

A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Accommodation in Female Leaders' Public Speeches³

Author: Hawraa Mohammed Talib¹

Co-Author: PhD Prof. Ahmed Sahib Mubarak²

University of Babylon, Collage of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English

Contact Information: 1. hum358.hawraa.mohammed@student.uobabylon.edu.iq

2. hum.ahmed.sahib@uobabylon.edu.iq

Abstract:

Believing that feminist leaders choose a special kind of language use and to prove that each one of them own a special style in order to converge towards or diverge from the audience, and that each occasion determine that difference, this study applies Feminist Stylistics to examine accommodation using two strategies: convergence and divergence, through 21 convergence and 19 divergence FSDs in six public speeches by two prominent female leaders. These devices; spanning phonetic, semantic, and syntactic levels, show how language can either converge towards the audience, or diverge from them. Of the best of the researcher's knowledge, this notion (tackling Accommodation using the field of feminist stylistics in female leaders' public speeches) has not been given attention creating a gap which the current study tries to fill.

Accordingly, the present study is set to investigate how the context of each speech influences a speaker's use of FSDs and language accommodation strategies, setting that the context of each speech is essential in shaping a speaker's use of FSDs and accommodation strategies, driving them to adapt their language through inclusivity, advocacy, symbolism, authority, or propaganda, across the audience's different demographics, to meet audience expectations and their own goals.

Key Words: Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, Feminist Stylistic Analysis, Communication Accommodation Theory, Convergence, Divergence.

Introduction:

Feminist stylistics can be defined as the sub-branch of stylistics which accounts for the way in which gender concerns are linguistically encoded in texts, and which attempts to do so by employing some of the frameworks and models pertaining in the stylistics tool-kit. This approach critically examines how language perpetuates gender biases and stereotypes. Mills (1995:16)⁶ asserts that feminist stylistics not only studies the representation of gender in literature but also scrutinizes the broader social norms and power structures that influence these representations. Through detailed linguistic

³ This research is an extract from a master's thesis submitted by the student Hawraa Muhammad Talib to the College of Education and Humanities/University of Babylon as part of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree in English Language/Linguistics

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analysis, feminist stylistics seeks to reveal the subtle ways in which texts reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies (Wales, 2001:12)¹¹. Accommodation can often be seen in activities like public speaking, which entails changing one's speech patterns, phrasing, and communication style in order to better connect with the audience. This can involve maintaining a same level of formality, utilizing language that is relevant to the audience's experiences, or matching speech tempo and tone to retain engagement. Effective speakers frequently employ accommodation to establish rapport, promote understanding, and increase persuasion. Speakers can look more approachable and believable by mimicking the audience's linguistic preferences, which improves their overall communicating efficiency (Giles & Soliz, 2014:68)⁴.

There are two main accommodation strategies; the first is called convergence which is adapting one's communication behaviour to become more similar to another person. The second is divergence which is a communication strategy of accentuating the differences between one person and the other (Giles, 2016:25)³.

The analysis incorporates various statistical calculations to obtain satisfactory data results, including the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, Adjusted Correlation Coefficient, arithmetic mean, by applying the SPSS and Microsoft Excel software programs.

Literature Review:

Feminist stylistics applies critical linguistics to uncover how language perpetuates gender inequality and power dynamics. Critical linguistics, based on Halliday's systemic functional grammar, emphasizes how language and society are interconnected, with language used to maintain power structures. Key figures like Fowler et al. argue that language is a tool for ideological manipulation, reinforcing social hierarchies. Feminism challenges these power imbalances, with radical and liberal feminism offering different approaches. Feminist stylistics, coined by Mills, analyzes how language reflects and shapes gender roles, revealing underlying biases in texts (Mills, 1995: 8; Fowler et al., 1979:21-65)^{3&8}.

In Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), "accommodation" refers to the adjustments people make in their communication to either converge (become more similar) or diverge (emphasize differences) with their conversational partner. Convergence fosters rapport and social approval by mirroring speech patterns, while divergence highlights differences to assert identity or maintain social boundaries. Maintenance, on the other hand, occurs when individuals retain their habitual communication style without adapting, often to assert authority or preserve cultural

identity. CAT explores how these strategies impact social dynamics, relationships, and (Giles, 2016:92; Crystal, communication effectiveness across various contexts 2010:102)^{1&5}.

Public speaking, especially in the political realm, is closely tied to persuasion, with politicians using language to influence, inspire, and connect with diverse audiences. Political discourse involves various speech acts, including legitimizing, protesting, or guiding public opinion to align with specific political realities. This type of communication often involves strategic language management to maintain power and shape societal narratives. In feminist political discourse, language serves as a tool to challenge gender stereotypes and advocate for equality. Feminists use persuasive speech, emotional appeals, and inclusive language to advance social justice and influence public opinion, highlighting the power of discourse in political and feminist activism (Woods, 2006:58; Virtanen & Halmari, 2005:3)^{13&15}.

Materials and Methods:

The data consists of six prominent public speeches: three by Hillary Clinton and three by Michelle Obama. Each one of the collected speeches is within the average of 20-25 minutes in length, delivered on similar occasions for both speakers. The first occasion is on the Class Day's Graduation ceremony: Clinton's Yale University Commentary in 2018, and Obama's Tuskegee University Commentary in 2015. The second occasion was on the International Women's day which occurs annually in February the twenty-eighth: Michelle Obama's speech in 2016 and Hillary Clinton's in 1997, as each one of the speakers was holding the title of the first lady at the time of the speech. The last occasion was a nominating convention that is held every four years called the Democratic National Convention being organized at the same time in the same place for both: Michelle Obama was the first lady at the time while Hillary Clinton was nominated for presidency. The majority of the language utilized are standard language that apply complicated sentences, emphasizing complexity, which echoes throughout Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton's speeches. Most extracts adopt a formal tone to emphasize respect and seriousness. Hillary Clinton, who is white, and Michelle Obama, who is an African Woman, have both used their influence to fight for social justice and address the deep-rooted racism that impacts people of colour in the USA. The model of the analysis is designed based on Searle's Speech Act Theory (1960)¹¹, Galperin's theory of stylistic devices (1971)⁴, Tannen's Difference theory (1990)¹², Palmer's theory on mood and modality (1991)⁹, Mills' Feminist Stylistic theory (1995)⁸, Filimonova's theory of Clusivity (2005)², Jeffries' Critical Stylistic theory (2010)⁷, as well as Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (2016)⁵. In this study, numerous statistical methods are used to analyze the data, following the empirical methodologies defined by Riezler and Hagmann (2021:11-80)¹⁰. First, the average values ($\bar{x}$ or $\bar{y}$) of the datasets are derived using and, which provides information about the data's central patterns. The formula then determines the correlation between the two variables, resulting in a correlation coefficient using Pearson coefficient correlation (r) that shows a strong positive association, as well as the adjusted correlation coefficient (R), finally the researcher used Cronbach's Alpha (α) which indicates strong internal consistency.

