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Speaking in Parliament: first speeches of men and women

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In Parliament, as in society generally, there is a tension between forces for change and pressures to retain the modes of the past. On the one hand, because genres are sensitive to changes in culture, it is reasonable to expect that the presence of women will eventually influence parliamentary speech genres. Hence, women’s use of the genre -- language usage, style and topic focus -- in First Speeches to the House of Representatives might be expected to differ from that of men although, until the percentage of women in Parliament rises beyond the present 14%, one would expect the differences to be slight as women tried consciously to adapt to established genres. Based on analysis of a sample of First Speeches in Parliament this study found a clear difference in that while women speak as much about finance and the economy, the budget, the deficit and small business they speak more about local and family issues than men. In addition women spend more time thanking those who helped them get to Parliament than men do, and they self-disclose more in their speeches which do not differ significantly in length from those made by men, on the occasion of their First Speech in Parliament.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian literary theorist, might have been talking about the Australian Federal Parliament when he wrote:

Each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres … each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex (Bakhtin, 1986, p.60).

This article shows, that in perhaps the most formal speech they will make in Parliament - the speech whose genre is clearest and most defined - the First Speech (previously called Maiden Speech), women Parliamentarians thank others more and self-disclose more than men and speak about different topics. This study supports both Bakhtinian ideas that speech genres, while relatively stable, do respond to changes in the context and speakers and those who assert that men and women use language differently.

The differences found are more remarkable when the genre is set by well-established precedent. In preparing his or her “First Speech” a parliamentarian would seek advice and look at other examples of this genre to discover the special rules of “first speeches”: for example, that they are not interrupted - and that in deference to this rule such speeches should not be unduly controversial. A First Speech is defined in House of Representatives Practice (Barlin, 1997) as:

the first speech made by a Member following his or her first election to the...
House ... normally ... during the Address in Reply debate ... There is a convention in the House that a first speech is heard without interjections or interruptions ... . In return for this courtesy the Member should not be unduly provocative (p. 159).

Developing the idea that genres grow out of the sphere of activity in which they are practised, Klope (1996) suggested that there are rules or standards for such elements as: what constitutes argument quality; who can speak, and when, and how; what elements change according to setting or context and how, etcetera. The genres so developed are created out of sociocultural conditions, and change as these conditions change: “humans in interaction find that the same type of utterance cannot serve to accomplish radically different goals, and so forms of utterance are created that more specifically accomplish the [desired] goals” (p. 17).

The idea that speech genres in a sphere such as politics, although relatively stable, do change in response to changes in the broader culture and to changes in the context gives rise to the question of how the genre of political speeches (and First Speeches in particular) might change, when those entering the sphere of politics come from non-traditional places, for example, come from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds or are women (Australian politics has traditionally been dominated by Anglo-Saxon-Celtic males).

Examining women’s participation in Swedish politics, Hedlund (1988) claimed that the “culture” of women could affect their style and the issues they preferred to discuss. Hedlund also noted that

the forms of discussion developed within the private sphere of the women’s culture are based on dialogue and the need to listen to the other side. This way of talking is difficult to practice in political debate (p. 97).

Similarly, in Australia the Women & Parliaments discussion paper (1994) suggests

women’s style is seen as being more consultative, accepting consensus as a win rather than a backdown. Ironically, this perception can create a conflict of roles for a woman in Parliament - between expectations of her performance as a woman and as a politician (p. 33).

Lawrence (1994) also makes reference to this conflict, noting that “as a woman particularly, tension between the way you would like to behave and what is required to succeed in the Parliament is very great indeed” (p. 3). Lawrence also implies that Parliament is sometimes an uncomfortable environment for women when she points out that debate in Australian politics is focused heavily on personal attack rather than factual debate.

Even if women did bring a particular way of speaking or communicating with them to Parliament one might expect them to be also aware of the existing political speech genre and not attempt to change it radically. They are, after all, the “new kids on the block”, the minority, and as Bakhtin notes, “one observes an extreme differentiation of speech genres and styles depending on the title, class, rank, wealth, social importance of the addressee and the relative position of the speaker” (1986).

