when it was a little infant.** Now it's in over 30 countries, and **you're going to stop them? I don't think so.** HOLT: Mr. Trump, a lot of these judgment questions. You supported the war in Iraq before the inva-

sion. What makes your (Interruption) TRUMP: **I did not support the War in Iraq.** HOLT: In 2002 (Interruption). TRUMP: **That is a mainstream media nonsense put out by her,** because she, frankly I think the best person in her campaign is mainstream media. **Would you like to hear? I was against the war, wait a minute. I was against the war in Iraq.** Just so you put it out (First presidential debate, 2016). Trump employs assertive language and a dismissive attitude towards Clinton. He uses the taboo word *hell* to assure his intention. *Knock* is used to show power and strength. According to Trump, ISIS was formed because of the bad decision that was made by both Clinton and Obama to leave Iraq. Trump asserts that the vacuum that they created is the reason for forming ISIS. The phrase *"believe me,"* implies that he possesses knowledge or insight that the audience may not be aware of, and persuades them to trust his judgment. The rhetorical question *"you're going to stop them?"* challenges Clinton's capability. The repetition of phrases, such as *"wait a minute"*, *"I was against the war"*, *"when they formed"* and *"it should never have happened"*, is used for emphasis and reinforces Trump's position. In the statement *"But you were there...I don't think so,"* the use of rhetorical questions and declarative sentences adds to the confrontational nature of the argument. *"Mainstream media nonsense"* is a derogatory phrase used to dismiss media reports as unreliable or biased. TRUMP: **I have better judgment than she does, there's no question about that. I also have a much better temperament than she has, you know? I have a much better.** She spent, let me tell you. She spent hundreds of millions of dollars on an advertising – you know, **they got Madison Avenue into a room,** oh, temperament, let's go after. I think my strongest asset, maybe by far, is my temperament. **I have a winning temperament, I know how to win. She does not** – HOLT: Secretary Clinton? CLINTON: **Woo, okay.** (LAUGHTER) (First presidential debate, 2016). Trump uses comparative adjectives like *"better"* and *"much better"* to describe his judgment and temperament compared to Clinton's and positions himself as superior. The repetition of the phrase *"I have a much better"* emphasizes his point and adds intensity to his assertion of superiority. "Mad-



ison Avenue” is a metonym for the advertising industry, particularly in New York City, known for its concentration of advertising agencies. So, by saying “*they got Madison Avenue into a room*” Trump challenged Clinton’s advertising campaign. The interjection “*Woo, okay*” from Clinton, accompanied by laughter is not aggressive itself. However, it contrasts with Trump’s assertive tone and may be interpreted as a subtle attempt to deflect or undermine his assertions of superiority. TRUMP: Let me tell you. Let me tell you. **Hillary has experience, but it’s a bad experience. We have made so many bad deals during the last –** So she has experience, I agree. **But it’s a bad, bad experience**, whether it’s the Iran deal that you’re so in love with, where we gave them \$150 billion back. Whether it’s the Iran deal, **whether it’s uh, anything – man, you almost can’t name a good deal.** I agree, she’s got experience, **but it’s a bad experience. And this country can’t afford to have another four years of that kind of bad experience.** (Cheers and Applause) (First presidential debate, 2016). In his claim “*Hillary has experience, but it’s bad experience*” Trump uses the conjunction “but” to juxtapose his negative opinion with Clinton’s experience. Furthermore, Trump repeats the collocation “bad experience” in the sentence “*And this country can’t afford to have another four years of that kind of bad experience*” and in previous statements to reinforce and empha-

size his perspective. The informal expressions “uh” and “man” add a conversational tone to his speech, making it more engaging and relatable to the audience. Thus, Donald Trump’s speech can be characterized by assertive language, frequent interruptions, and a confrontational tone. He often uses rhetorical questions, repetition, and direct attacks to assert dominance and challenge opponents. In contrast, Hillary Clinton’s speech is typically composed, with a focus on specific examples, sarcasm, and irony to defend her positions and counter attacks. She employs a more measured tone and strategic language to appeal to voters.

### Conclusion

In exploring the gender features of aggressive verbal behavior, it becomes evident that communication styles are deeply influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms, and individual characteristics. While traditional gender roles often dictate distinct modes of expression for men and women, the reality is far more nuanced. Women, in navigating societal expectations, may employ subtle forms of verbal aggression, such as sarcasm and irony, to assert themselves. Conversely, men may exhibit more overt forms of aggression, including direct attacks and interruptions, as a means of asserting dominance. Political discourse serves as a revealing case study, showcasing how gender dynamics play out in high-stakes communication environments.

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