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Results:

The context of a speech, including the audience's social variables and the nature of the occasion, has a significant impact on how a speaker uses language. This is evident when comparing the speeches of Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama across three different contexts: Class Day's Graduation Ceremony, International Women's Day, and the Democratic National Convention. The analysis of speeches

reveals how context shapes language use as in:

1. Academic Graduation Ceremony: Both speakers tailor their language for a diverse, educated audience. Clinton employs vivid, metaphorical language and inclusive pronouns to build rapport but risks confusing listeners with her emotional responses. Obama uses a direct and structured approach, making relatable comparisons but sometimes loses engagement with her cautious tone.
2. International Women's Day: Addressing a feminist audience, Clinton's language becomes more layered, using inclusive pronouns and contrasts to emphasize unity and political stakes, while Obama maintains an engaging approach, balancing passion and reason with dramatic language and hyperbole.
3. Democratic National Convention: In this political setting, both adjust their rhetoric to align with political messaging. Clinton uses evocative language to reinforce key points but can be polarizing, while Obama employs rhythmic and authoritative language to rally support.

Overall, both speakers strategically adjust their styles based on the audience and occasion, highlighting the significant influence of context on rhetorical effectiveness. This shows that the context of a speech greatly influences a speaker's language. Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama strategically adjust their style, whether symbolic,

direct, authoritative, or engaging, based on the audience and occasion to communicate effectively. Recognizing these influences is key to assessing their rhetoric's effectiveness and impact.

The following is a Model of the difference of each occasion and language use of both speakers:

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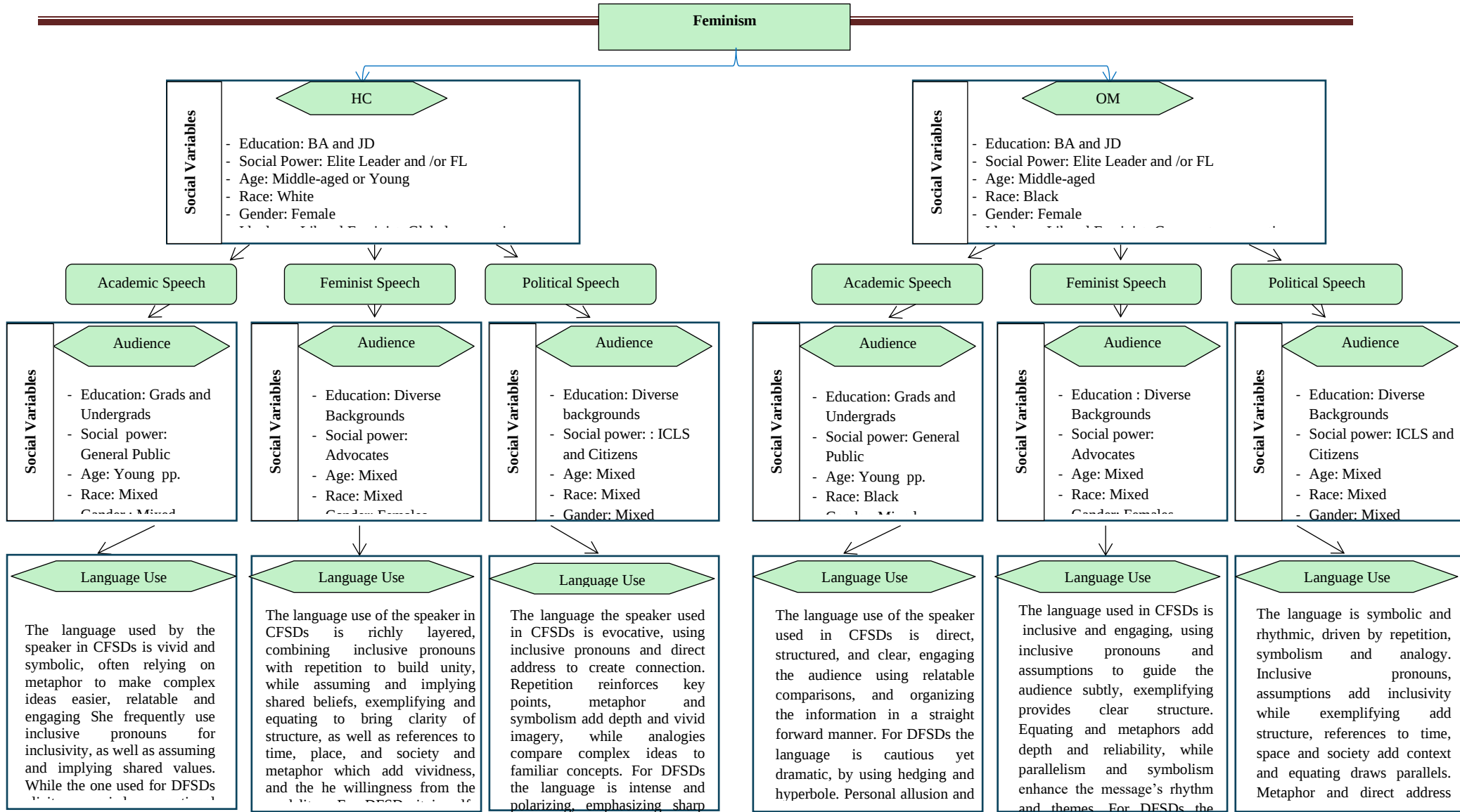


Figure 1: Differences of HC & MO and their Different Audiences with their Language Use Model