So one would expect, following Bakhtin, that women’s First Speeches would be similar to men’s, because one would not expect them to change the genre quickly or radically. This occurs in many settings. In the same way, because of the expectations of audiences, one would not expect the sermons of the first women priests or religious ministers to vary the genre of the sermon. Because of genre expectations,
students too, educated in patriarchally
structured universities, might devalue
lecturers who diverge from patriarchally and
hierarchically structured ways of imparting
knowledge in favour of interactive and
conversation-like styles of speech. Genres
are influenced by the balance of power and
powerful modes of speech are adopted by
those who seek to be powerful. So as
women priests give sermons and women
academics lecture within existing genre
conventions, one would expect women
parliamentarians to adopt the existing First
Speech genre.

Hence, although women’s use of the genre -
language usage, style and topic focus -- in
First Speeches to the House of
Representatives might be expected to differ
from those of men at first one would expect
the differences to be slight as women try
consciously to adapt.

Women’s Language and Style

As utilised here “women’s language” refers
to style, topic and vocabulary used more by
women than men. Political scientist, As’s
definition of “women’s culture” (cited in
Hedlund, 1988), “An assembled set of
values, interpretations and causal
connections that are effective for women but
difficult to understand or invisible for men”
(p. 82) suggests that women will argue in
different ways from men. Differences in
gender behaviour are generally thought to
be due to nurture rather than nature. Pearson
et al. (1995) conclude that “most scholars
reject the idea that self-image is directly
biologically programmed” (p. 49).
Childhood socialisation is different for men
and women and has correspondingly
different effects on personal style and
behaviour.

As children develop, family, literature,
school, games, and toys socialise them
towards fulfilling societal gender roles.
Tannen (1990) comments that boys prefer to
play outside, in large hierarchical groups.
The groups have winners and losers and
leaders who give orders. Boys jockey for
position in the group by joke-telling and
seeking centre stage. Tannen (1990) suggest
that this childhood experience prepares men
well for the cut and thrust of
business life. Women’s socialisation is
different; girls favour small groups or dyads
and focus on developing closeness. Their
games tend not to have winners or losers
and they do not give orders, preferring
instead to offer suggestions. Being liked or
popular in the group is a girl’s main concern
(p. 44). Giles et al. detail the development
of gender specific socialisation (cited in
Kramarae, 1981):

Humans are from birth actively trying to
make sense of their environment by
categorising themselves and their world.
Gender is a basic organising category of
our social structure … People’s social
identity and self-evaluation are derived
from knowledge of their perceived
membership in social groups and from
the perceived evaluation of those groups
by the contrast groups. The language
variety associated with a social group is
usually a high salient dimension of a
group’s identity...Through speech style
shifts, individuals work at establishing
and communicating their distinctiveness
(p.101).

By adulthood an individual has firmly
established a gender-centric cultural
distinctiveness, expressed primarily through
communication. Lakoff described what she
called “women’s language” suggesting that
women differ from men in the usage of ten
characteristics: specialised vocabulary,
expletives, empty adjectives, tag questions,
intonation, superpolite forms, hedges,
hyperc正确 grammar, and joke-telling
humour (Lakoff, 1973, quoted in Crawford,
1995).

Common findings from further research into
women’s language, culture, and style
indicated that women seek confirmation

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more from the other speaker, are more precise in their speech and speak less than men, but they speak of attitudes, beliefs and concerns more than men do. Leaper (1987) noted that women use more expressive language forms and concluded that “gender, even in conjunction with personality variables, still is an important predictor of behaviour … the variables examined - agency, communion, and the various language forms - may have different meanings for the sexes” (p. 147). Another finding heavily supported by the literature is that men speak more than women (Crosby et. al, 1981, Aries, 1987; Tannen, 1990).

The purpose for which language is used also differs by gender. Tannen (1990) claims men use language to enhance their hierarchical position in a group and women use language to enhance relationships. Pearson et al. (1985) concluded that, “Men are viewed as instrumental, task oriented, aggressive, assertive, ambitious and achievement oriented. Women … are viewed as relational, socioemotional, caring, nurturing, affiliative and expressive” (p. 122). Aries (1987), suggests that “competent women … appear to compensate for their power with social-emotional behaviours and avoidance of dominant responses” (p. 152). Tannen (1986) comments,

Many individuals, especially (but not only) men, place more emphasis on their need for independence and less on their need for social involvement. This often entails paying less attention to the metamessage level of talk - the level commenting on relationships - focusing instead on the information level (p. 15).

