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## Gender-based power language and American political debates

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### Abstract

The last 40 years have produced an abundance of research about gender-based power language, the relationship between language and power and how language expresses power. Particular attention has been paid to asymmetrical discourse between the sexes (Lakoff, 1975, 2004; Fishman, 1978; Lipman-Blumen, 1984). The purpose of this study was to examine the power language currently being used 30+ years after the main research to see if there have been any changes on the part of the female to broker power relationships through linguistic behaviors. This study examined three male vs. female political debates in three U.S. national election campaigns. An analytical scale based on a combination of woman/man discourse and power discourse was used. This study concluded that women have made significant progress in asserting and maintaining power in controlled debate situations; also male/female asymmetry seems to be reduced, and that culture has also become determinant of power relations.

Keywords: Power language; gender-based language; asymmetrical discourse; political debates;

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## 1. Introduction

In her seminal work *Language and Woman's Place*, Lakoff (1973), stated that the situation of powerlessness and marginality of women was reflected in the way women were supposed to speak "women's language". She observed that this problem "submerges a woman's personal identity by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it... the ultimate effect... is that women are systematically denied access to power on the grounds they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior" (Lakoff, 2004). She went on to say that there is a particular language or linguistic usage that keeps women "down", which she called "talking like a lady", and that it is particularly identifiable in terms of lexical usage, meaningless particles, weak expletives, use of question tags and overly correct grammar (Lakoff, 1973). She said that little girls are trained to "speak like girls" and not permitted to engage in what is considered "man talk" which in turn is the dominant language of power. Lakoff used the phrase "a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn't". The girl or woman who does not talk like a lady, "is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has—to be less than a woman or less than a person—are highly painful" (Lakoff, 1973).

Because it would seem that male-female asymmetrical language and power relations are interrelated, this section reviews the literature on both male-female language and that of language and power.

### 1.1 *Asymmetrical discourse between men and women*

Asymmetrical discourse between men and women has been intensely studied by researchers. Some of them include Fishman (1978), Lakoff (1975), Lipman-Blumen (1984), Coates and Cameron (1988) and Crawford (1995). According to Tromel-Plotz (1984) women are dominated by men in conversation by speaking time, topic controlling and interruptions. Many asymmetries have been observed in male-female conversations. Asymmetries between men and women in conversation include:

- Men control the topic and ignore women's attempts at topic initiation;
- Women do the conversational "shitwork" (Fishman, 1978);
- Men interrupt women more (Eakins and Eakins, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1983);
- Women produce more tags and back-channel signals (Lakoff, 1973);
- Women talk softer/men talk louder

But Tannen (1993) comments that the above linguistic strategies cannot be interpreted as powerless or dominant strategies, because "the meaning of a linguistic strategy can vary, depending at least on context, the conversational styles of participants, and the interaction of participants' styles and strategies".

Commonly agreed linguistic strategies that demonstrate power include turn-taking, choice of topic, pronoun use, indirectness, amount of talk, questions and interruptions. Men and women were found to differ in these areas.

### 1.2 *Language and power relations*

Many studies have been carried out in the past on gender-based power language, especially focusing on the differences between men and women. The 1970's, 80's and early 90's produced an abundance of research about the relationship between language and power and how language

expresses power.

How are power relations demonstrated in face-to-face communication? Ervin-Tripp et. al (1984) stated that power relations are indicated through various communication acts. These include “offers, requests, orders, prohibitions and other moves that solicit goods or attempts to effect changes in the activities of others” (p. 116). Basically power is the capacity to exert control over others. This control is demonstrated through communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Power relationships can be noted through the use of language. According to Fowler power relationships can be understood not just through obvious modes such as orders, rules, etc. but also through the way language is used. Positions, status and roles are constituted through the use of particular language (Fowler 1985). He states that some linguistic usages indicate authority, prestige, and success whereas some others indicate the lack of power. “Directive” and “constitutive linguistic practices” are two types of linguistic processes that indicate social control. Directive speech acts such as requests, commands and pronominal usages, basically directly manipulative by nature, indicate a power relationship. They can be directly identified in asymmetrical face-to-face interaction. Another type of linguistic practice is called “constitutive practice” which is less easily observed but functions to assert the existence of the power structure and hierarchy. Existing power structures, whether governmental, judiciary or public institutions, are supported through the use of official discourse; basically any media that controls the communication of ideas (Fowler, 1985).