Quantitative Study

Figure 1: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of HC - Speech 1

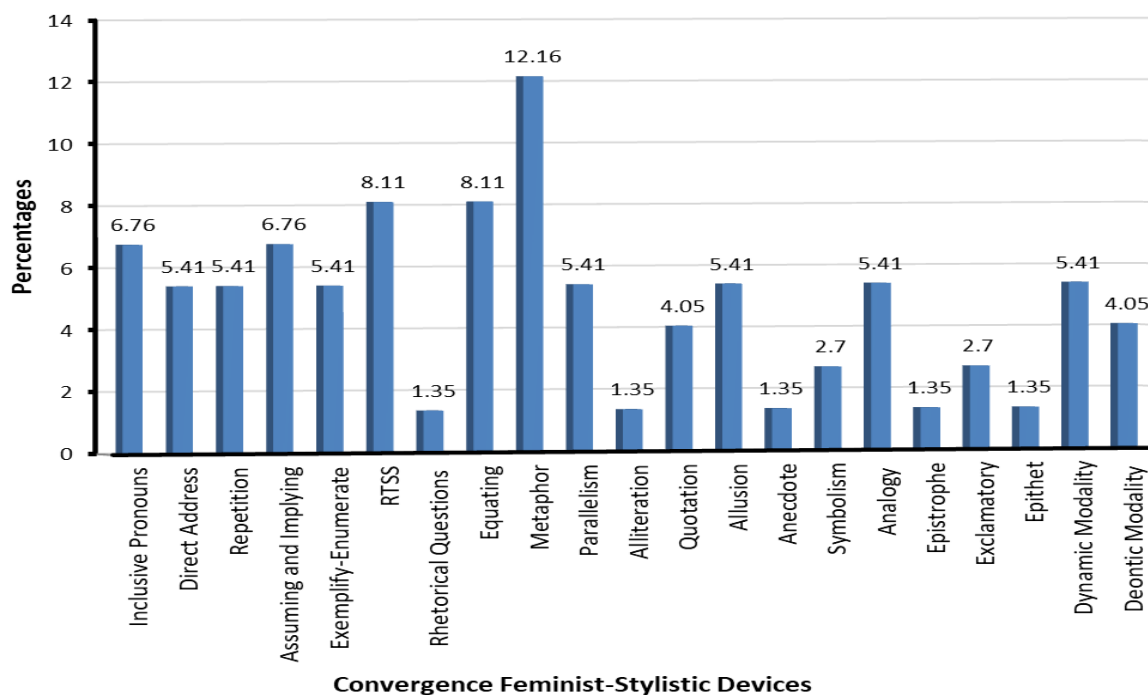
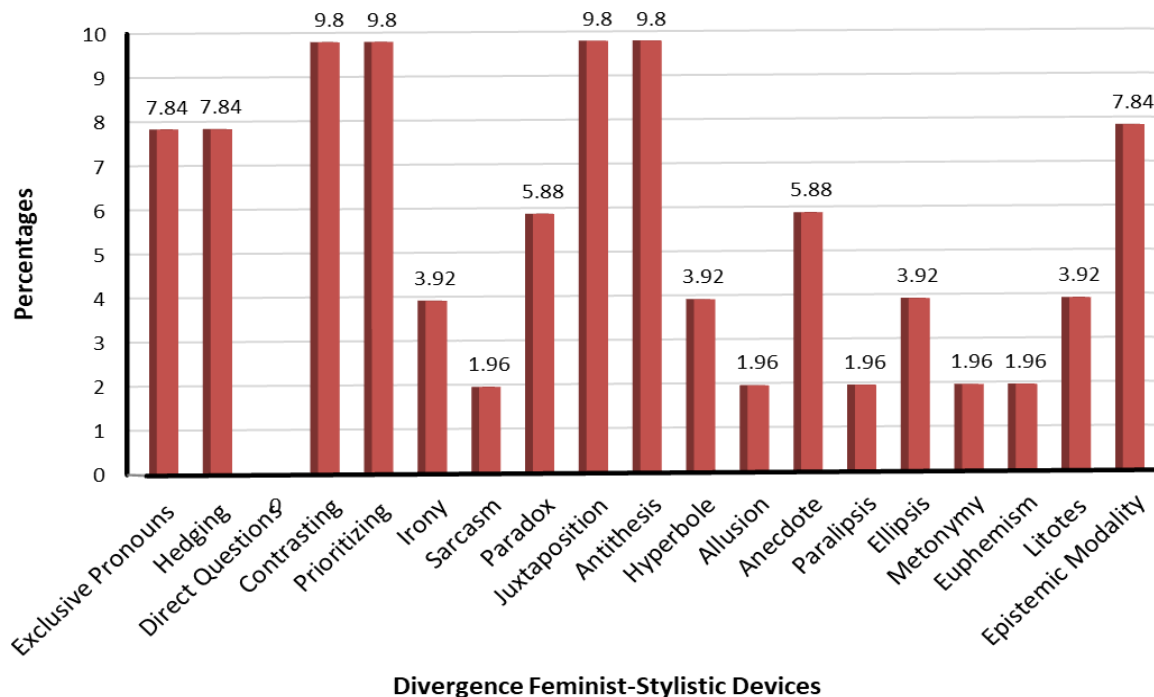


Figure 2: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of HC- Speech 1



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Figure 3: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 2