Women seem to focus not only on the information being imparted, but also on communicating the information in a manner that will strengthen a relationship; in Tannen’s words “rapport talk” (1990). Men focus on the information that is being conveyed “report talk” (Tannen, 1990), and at times use communication to enhance their position in a group.

The use of women’s language to establish rapport leads to the inclusion of certain characteristics in women’s discourse. Women tend to avoid conflict in communication preferring to offer suggestions rather than commands (Aries, 1987). Women tend to use language that is more animated, descriptive, open, attentive and friendly, whereas men tend to use language that is more dominant, less expressive and more contentious (Pruett, 1989).

Tannen (1994) commented that, in a mixed gender group, females are more likely to converge toward a masculine style of communication, which would lead us to expect that in Parliament women would speak in similar ways to men and that, given the pressures to conform, any change in genre is remarkable.

Topics characteristically addressed by men and women also differ, suggesting that some topics are more commonly addressed by one gender than the other. Aries (1987) concluded that women focus heavily on personal issues involving disclosure of feelings, relationships, family, friends, lovers and home life more than men. Men talk little on these topics. Andrews (1987), writing on gender differences in persuasive communication, noted women focus on family themes and maintenance of family relationships more than men. Crawford and Chaffin (1987) noted that males are more likely to choose the topic in a mixed gender group. Other research has suggested that women hold conversations about people and relationships, while men speak on work, money and sports (Bischoping, 1993; Leaper, 1987; Bate, 1988).
Hence the literature generally supports the existence of women’s language (Montgomery & Norton, 1981; Pruett, 1989; Tannen, 1994). However, there are difficulties in the generalisation of these results. For example, research with undergraduates in university settings where both sexes feel more equal does not find differences in the use of powerful speech (Hogg, 1985; Simkins - Bullock & Wildman, 1991). Reported differences in some aspects of language use appear to be context dependent (Crawford, 1995; Kramare, 1981), or in Bakhtin’s terms, subject to “genre rules”, and poses the possibility that one reason why distinctive women’s language is not found consistently in all research is that women adapt more than men to the expectations of the setting, institution or genre in the same way as minority groups do if they wish to avoid being noticed as “different”.

Hence, although from the research evidence we would expect women’s speech in Parliament would be different from men’s, we might also expect this difference to be modified by women’s awareness of the existing genre and understanding of communication rules in the sphere of Parliament. We would expect that women would be more likely to converge toward a male style in a mixed gender group rather than vice versa, but also that women might focus more heavily on topics relating to personal issues, disclosure of feelings, relationships and family themes.

The follow section describes the difficulties in gaining entry to, and the levels of, representation of women in Parliament and describes the environment they find there. Given that communication style is context dependent, it is important to understand the environment in which women must operate.

**Women in Politics and the House of Representatives**

Having ratified the 1989 Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Australia has an obligation to improve the status of women in Australian politics. Some headway has been made recently. Hansard no longer records singular male third person pronouns regardless of what was actually said (Reynolds, 1995). The Office of the Status of Women was upgraded into the Department of the Prime Minister, and the first woman Speaker was elected to the Chair in 1986. However, despite these changes Australia is ranked 27th out of 60 countries on percentage of women’s parliamentary representation in 1997. Although recent inroads have been made towards the greater representation of women in Australian elite politics, the struggle for women’s inclusion in Australian political life which began in the 1880’s (Haines, 1992), is still not fully resolved in 1997.

The categories “invisibility, limited visibility and visibility” used by Jones (1988) in describing the amount of research into women in politics can be applied to women’s participation in Australian politics. Before the 1902 enfranchisement of women for Federal elections they were completely invisible. Women gained limited visibility in the Federal sphere in 1943 with the election of Dame Enid Lyons to the House of Representatives. Limited visibility continued until Labor came to power in the election of 1983 and Australia ratified the 1983 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Since 1983 women have enjoyed greater, but still limited, visibility. In the ninety years that women have had the right to stand for Parliament they have constituted only 14.5 per cent of members (Donaghy, 1994). In Jones’ terms, if women were fully “Visible” they would constitute...
close to half members in a given Parliament. At the rate women entered Parliament in the elections of 1977 to 1993, equal representation of the sexes for women will not be achieved until the year 2053 (Donaghy, 1994). In 1976, Dinnerstein (cited in Jones, 1988) suggested “men have defined the territory of politics, established the rules of political discourse, and limited the scope of political interests” (p.25). However, women are slowly becoming more numerous in elite Australian politics.