Power in language has been studied in different contexts. Fowler studied it in terms of governmental/state controlled institutions. Others have studied it in politics, language of manipulation in advertising (O’Barr and O’Barr, 1976), as well as in different situations of social life (Karmarae et. al 1984).

Fairclough (1989) observed that “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants.” This control/constraint is applied to contents, relations and subjects (Fairclough 1989:46) which tend to overlap. He cites interruption, enforcing explicitness, controlling the topic, and formulation as four devices used by those in power who seek to exert control. He also discusses the presence of ideology as a factor of power, that the power holders exert in the imposition of “ideological common sense which holds for everyone”. He points out that social struggle takes different forms, and that ideological struggle takes place primarily in language. Another very important observation is how pronouns are used; the way *you* and *we* are used to indicate inclusion or exclusion. He defines the “inclusive we” and the “exclusive we”. The “inclusive we” is useful in making an “implicit authority claim”. “You” can also be used as an inclusive device.

Linguistic power relationships that have been the most commonly proposed as indicating power relationships are: turn-taking and interruptions, topic choice, use of pronouns, questions, indirectness, amount of talk. Foucault (1972, 1980) believes that all discourse is hierarchical and power is interactive; it can shift between individuals and groups, individual and group, above and below.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine the presence of power language and man/woman asymmetry present in three videos featuring a man and a woman in a political debate. The goal was to discover if in fact the same linguistic strategies could be identified over time and to see if there have been any changes on the part of the female to broker power relationships through linguistic behaviors.

## **3. Methods**

An analytical checklist was developed based on the research on male/female conversational asymmetry and some elements of power language. *Controlling the topic* is a linguistic device that is

used in power relations. *Interruptions* are used by dominant speakers to communicate that they think the other speaker's contributions are irrelevant; however, they can also be considered positive as a method of "restoration of order (turn taking) rather than conversational deviance" (Murray 1987). In the context of a political debate it is difficult for the participants to interrupt each other directly but a type of interruption may be observed: that of changing the subject or controlling the topic. Another element is that of *enforcing explicitness* (asking questions) in which the more powerful speaker asks for clarification and disambiguation (Thomas, 1988). Another element is summarizing or *formulation*.

*Speech volume* (men talking louder than women), asking questions (Fairclough, 1989), the presence of "woman's talk" (Lakoff, 1973) were considered.

The following list was used when analyzing debates. It is based on a combination of man-woman asymmetrical language and power language.

- controlling the topic (man/woman, power relations)
- enforcing explicitness
- talking louder (man/woman)
- asking questions (man/woman/power relations)
- formulation (power relations)
- the presence of 'women's talk' (Lakoff, 1973) including 'empty adjectives' 'hyper correct' grammar, super politeness, question tags, use of 'so'

This study examined three male vs. female political debates in three U.S. national election campaigns. Videos were analyzed using an analytical scale based on a combination of woman/man discourse and power discourse. Comments are incorporated in the text.

### 3.1 Debate 1: Vice Presidential Debate: Geraldine Ferraro (Democrat) vs. George Bush, Sr., (Republican)

The debate was held on October 13, 1984 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42scedX5MT8>).

The debate begins with both candidates walking to center-stage. They shake hands for what seems like a long time: 12 shakes. They say something to each other that is not heard. The following excerpts illustrate various points on the checklist.

FERRARO: "Let me say that I'm not a believer in polls and let me say further that what we are talking about are problems that are facing the entire nation. They're not problems facing women. .... I'm absolutely delighted that the League (of Women Voters) is sponsoring these debates..."

Here we can note the issue of women. Ferraro is drawing the discussion away from the focus on women for various reasons: the fact that she is the first woman to run for Vice President; the cultural environment of the 80's as well; and to avoid any possible attack from Bush. Then she mentions that the League of Women Voters sponsored the event, with the intuitive meaning based on her facial expression being that she found some support in that fact.