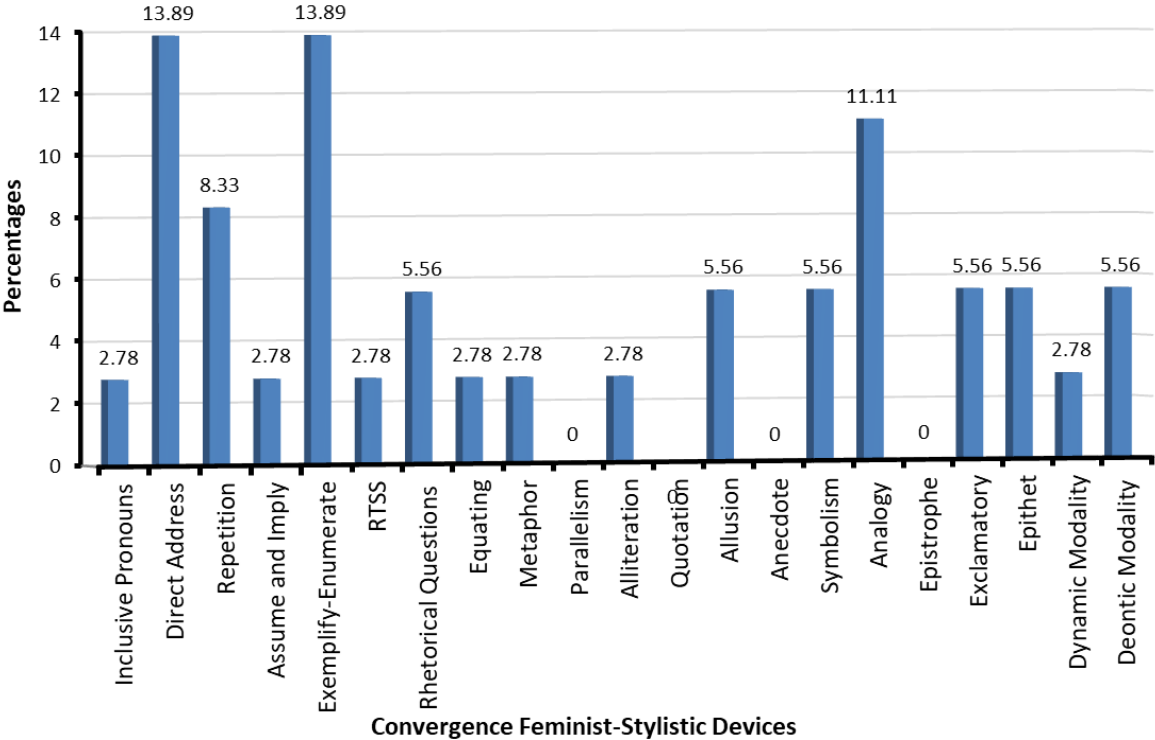


Figure 4: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 2

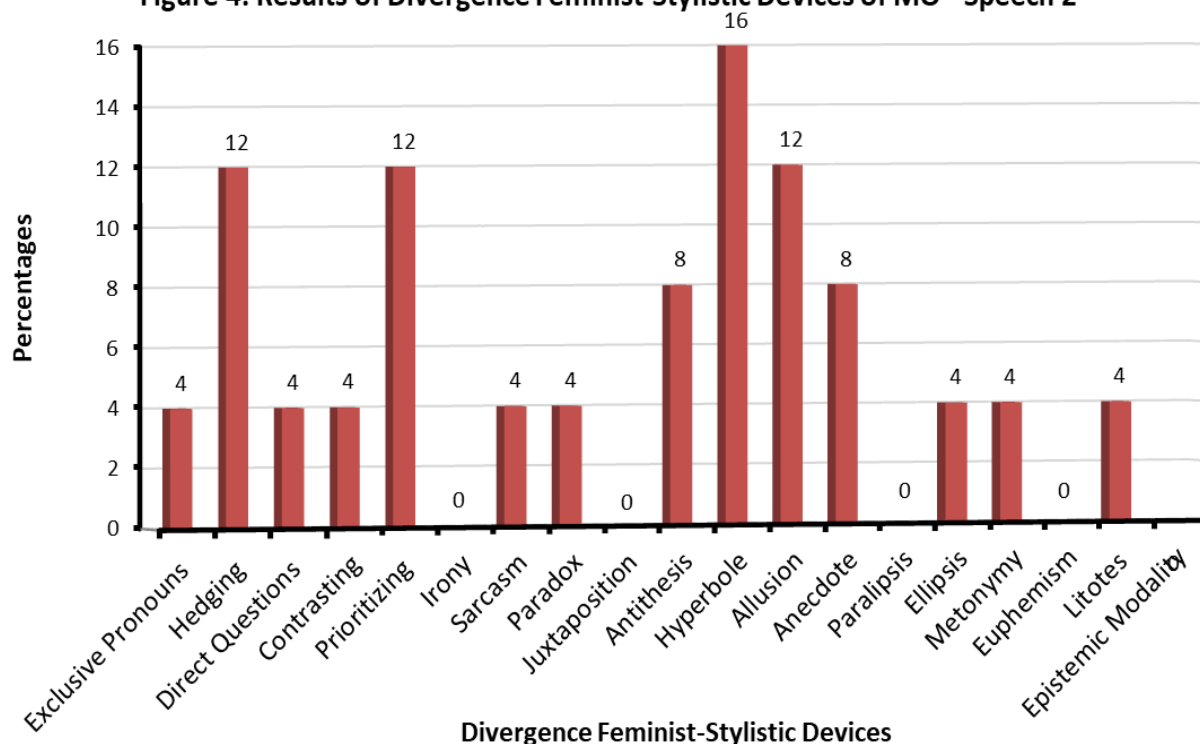
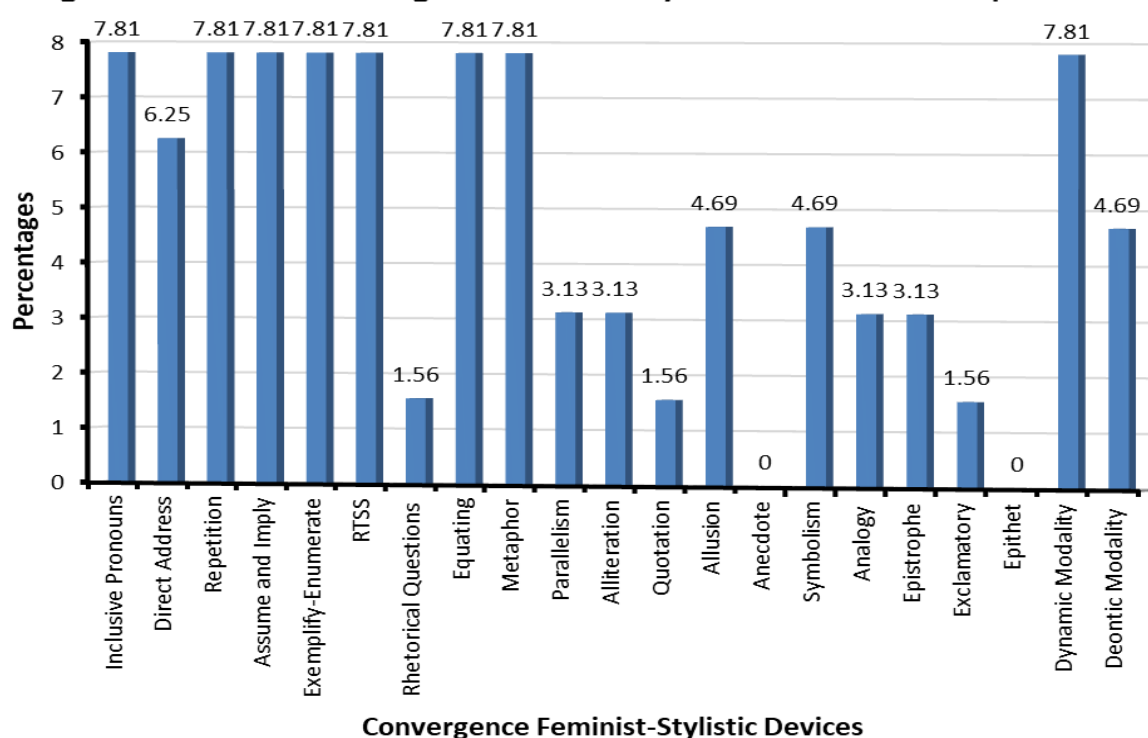