Two barriers preventing entry by women to politics have been preselection and placement in unwinnable seats. The first barrier is the party pre-selection process (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994; Reynolds, 1995; Sawer, 1984a) which is generally controlled by men. Regardless of political ideology “a dominant male culture still prevails” (Reynolds, 1995, p. 130). To be successful in pre-selection, candidates need to form alliances within political parties dominated by men, leading to yet another barrier, the political “old boys” club”. Some commentators believe that women have to be “twice as good to get half as far” (Coopers & Lybrand, 1994, p.17).

The Report from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (1994) noted that “the current pattern of preselection and election to Parliament is more suited to a man’s lifestyle and career than it is to a woman’s and ... the dominant ethic and power structure in politics is still overwhelmingly male (p.4).”

Overcoming the preselection barrier generally leads women to their final hurdle - placement in “unwinnable” seats (Sawer, 1984b; Reynolds, 1995; Coopers & Lybrand, 1994). Despite these difficulties, between the 1993 and the 1996 election the percentage of women in the House of Representatives rose from 8.8% to 14.1%. In this election, women candidates placed in marginal seats came into Parliament with the landslide Liberal/National victory.

Although recent reports suggest that women are just as likely as men to participate in lower levels of politics, the gender gap widens dramatically at the elite level (Coopers & Lybrand, 1994). This gap has been attributed to many factors: women’s many responsibilities - children, meals, and other family commitments (Sawer, 1984a); media attention; hours of work and proximity to home (Coopers & Lybrand, 1994); the lower socio-economic position of women in society (Donaghy, 1994); and the confrontational and adversarial nature of elite politics during selection and debate (Donaghy, 1994; Reynolds, 1995).

The going gets tough in Parliament at times, as Carmen Lawrence, the former Labour Minister can attest: “Parliament is not a debating forum where issues are expressed and discussed and outlined and dissected but it is, in fact, a place where people engage in gladiatorial combat” (Lawrence, 1994, p. 4). Clearly, although women politicians are making limited headway in increasing representation, a male political communication style is still dominant.

Women’s parliamentary communication style and culture also encompass women’s topic, or issue, focus. Investigating the experience and expectations of women candidates in the 1982 Victorian state election, Sawer (1988a) found women covered the “soft” issues: child-care, equal opportunity, abortion, education, environmental, and care for the aged. More recently, as women’s numbers in Parliament have increased there has been an increase in social issues under debate (Coopers & Lybrand, 1994). In general, women are given the soft ministerial portfolios, rarely are they ministers for defence, law, or the
Thus, it seems that women in Parliament will be pulled in several directions: towards the speech styles and topics engendered by their socialisation; towards the expectations of the setting and the genre of a male-dominated institution; and towards the discourse they encountered in their socialisation as adults in their professions, jobs, and the climb up the ranks of their political party.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the Bakhtinian notion that genres of speech style change according to the setting, the participant and the culture, and the description above of differences in communication style between men and women, the following expectations will be explored through analysis of first a sample of first speeches of members of Parliament:

In their first speeches to the House of Representatives, it is expected that:

(a) Women will speak less than men.
(b) Women will use more descriptive language than men.
(c) Women will acknowledge support from others more than men.
(d) Women will validate their comments with supporting quotes used as evidence more than men.
(e) Women will disclose more personal information than men.
(f) Women will focus on topics and issues relating to education, family/spouse/children, health/hospitals, environment, crime/police/violence and gender equity more than men.