BUSH: Well, I was glad to get that vote of confidence from Mrs. Ferraro in my economic judgement. (change of subject)  
FERRARO: I, I think what I'm going to have to do is I'm going to start correcting the vice-president's statistics... I'll become a one-woman truth squad and we'll start tonight.  
BUSH: ... Wonderful new legislation that's helping blacks more and more. We think of civil rights as something like crime in your neighborhoods. And, for example, when crime figures are going in the right direction that's good, that's a civil right.

Bush changes the topic and brings the attention to himself. He also raises his voice and moves his head emphatically. Ferraro gets control of the topic by correcting Bush's statistics. However, she makes another comment about being a woman again, indicating that she is trying to distinguish herself as a competent woman. Then Bush goes on to make a non-sequitur comment on civil rights while changing the subject and asserting his opinion, taking the power with a very ridiculous statement.

FERRARO: I just have to correct in my thirty seconds that are left the comment that the vice-president made with reference specifically to a program like AFDC. If you take AFDC, if you take food stamps, if you take - oh, go down the line on poor people's programs, those are the programs that suffered considerably under this administration's first budget cuts and those are the ones that in the second part of their part of their term, we were able to restore some of those terribly, terribly unfair cuts to the poor people of this country.

Ferraro takes back the power by formulation and controlling the topic.

BUSH: Almost every place you can point, contrary to Mr. Mondale's - I gotta be careful - but contrary of how he goes around just saying everything bad. If somebody sees a silver lining, he finds a big black cloud out there. Whine on harvest moon! I mean, there's a lot going on... maybe we have a factual - maybe we can ask the experts to go to the books. They'll do it anyway. Spending for food stamps is way, way up under the Reagan administration, AFDC is up under the Reagan administration, and I'm not going to be found wrong on that. I am sure of my facts, and we are trying to help...

Bush tries to enforce explicitness as well as controlling the topic, and he also raises his voice. He then comes out with a nonsensical phrase referring to an old song, which indicates the effort of cutting out the opponent from the communication by destroying the formality of the situation. Then he goes on with formulation to ask for the exact statistics even though he doesn't have any.

FERRARO: I'm taking it from the historical viewpoint..., if you go back to the 1600s .... in the 1940s ... now in the 1980s and 1984 when they can get out of the country to escape communism so they can come here and practice their religion... Now what's happened over the past several years, and quite frankly I'm not going to let you lay on me the intrusion of state politics into religion or religion into politics by my comments with reference to the president's policies...What has happened over the past four years has been, I think, a real fudging of that line with the separation of church and state.... But what I do have a problem with is when the president of the United States... Are they intolerant of religion? Is that what the president is saying?

Ferraro takes back the power by using precise historical facts and figures; she also declares that she will not allow herself to be accused of something; she is reformulating what has been said. However, she reverts to "women's talk" when she uses the word "fudging". In the last line when she asks what the president is saying, she emphatically enforces explicitness.

BUSH: I think that was a cheap shot - telling the American people to try to divide class - rich and poor. (formulation combined with disrespectful use of language 'cheap shot').  
BUSH: Well, I'm surprised. I think I just heard Mrs. Ferraro say that she would do away with all covert actions, and if so, that has very serious ramifications, as the intelligence community knows. (Here he is asking a question, indirectly, as well as controlling the topic.)

Here Bush is using formulation combined with the disrespectful use of language “cheap shot” which is considered fairly low register. In the next line he is asking a question indirectly, as well as controlling the topic.

FERRARO: I think the Vice-President's comment about the Carter-Mondale administration really typifies this administration. It's an administration that looks backwards, not forward and into the future. ...Being the candidate for vice-president of my party is the greatest honor I have ever had. But it's not only a personal achievement for Geraldine Ferraro - and certainly not only the bond that I feel as I go across this country with women throughout the country. I wouldn't be standing here if Fritz Mondale didn't have the courage and my party didn't stand for the values that it does - the values of fairness and equal opportunity. Those values make our country strong and the future of this country and how strong it will be is what this election is all about... This campaign is not over. For our country, for our future, for the principles we believe in Walter Mondale and I have just begun to fight.