Figure 5: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of HC - Speech 3



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Figure 6: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of HC - Speech 3

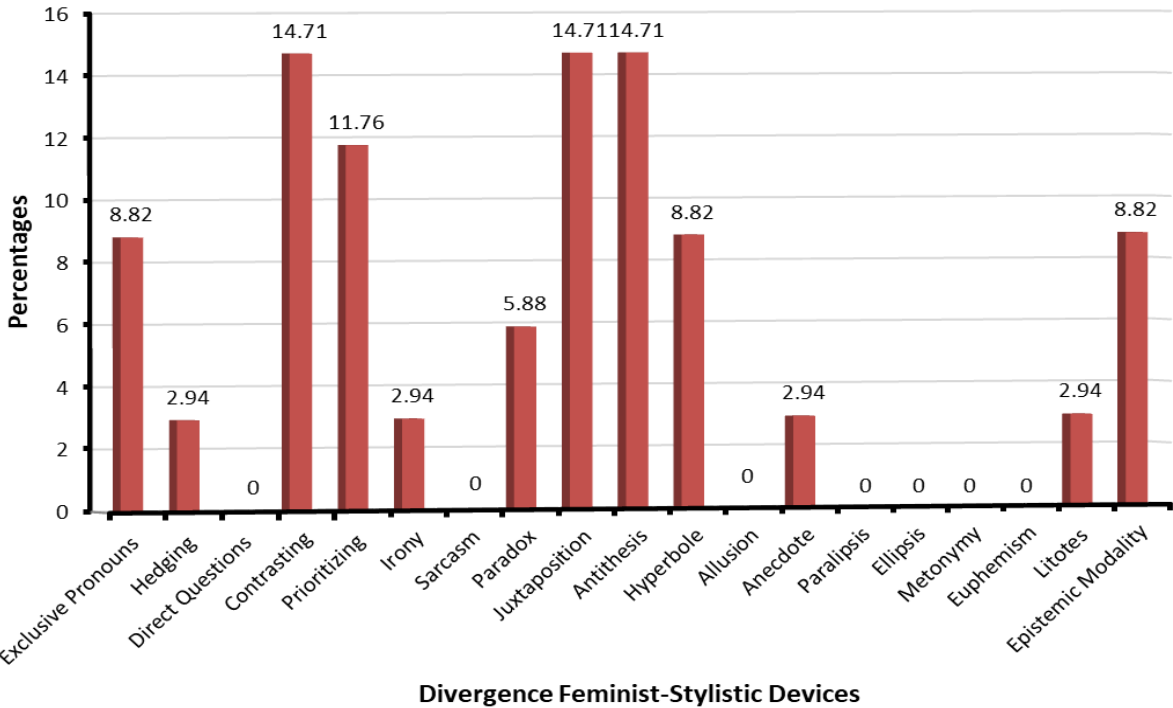


Figure 7: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 4

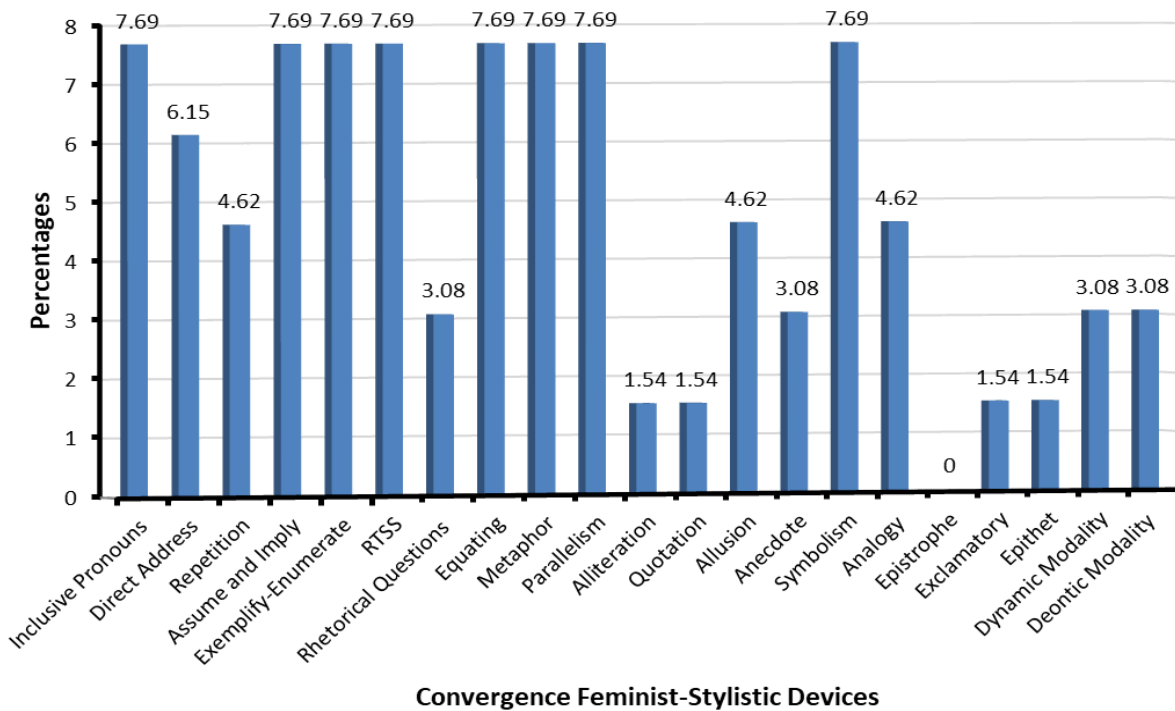