**Methodology**

A sample of five female and five male first speeches was selected in the following manner: biographies of all members of the House of Representatives in the 38th Parliament were taken from (http://demos.anu.edu.au:7007/cgi-bin/pas...allarticles.pl?dir=misc/biographies/reps) on the Internet and compiled into an alphabetical data base. The percentage of females in the House of Representatives was calculated. All males older or younger than the oldest and youngest females were eliminated in an attempt to obtain a more closely related sample and to reduce generational differences in speaking styles. A random sample consisting of five women (Miss Kelly (J), Mrs Stone, Mrs Grace, Mrs Elson, Mrs Bailey) and five men (Mr Brereton, Mr Williams, Mr McDougal, Mr Ronaldson, Mr Forest) was drawn and copies of their first speeches obtained from Hansard.

Two methods of analysis were used. After establishing that a certain number of key words or topics recurred, key word counts were made (regardless of word context). The number of times a word appeared (for example, “Education/al”) was calculated across each gender and recorded. Then, a qualitative analysis was performed, taking into account the context in which the key words were spoken. The “primary message” in each paragraph was noted, then the number of words communicating that message recorded for each gender. Categories for both types of analysis were developed from the literature review focussing on two primary areas: topic, or...
issue focus; and women’s communication and language style.

Finally, individual speeches were analysed for instances of the use of anecdotes and descriptives. “Anecdote” is defined as: “a short narrative of a particular incident or occurrence of an interesting nature” (The Macquarie Dictionary, 2nd ed.). A descriptive is defined as: “an adjective expressing a quality of the noun it modifies” (The Macquarie Dictionary, 2nd ed.). During preliminary analysis what appeared to be a gendered trend in the use of inductive and deductive reasoning was noted, and this was therefore also included in the final analysis. Inductive reasoning is defined as reasoning by presenting “a series of facts leading to a valid conclusion … [which] moves from specific instances to a general statement” (McKernan, 1988, p. 224). Deductive reasoning is defined as reasoning that “moves from the general to the specific … illustrated by the syllogism … (1) major premise, (2) minor premise, and (3) conclusion” (McKernan, 1988, p. 225).

All totals were compiled into three tables (See Table 1, 2 & 3) for analysis and discussion.

Although speeches may have been written by, or in conjunction with, a professional writer (of perhaps a different sex to the member) the speakers have chosen to represent themselves in Parliament and to their constituents through these speeches.

Several limitations of this present study are acknowledged. The gender imbalance in the House of Representatives poses difficulties regarding random sampling for gender comparisons. The sample of ten speeches was selected from the 38th Parliament in which members of the Liberal National Coalition predominate. The sample was chosen without regard to the political party represented by its members, which led to the female sample all being members of the Liberal National Coalition.
Results

Table 1

Support for hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Hypothesis supported</th>
<th>Chi-Square Value</th>
<th>Significant Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Women will speak less than men.</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Women will use more descriptive language than men</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Women will acknowledge support from others more than men do</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Women will validate their comments with supporting quotes used as evidence more than men</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Women will disclose more personal information than men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>84.54</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Women will focus more than men on topics and issues relating to:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/hospitals</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/spouse/children</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>9.98</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime/police/violence</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equity</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>116.5</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</table>

*Journal of Applied Social Behaviour, 4*(2), 42-55
### Table 2

**Key Word Count**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total: Women</th>
<th>Total: Men</th>
<th>Specific Key Word:</th>
<th>Count: Women</th>
<th>Count: Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Average number of words in speech</td>
<td>2,644</td>
<td>2,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal home life:</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband/wife</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance &amp; economy:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deficit</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business:</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small business</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local issues:</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/hospital:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School/s/ing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Handicapped</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental:</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Environment/al</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime:</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Police</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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Table 3

Additional Categories of Key Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words dedicated to thanking</td>
<td>1312</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes used</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words dedicated to personal disclosure &amp; history</td>
<td>1252</td>
<td>830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words dedicated to electorate and electorate specific issues</td>
<td>4414</td>
<td>4522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words dedicated to gender equity issues</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words dedicated to environmental issues</td>
<td>766</td>
<td>1020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of anecdotes in speech</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of descriptives used</td>
<td>1312</td>
<td>1415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instances of inductive reasoning</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instances of deductive reasoning</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

As Table 1 shows, three hypotheses were supported at significant levels of probability as measured by a Chi square test and three were not. One difference was significantly different in the opposite direction to that predicted

In summary:

(a) Women did not speak less than men. In fact they spoke about the same amount - an average of 2,644 words per speech for women and 2,787 for men. However, women (14 times) mentioned significantly more of the topics listed above under study than men (5 times) (as measured by a sign test; \(p<.01\)). Thus, while speaking about the same amount as men, women spoke about a wider range of topics.