Ferraro counters Bush's comment and formulates her point. She refers again to the issue of being a woman and points out that she would not be in this position if it hadn't been for America and what America means: fairness and equal opportunity. She refers to equal opportunity and uses the famous quotation by a famous American patriot, Patrick Henry, to define the campaign fight.

To sum up, Geraldine Ferraro presents the image of a very well-prepared, calm and rational person. She bunks the stereotypes of the time that define women as being emotional and unable to function under stress. She has an analytical style, comes across as very matter-of-fact and nothing escapes her. She maintains a calm steady voice, unlike her opponent. She is able to defend herself from every attack on the part of Bush and effectively takes back the control every time. Thirty-one years after this debate it is easy to see the inherently chauvinistic behaviors of both Bush and the male moderator. The number of referrals to women, and the fact that she is a woman herself, seem to demonstrate the cultural context of the times when women were just starting to emerge as strong political players. Interestingly enough there was only one example of 'women's language' (fudging). It is also interesting that there was only one female journalist included. This particular debate clearly illustrates the power relations game.

### **3.2 Debate 2: Sarah Palin vs. Joe Biden**

On Oct. 2, 2008, Sarah Palin, Governor of Alaska, Republican, and Joe Biden, Sr. Senator for Delaware Democrat, participated in a debate in the vice presidential campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89FbCPzAsRA> ).

Governor Palin sets a new standard for presidential debates. At the beginning of the debate, which is traditionally a formal moment of presentation, when she walks out, she waves at the audience, comes close to Sen. Biden, and says, “Nice to meet you, can I call you Joe?” The handshake is short and she comes very close to him. Her entrance was reminiscent of that American institution, the “cheerleader” in that she was full of enthusiasm and energy. Perhaps her style is a way to set the tone which in itself is a way to control a situation. She immediately launches into the use of very informal language, revealing full abandonment of Lakoff's idea of women's language as being formal and demonstrating an ongoing use of “rough talk” (Lakoff, 1973).

Palin: And I'll betcha, (smile) you're going to hear some fear in that parent's voice... And I've joined this team that is a team of mavericks with John McCain, also, with his track record of reform, where we're known for putting partisan politics aside to just get the job done.  
PALIN: ... with all due respect, I do respect your years in the U.S. Senate... I think that's why we need to send the maverick from the Senate and put him in the White House, and I'm happy to



join him there... just everyday American people, Joe Six Pack, hockey moms across the nation, ... we have an opportunity to learn a heck of a lot of good lessons ...

Here Palin uses very informal and colloquial language and pronunciation to establish an intimate rapport with the listeners in an effort to gain power. She makes a referral to the American hero-image of the maverick, who comes in to solve problems in the Old West, and by doing so she tries to control the topic with a non-intellectual technique. Biden is smiling, almost laughing. Palin is enthusiastic with lots of facial expression. The tone is informal. She also uses 'women's talk' but with a different twist-she has actually taken control from the first moment by asking Biden's first name; by using the 'respect' word she harkens back to the 'old' type of 'woman talk. Again she uses very informal colloquial language when she refers to 'Joe Six Pack' and 'hockey moms'. Then she tops it off with the expression 'a heck of a lot' which brings her down to a very informal level.

BIDEN: The charge is absolutely not true. Barack Obama did not vote to raise taxes. The vote she's referring to, John McCain voted the exact same way..., John McCain voted 477 times to raise taxes. It's a bogus standard but if you notice, Gwen, the governor did not answer the question about deregulation, did not answer the question of defending John McCain about not going along with the deregulation, letting Wall Street run wild....  
PALIN: I'm still on the tax thing because I want to correct you on that again.... And I may not answer the questions the way that either the moderator or you want to hear, but I'm going to talk straight to the American people and let them know my track record also.

Biden tries to control the topic by saying the charge is absolutely not true. He uses the words 'bogus' and 'run wild' possibly to scale his language use down to the same level as Palin's. He uses facts to formulate his argument, and also points out that Palin did not answer his question. This is an example of enforcing explicitness.