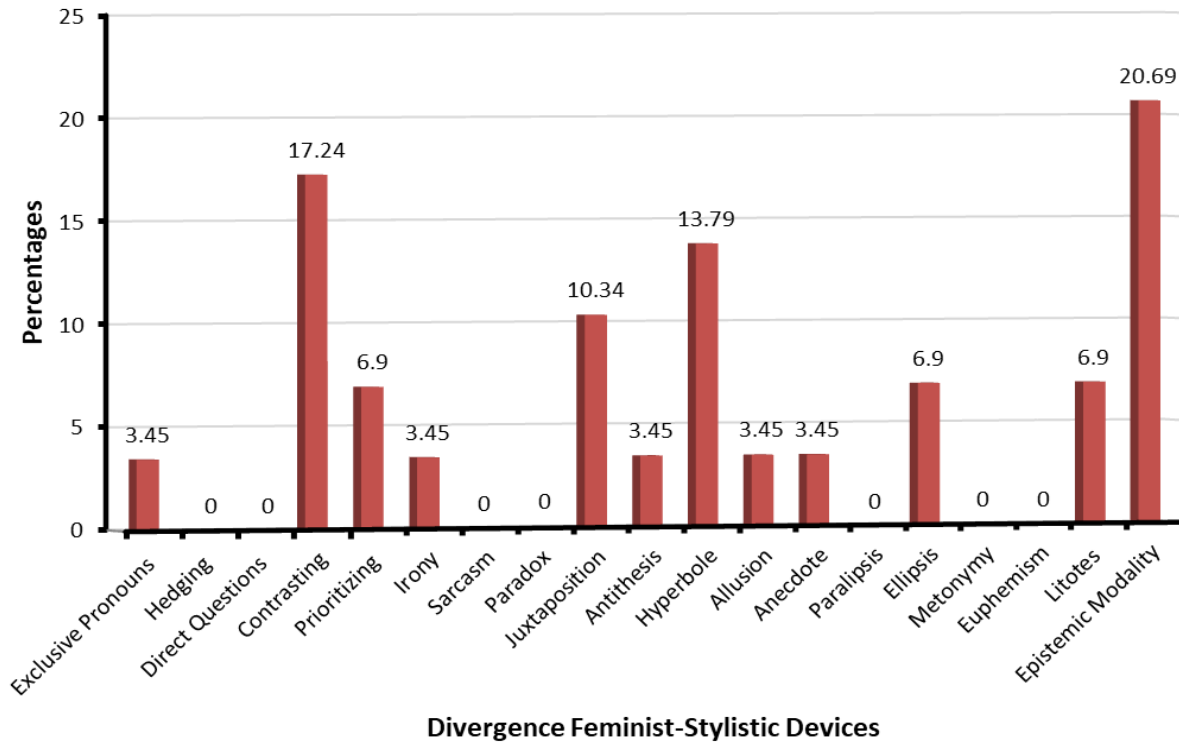


Figure 8: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 4



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Figure 9: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of HC - Speech 5

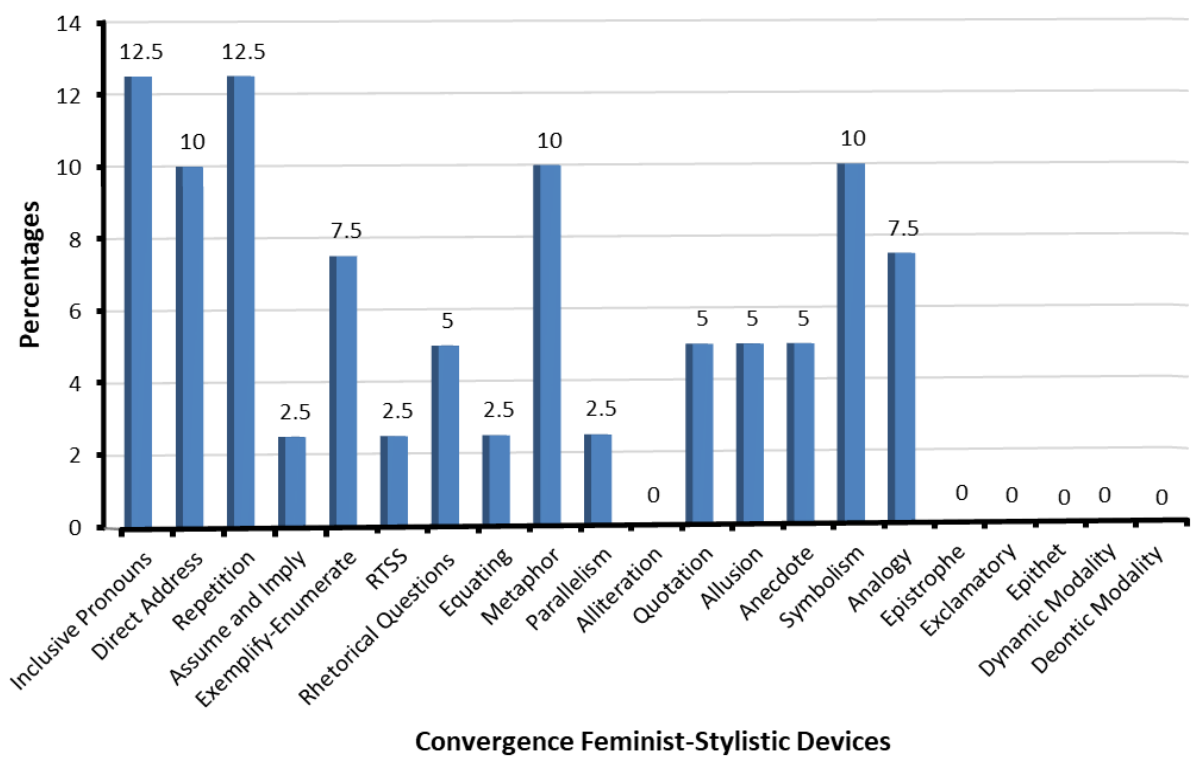


Figure 10: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices in HC - Speech 5

