

The use of gendered language in speeches made by Trump and Clinton adhered to stereotypes of the roles of male and female leaders

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Speeches delivered by Donald J. Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign contained many uses of gendered language. **David McGuire, Abbi MacKenzie and Heather Kissack** evaluate the use of first person singular pronouns, anger, swear words, cognitive language and tentative wording to develop an insight into how both candidates delivered important messages and framed their public persona. They also find that the choice of language and speech patterns was affected by wider stereotypical beliefs in relation to the role and disposition of male and female leaders.



The 2016 US presidential campaign pitched a reality TV star, businessman and political outsider (Trump) against an established politician, former Secretary of State and First Lady (Clinton). As the first female candidate nominated by a major political party to seek the US Presidency, Clinton used her campaign speeches as a platform to put forward her vision for a better America based upon raising middle class incomes, education, affordable healthcare and confronting the “think power, think male” bias leading to the underrepresentation of women in politics. In so doing, the “voice” of her campaign speeches appeared to stand in marked contrast to the direct, tough, uncompromising rhetoric of Donald Trump, who promulgated an “America First” agenda which placed emphasis on renegotiating trade deals, pursuing energy independence, reducing taxes and deregulation. And so, we ask: are there discernible gendered differences in the speeches of Hilary Rodham Clinton and Donald J. Trump? We examine 80 speeches delivered by each candidate between 19th July 2016 and 8th November 2016. Our findings identify some important distinctions.



Use of First Person Singular Pronouns

[Previous research](#) has indicated that women are more likely to use first person singular pronouns than men. Evidence from the 2016 presidential campaign confirms this, as Hillary Clinton was more likely to use pronouns such as “I” and “my” than Donald Trump and her use of first person singular pronouns increased gradually across the campaign period. First person singular pronouns are often used to convey trustworthiness and authenticity and leads to a candidate showing a more personal side to voters. Data shows that the use of first person singular pronouns by Clinton peaked during the period between October 11th and November 8th, a period which coincided with the Clinton personal email server controversy. It is arguable that this period necessitated greater use of first person singular pronouns on behalf of Clinton as a way of communicating direct actions that she would take and as a way of articulating key personal values in a time of crisis.

Clinton: “**My** dad, who was a small businessman in Chicago, worked hard. And **I** want that story to be true for every American family. And that is – that is the principal motivation that **I** have in this campaign” (16th August 2016)

Trump: “**I’m** not owned or controlled by anyone – **my** loyalty is to you. **I** will fight for you. **My** economic agenda can be summed up in three very beautiful words: jobs, jobs, jobs” (28th September 2016)

Use of Anger

The use of emotion is often deployed to express deeply felt sentiments about a particular issue or approval/disapproval of a set of actions or behaviours. [Previous research](#) has indicated that the use of emotion by men is often associated with the display of power and assertiveness. Conversely, the use of emotions by women provokes negative reactions among the audience. Campaign speeches show that Trump was far more likely to use words than conveyed anger than Clinton. Trump often used 'anger words' as an attempt to discredit his rival, for example referring to the "**corrupt Clinton machine**" and "**crooked Hillary**". Anger was also expressed by Trump in relation to the Obama administration, describing it as "*an absolute **disaster***" and "*absolutely **terrible***". Clinton used considerably less 'angry words' than Trump, the use of which peaked between September 13th and October 10th, coinciding with the release of a video showing Trump making lewd and sexist remarks about women. Clinton expressed her anger claiming that Trump had "*huge **disrespect** and **contempt** for women*" and arguing that he "*relishes in making women feel **terrible** about themselves*".

In respect to the use of anger, there appears to be a conscious effort by Clinton to adopt more measured, controlled language in order to build a public persona of a calm, considered Commander-in-Chief in waiting. The use of anger by Clinton is reserved for situations where cherished values and principles are violated and the situation dictates a more direct and impassioned response.

*Clinton: "Keep calling him out and rejecting the **hateful, bigoted** rhetoric that seeks to pit Americans one against each other, and continue making the case in every way for our vision of an America that is "stronger together." An America where all our children have the choice to live up to their God-given potential, no matter where they come from, or what they look like, or what the circumstances of their lives have been " (7th September 2016)*

*Trump: "I will **fight** for you against the special interests, against the **corrupt** politicians and against the powerful insiders. Let me be your champion. In all things, it's time to put Americans first – and start taking care of each other." (14th September 2016)*

Use of Swear Words

The use of swear words is often associated with masculine speech. Swear words are often deployed to release feelings of anger and frustration. During the campaign, Clinton did not publically use swear words, whereas Trump used a total of seven swear words in his speeches.