Palin takes control by saying she isn't going to answer the questions the way either Biden or the moderator would like to hear. She takes control of the topic again and formulates the discussion. She is smiling the whole time, which seems almost incongruous with her message.

BIDEN: Gwen, no one in the United States Senate has been a better friend to Israel than Joe. The fact of the matter is, the policy of this administration has been an abject failure.  
IFILL: Has this administration's policy been an abject failure, as the senator says, Governor?  
PALIN: No, I do not believe that it has been. But I'm so encouraged to know that we both love Israel, and I think that is a good thing to get to agree on, Senator Biden. I respect your position on that... Oh, yeah, it's so obvious I'm a Washington outsider. And someone just not used to the way you guys operate. Because here you voted for the war and now you oppose the war. You're one who says, as so many politicians do, I was for it before I was against it or vice-versa.  
PALIN: I think we need a little bit of reality from Wasilla Main Street there, brought to Washington, DC. So that people there can understand how the average working class family is viewing bureaucracy in the federal government and Congress and inaction of Congress. Just everyday working class Americans saying, you know, government, just get out of my way.

Biden refers to himself in third person singular which takes him out of a direct personal attack.

He uses historical facts to discuss foreign policy. Then he makes a move to formulate by commenting on the failure of the previous presidency in the area of foreign policy. Palin regains

control by using the 'respect' word again. Then she goes for the throat and criticizes Biden and everyone else in Washington D.C. for changing their stance. In this way she formulates and controls. On top of that she laughs not in a nice way that is effective in flaunting the control she has gained.

BIDEN: Can I respond? ... Look, all you have to do is go down Union Street with me in Wilmington or go to Katie's Restaurant or walk into Home Depot with me where I spend a lot of time and you ask anybody in there whether or not the economic and foreign policy of this administration has made them better off in the last eight years...they get it. They get it. They know they've been getting the short end of the stick.... It's time we change it. Barack Obama will change it.

PALIN: Say it ain't so, Joe, there you go again pointing backwards again. .... Now doggone it, let's look ahead and tell Americans what we have to plan to do for them in the future. You mentioned education and I'm glad you did. I know education you are passionate about with your wife being a teacher for 30 years, and God bless her. Her reward is in heaven, right? (another example of using personal information and an idiomatic expression which can be interpreted either as a compliment or as an insult).... Teachers needed to be paid more. I come from a house full of school teachers. My grandma was, my dad who is in the audience today, he's a schoolteacher, had been for many years. My brother, who I think is the best schoolteacher in the year, and here's a shout-out to all those third graders at Gladys Wood Elementary School, you get extra credit for watching the debate.

Biden asks a question to take back control of the topic. He then reformulates the subject. He tries to be serious. Then Palin counters with another example of idiomatic, informal jargon which has the effect of adding a sense of ridiculousness to Biden's comment, and it also makes Palin look ridiculous. Then she throws out more man talk (doggone it) and then uses personal information about Biden which can function as a compliment or as an insult. One wonders if Palin was aware of the fact that Biden lost his first wife in a terrible accident. Then she tops it off by behaving like a cheerleader and saluting the third grade children her brother teaches. One wonders how seriously she takes the entire event.

The Biden-Palin debate illustrated a major change in the way men and women use language in power relations. There was almost a 360- degree change in the man-woman asymmetrical use of language as well as that of power relations. Sara Palin used some 'women's talk' as a weapon; but she also used 'boy talk' and rather low register expressions that reflected (she thought) the common people who were watching the debate. She smiled, winked and behaved in a very confident and informal manner.

### **3.3 Debate 3: Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, Martin O'Malley**

On November 14, 2015 three potential presidential Democratic Presidential candidates debated various issues in a fast-moving panel-type debate where the moderator seemed to be the power broker ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCFQavaDw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCFQavaDw)) . This particular debate differs from the other two because the participants are not as combative because they are all from the same political party. They are given one minute to respond to a question and 30 seconds to offer a rebuttal.