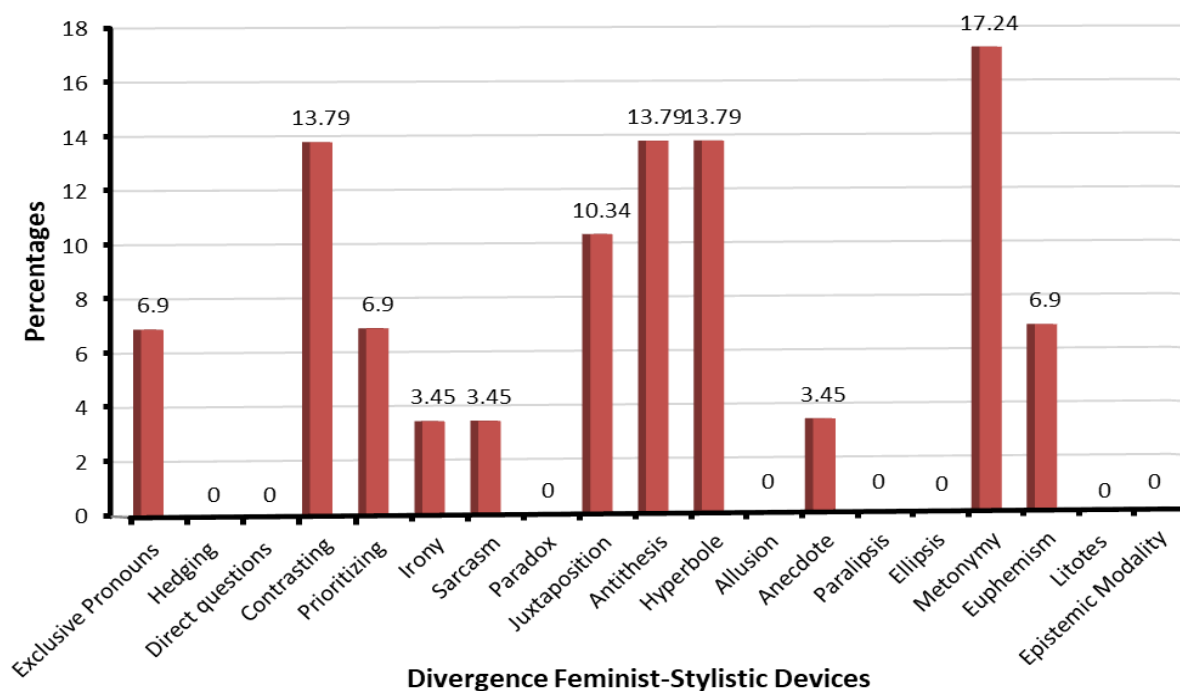
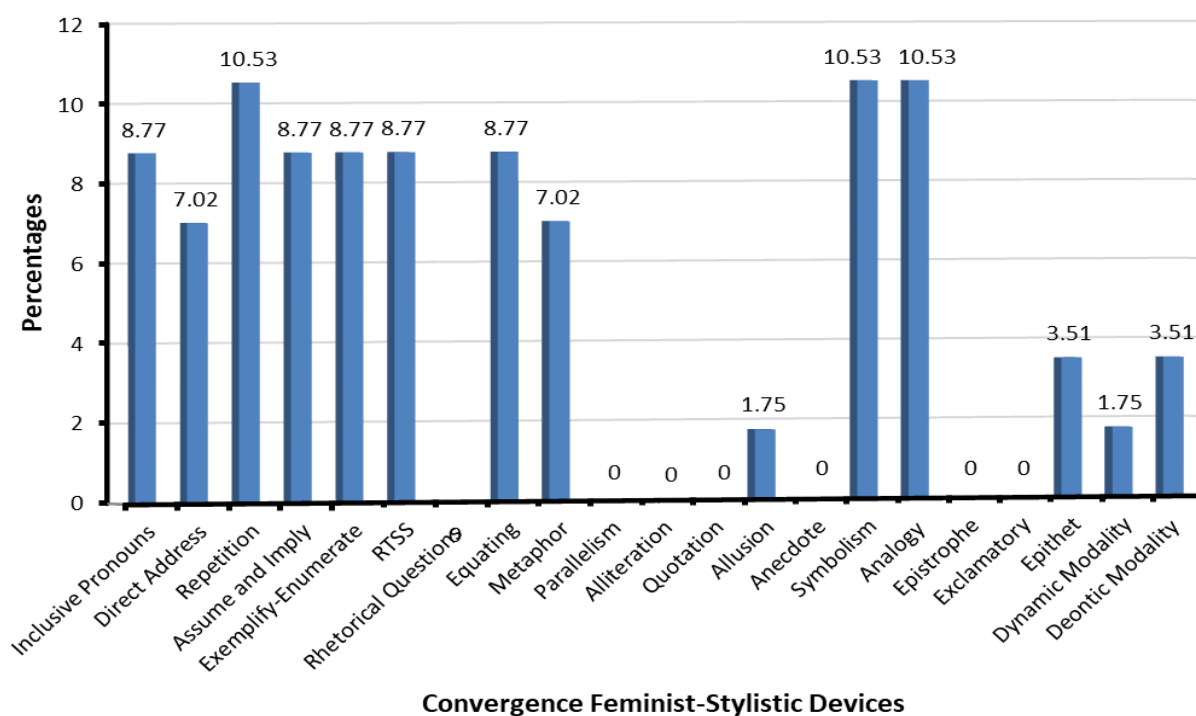


Figure 11: Results of Convergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 6