(b) The difference in the number of descriptives used was not significant.

(c) Women thanked and acknowledged the support of others significantly more frequently than men.

(d) Women’s use of quotations was not significantly different from men’s.

(e) Women’s self-disclosure and accounts of personal history were significantly longer than men’s.

(f) Women focused on topics and issues relating to family/spouse/children, crime/police/violence and gender equity significantly more than men, but the differences between mentions of education/schooling, environment and health/hospitals by men and women were not significant.

In addition, women spoke significantly more often about business, \(\text{chi sq} 8, 89; \ p<.01\), local issues (\(\text{chi sq} 6, 23; \ p<.02\)) and made the only references the handicapped which we had not included in our hypotheses. The differences between men and women’s mentions of topics such as finance and economy, the budget, the deficit, the economy and small business were not significant, and neither were the differences between the two groups in the use of inductive and deductive reasoning as shown by Table 3.

These results show that there are subtle changes in the genre as Bakhtin’s writings would have predicted. Women talked the same amount as men, but mentioned more topics. They did not fail to mention those things that men do and so might be regarded as the same as men if measured by what men do. However, they did more. Their expressions of thanks to those who helped get them to Parliament are more elaborate. They more often told their life stories, seeing Parliament as a place where it is appropriate to self-disclose.

Thus women tended to use speeches to create rapport as well as to convey issues. Women self-disclosed 66% (1252 words; Table 2) more than men (830 words) and thanked others 35% more than men (458 words). In Tannen’s (1990) terms, women used self-disclosure and acknowledgment of others to create rapport, whereas men appeared to use speeches mainly to impart specific information.

In addition, women made greater use of audience retention strategies such as repetition and metaphors, and developed multiple themes in their speeches; whereas men tended to focus on only one or two main themes. However their speeches did not show a greater use of descriptive adjectives than men’s speeches.

Conclusion

Men’s and women’s first speeches to the House of Representatives are slightly different. While both men and women see health and education as important issues, women tend to focus on stereotypically feminine issues more than men and use a different style. In Parliament, women are moving into a domain where the speaking genre is already defined, although not “set in concrete”. Indeed, those women successful in overcoming the many hurdles to election have begun to change the genre, and, as their numbers increase, it can be expected that the genre of political communication will change even more. However, because of their minority status, women’s way of speaking is not the discourse of power. Thanking people is not what men in Parliament have spent much time doing. Parliaments, and the men who are successful in them, do not devote the amount of attention that women think is needed for issues relating to family, children, local issues, schools, and crime. Women, elected to govern the country, did not neglect business. In fact, they referred to the economy about the same number of times as men did, and business twice as many times as men did. Women voters currently outnumber men and their women representatives are interested in, and think their constituents are interested in, local issues and family. They think thanking is important, along with issues relating to family, children, crime and gender equity which male members of Parliament do not think are sufficiently important to spend time on, in the momentous occasion of their first speech in Parliament which for many will serve to define their ethos and values in that place.

Studies have shown that women are not viewed as credible if they either adopt a masculine style or retain their feminine style in corporate management (Fiske et al., 1991; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985;) and negotiations (Kolb & Coolidge, 1991). This suggests that women, while they are in a minority, may also be viewed as not credible if they either deviate too far from or retain too much of, a feminine communication style in the House of Representatives because being a woman is a difference and differences are stigmatised.

An understanding of gender language and style in politics could aid in breaking down the barriers that women currently face in pursuing a career in politics. Repetition of this present study with a larger sample is necessary to confirm its findings. Analysis of daily debate in the House of Representatives would ascertain if difference in masculine and feminine style and language also occurs in daily debate. If there are such differences, then repetition of analysis on several individuals, over time, during their parliamentary career, would establish whether length of time in Parliament changes a woman’s style and language usage.

References


Pruett, B. (1989). Male and female communicator style differences: A