SANDERS: The-- the secretary's obviously right. It is enormously complicated. But here's something that I believe we have to do is we put together an international coalition.... And that is we have to understand that the Muslim nation in the region, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, all of these nations, they're gonna just have to get their hands dirty, their boots on the ground.... We should be supportive of that effort. So should the UK, so should



France. But those Muslim countries are gonna have to lead the efforts. They are not doing it now.

CLINTON: I-- I think that is very unfair to a few that you mentioned-- most particularly Jordan which has put a lot on the line to the United States. It's also taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria and has been therefore subjected to threats and attacks-- by extremists themselves. I do agree that in particular Turkey and the Gulf Nations have got to make up their minds. Are they going to stand with us against this kind of jihadi radicalism or not? And there are many ways of doing it... they can provide resources. But they need to be absolutely clear about where they stand.

Sanders formulates an interpretation of the current problem in the Middle East and ISIS. He suggests setting up an international coalition. Hillary counters by saying that his judgement is unfair on some of the countries and by so doing she takes control of the topic.

DICKERSON: Governor O'Malley, I wanna ask you a question and you can add whatever you'd like to. But let me ask you, is the world too dangerous a place for a governor who has no foreign policy experience?

O'MALLEY: John, the world is a very dangerous place. But the world is not too dangerous of a place for the United States of America provided we act according to our principles, provided we act intelligently.... And I wanted to add one other thing, John, and I think it's important for all of us on this stage. I was in Burlington, Iowa and a mom of a service member of ours who served two duties in Iraq said, "Governor O'Malley, please, when you're with your other candidates and colleagues on-- on stage, please don't use the term boots on Iraq-- on the ground. Please don't use the term boots on the ground. My son is not a pair of boots on the ground." These are American soldiers and we fail them when we fail to take into account what happens the day after a dictator falls. And when we fail to act with a whole of government approach with sustainable development, diplomacy and our economic power in-- alignment with our principles.

The moderator throws a pointed question to O'Malley about his inexperience in foreign policy. O'Malley turns the argument around (controlling the topic) by referring to American principles and intelligence, which no one can argue against. He then makes a comment about "boots on the ground" which is a type of re-formulation based on what Clinton has previously said. He then refers American soldiers which is a very sensitive topic currently.

SANDERS: Let me pick up an issue that-- a very important issue that we have not yet discussed.... I think we need major reform in the military making it more cost effective but also focusing on the real crisis that faces us...intelligence, increased manpower, fighting international terrorism.... In terms of refugees I believe that the United States has the moral responsibility with Europe, with Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia to make sure that when people leave countries like Afghanistan and Syria with nothing more than the clothing on their back that of course we reach out... But I certainly think that the United States should take its full responsibility in helping those.

O'MALLEY: John, I was the first person on this stage to say that we should accept the 65,000 Syrian refugees... And I believe that that needs to be done with proper screening.... But I would want to agree with something that Senator Sanders says, the nature of warfare has changed...

CLINTON: I think that is the number one requirement. I also said that we should take-- increased numbers of refugees. The administration originally said ten. I said we should go to 65 but only if we have as carefully screening and vetting process as we can imagine

whatever resources it takes. Because I do not want us to-- in any way-- inadvertently allow people who wish us harm to come into our country. But I wanna say a quick word about what-- Senator Sanders and-- and then O-- and Governor O'Malley said. We do have to take a hard look at the defense budget. And we do have to figure out how we get ready to fight the adversaries of the future, not the past. But we have to also be very clear that we do have some continuing challenges. We've got challenges in the South China Sea because of what China is doing in building up-- these-- military installations. We have problems with Russia. Just the other day Russia allowed a-- television camera to see the plans for a drone submarine that could carry a tactical nuclear weapon. So we've gotta look at the full range and then come to some smart decisions about have-- having more streamlined and focused...

Sanders moves in to propose another subject, thereby controlling the topic. O'Malley counters by saying that he was the first person on the stage to talk about accepting Syrian refugees. Then he formulates with what Sanders says by agreeing with him and extending the fact that warfare has changed.