*Trump: "I'm running out of things but I'm going to tell you one thing. In a Donald Trump administration, there will be no **bullshit**. Thank you very much." (31st October 2016)*

Use of Cognitive Language

Cognitive language used in the campaign provides an insight into the beliefs, values and morality of the two candidates. Use of these words facilitate an understanding of the choices the candidates have made and the process through which they have arrived at such decisions. Cognitive mechanisms help leaders present a vision of the future through which key campaign themes can be embedded. An analysis of the candidates' campaign speeches demonstrate that Clinton was far more likely to use cognitive language than Trump. The use of cognitive language highlights a key difference between the visionary outlook of Clinton (indicating hopes, beliefs and aspirations of a more positive future) and the direct, action-oriented pragmatism of Trump. This accords with previous [research studies](#) showing that women are more likely to embed cognitive mechanisms within their speech patterns than men.

Clinton: “I **believe** that we can do this. ‘Stronger Together’ is not just a slogan for me, it’s a blueprint for our future. I **believe** that the economy should work for everyone, not just those at the top. And I’m closing my campaign the way I started my career, fighting for kids and families to make sure every single person in this country has the chance to go as far as your hard work and your talent will take you. You see, I **believe** the American Dream is big enough for everybody.” (7th September 2016)

Trump: “Good policing saves lives. My dear friend, Rudy Giuliani, knows a thing or two about this. The policies put into place by Rudy ultimately brought down crime by 76 percent and murder by 84 percent. **Think** of how many families were saved, how much heartache was prevented, when police were put into communities and criminals were removed. **Imagine** how many lives could have been saved, all across this country, if Democratic politicians hadn’t blocked in their cities what Rudy did in New York City? I’ll make sure we deliver safe neighborhoods here in Milwaukee, and all across this country. It’s easy for Hillary Clinton to turn a blind eye to crime when she has her own private security force. I **believe** all Americans, not just the powerful, are entitled to security.” (16th August 2016)

Use of Tentative Language

Previous research has indicated that men are more likely to be more dominant and aggressive in their speech patterns, while women make stronger use of tentative speech. These studies also showed a stronger likeability among male audience members for women who spoke tentatively and were less assertive, while male leaders’ likeability and influence was not affected by whether they use assertive or tentative speech, revealing stereotypical beliefs held towards female leaders. Research also indicates that tentative speech can also be used as a mechanism to generate audience participation and reaction and keep levels of engagement high. During the campaign, it is clear that Clinton was more likely to use tentative speech patterns, whereas Trump preferred a more direct, assertive style. It is also apparent, given Trump’s preference for direct speech that he uses tentative language to either inject humour into speeches or attack his opponent.

Clinton: “Our SEALs took the time to move the women and children, bin Laden’s family members, to safety, before destroying the helicopter. That is what honor looks like. That is America at our best. **Maybe** the soldiers of other nations wouldn’t have bothered, or **maybe** they’d have taken revenge on those family members of terrorists. But that is not who we are. And anyone who doesn’t understand that doesn’t understand what makes our nation great.” (31st August 2016)

Trump: Hillary is, and has been, in politics since the 70s. What’s her pitch? The economy is busted? The government’s corrupt? Washington is failing? “Vote for me. I’ve been working on these problems for 30 years. I can fix it”, she says. I wasn’t really sure if Hillary was going to be here tonight, because I **guess** you didn’t send her invitation by email. Or, **maybe**, you did and she just found out about it through the wonder of WikiLeaks.” (21st October 2016)

In conclusion, there is clear evidence of gendered speech in the 2016 US presidential campaign speeches of Donald J Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton. It is apparent that Donald Trump adhered to a more typical masculine linguistic style, through the more frequent use of anger words and swear words. Hillary Clinton was more likely to use first person singular pronouns, cognitive language and tentative language. It is also clear that the choice of language and speech patterns was affected by wider stereotypical beliefs in relation to the role and disposition of male and female leaders. Moreover, the findings also attest to the importance of context in the framing of language. For example, first person singular pronouns are often used to convey trust and authenticity particularly in response

to a scandal; while anger is used to discredit or damage a rival candidate who may be facing a crisis. Future candidates must therefore take care in using language to frame their public persona and ensuring that their message delivers the desired impact.

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