Clinton mentions the current refugee situation and agrees that they should be helped but she changes the subject to talk about military spending and current military threats, including China and Russia, thereby demonstrating her competence in world affairs.

SANDERS: I have never heard a candidate, never, who's received huge amounts of money from oil, from coal, from Wall Street, from the military industrial complex, not one candidate, go, "OH, these-- these campaign contributions will not influence me. I'm gonna be independent.

CLINTON: (You are trying to) impugn my integrity, let's be frank here... Oh, wait a minute, senator. You know, not only do I have hundreds of thousands of donors, most of them small, I am very proud that for the first time a majority of my donors are women, 60 percent...

SANDERS: Here's-- she touches on two broad issues... It's not just Wall Street. It's campaigns, a corrupt campaign finance system. And that's what I'm doing. ...In terms of Wall Street I respectfully disagree with you, Madame Secretary....

O'MALLEY: Well, I'll tell you what, I've said this before, I-- I don't-- I believe that we actually need some new economic thinking in the White House. And I would not have Robert Rubin or Larry Summers with all due respect, Secretary Clinton, to you and to them, back on my council of economic advisors. If they were architects, sure, we'll-- we'll have-- we'll have an inclusive group. But I won't be taking my orders from Wall Street. And-- look, let me say this-- I put out a proposal-- I was on the front line when people lost their homes, when people lost their jobs. I was on the front lines as the governor-- fighting against-- fighting that battle.

Sanders takes control of the topic of campaign donations and the issue of corruption. He basically points to Clinton, who has a very strong reaction. She shows her irritation and counters by saying that she defended New York City after 9/11. And she claims that most of her donors are small, and they are mostly women. This is the first mention of any kind of woman's issue in this debate. O'Malley reformulates the topic and talks about economic advisors, thus getting the topic switched to discussion of his experience.

Hillary Clinton repeatedly talks about her 'plan' applied to every area of debate. She is the only one of the candidates that continues to mention an organized program to solve various national issues. There was no indication of 'women's talk on her part; it seemed that there were three people on equal ground involved. Actually, Hillary Clinton has more experience than the two men and her self-

esteem and confidence continually came out as she addressed difficult problems.

#### 4. Findings

In general, political debates can be conflictual and reveal asymmetrical talk through the use of a continuous flow of power and negotiation of control. The debate participants both hold power according to their position and status.

This study concluded that significant progress had been made on the part of the woman in terms of asserting and maintaining power. Kunsmann (2000) comments that the vitality factor in the female subculture is growing, with the result that there is an increase in assertiveness. He says that “gender *and* status rather than gender *or* status will be the determinant categories. He bases this on the research that has been done on the relationships between social identity and language. He refers to the ethnolinguistic identity theory which was formulated by Giles (1977), Gumperz (1982) and Tajfel (1974). This theory regards men as the majority group, or dominant culture, and women as the minority group, or subculture. This theory puts forth the idea of vitality. The vitality depends on its social activity, solidarity and distinctiveness in regards to another group. If all three features are strong, the group is considered to have high vitality. A group with low vitality will present as “weak, unassertive and tentative” which is what Coates (1998) defines as women’s language. Coates asserts that women’s language presents women as victims and losers. The analysis of the three texts presents the fact that in fact this ‘vitality’ is growing.

In the Ferraro debate, attention was paid to the fact that she was a woman. Twenty-four years later with Palin, there was no mention of being a woman. The power had switched completely. In the most recent debate, Clinton demonstrated a very secure stand as a seasoned, experienced candidate with no reference to being a woman.

#### 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusion is that male and female language differences do not exist *per se*, but are defined by power language. More studies should be conducted in the political arena where women are becoming stronger. Depending on the outcome of the U.S. Presidential election of 2016, there should be some very interesting political discourse to study. According to the Pew Research Center (2015), one in five members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate represent a racial or ethnic minority. At the moment of writing, two Republican presidential contenders have a Cuban-American background.

This fact demonstrates the changing face of the U.S. political scene and represents a research challenge to discover how power language is evolving in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More research should be conducted to measure the influence of culture and ethnicity in the changing face of the U.S. political scene.

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