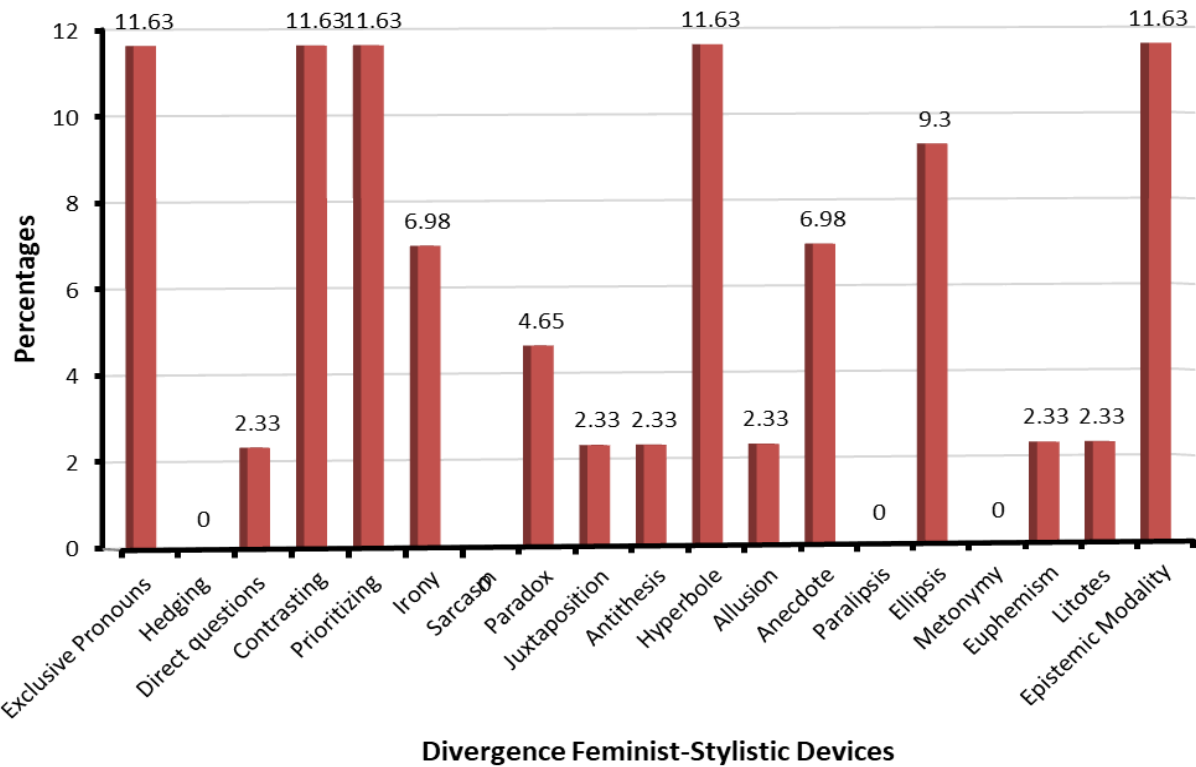


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Figure 12: Results of Divergence Feminist-Stylistic Devices of MO - Speech 6



Discussion:

The context of a speech, such as the audience’s demographics, social power, and occasion, significantly shapes each speaker’s language use. For Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama tactically adjust their language in different contexts like academic ceremonies, International Women’s Day, and the Democratic National Convention to align with their audience’s expectations and goals. Clinton often uses vivid, symbolic language and inclusive pronouns to connect with diverse groups, but her discourse devices can sometimes polarize or confuse. Conversely, Obama employs direct, structured language for clarity and engagement but uses dramatic contrasts and authoritative tones to emphasize key points, especially in political contexts. Both speakers demonstrate that language choice, whether inclusive, metaphorical, or authoritative, is strategically adapted to suit the specific social and ideological context of their audience, enhancing their ability to persuade, unite, or mobilize listeners effectively.

Academic speeches' convergence results show that:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} x_i}{21} = \frac{74}{21} = 3.52$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} y_i}{21} = \frac{36}{21} = 1.71$$

$$0.05r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{21} (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{21} (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{3.14}{\sqrt{(85.24)(44.29)}} =$$

This value indicates a very weak positive linear relationship between x_i and y_i .
the correlation is close to zero, suggesting that the variables do not have a significant
linear relationship.

$$0.1R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.05)}{0.05+1} =$$

The adjusted correlation R is low, reflecting that the weak positive correlation is
not substantially stronger after adjusting for the effects of potential distortions in the
data.

Academic speeches' divergence results:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} x_i}{19} = \frac{51}{19} = 2.68$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} y_i}{19} = \frac{25}{19} = 1.32$$

$$=0.14r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{19} (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{19} (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{4.89}{\sqrt{(50.11)(26.11)}}$$

This indicates a weak positive linear relationship. There is a marginally positive trend,
but it is not strong.

$$=0.24R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.14)}{(0.14)+1}$$

The adjusted correlation coefficient R is still relatively low but shows a somewhat
stronger positive relationship than what is indicated by r, suggesting a minor
improvement when accounting for data distortions.

Feminist speeches' convergence results:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} x_i}{21} = \frac{64}{21} = 3.05$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} y_i}{21} = \frac{65}{21} = 3.1$$

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$$0.7r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21}(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{21}(x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{21}(y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{44.9}{\sqrt{(66.95)(61.81)}} =$$

This value indicates a strong positive linear relationship between x_i and y_i . the correlation is substantial, suggesting that as x_i increases, y_i tends to increase accordingly.

$$0.82R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.7)}{0.7+1} =$$

The high adjusted correlation coefficient R confirms that the strong positive relationship observed with r is robust even after adjustments for potential distortions in the data.

Feminist speeches' divergence results:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} x_i}{21} = \frac{64}{21} = 3.05$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} y_i}{21} = \frac{65}{21} = 3.1$$

$$0.7r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21}(x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{21}(x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{21}(y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{44.91}{\sqrt{(66.95)(61.81)}} =$$

This value indicates a strong positive linear relationship between x_i and y_i . the correlation is substantial, suggesting that as x_i increases, y_i increases as well.

$$0.82R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.7)}{0.7+1} =$$

The high adjusted correlation coefficient R confirms that the strong positive relationship with r seen remains solid even after accounting for potential data distortions.

Political speeches' convergence results:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} x_i}{21} = \frac{40}{21} = 1.91$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} y_i}{21} = \frac{57}{21} = 2.71$$

$$0.62r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{21} (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{21} (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{21} (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{52.43}{\sqrt{(59.81)(120.29)}} =$$

This value indicates a moderate to strong positive linear relationship. There is a considerable positive trend, suggesting a notable correlation between the variables.

$$0.76R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.62)}{0.62+1} =$$

The adjusted correlation coefficient R is high, reinforcing the strong positive relationship. The data adjustments confirm that the correlation observed with r is significant and reliable.

Political speeches' divergence results:

$$1.53\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} x_i}{19} = \frac{29}{19} =$$

$$\bar{y} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{n} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} y_i}{19} = \frac{43}{19} = 2.26$$

$$0.15r = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{19} (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{19} (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^{19} (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} = \frac{9.37}{\sqrt{(52.74)(71.68)}} =$$

This indicates a weak positive linear relationship. There is a slight tendency for the variables to move in the same direction, but the correlation is minimal.

$$0.26R = \frac{2r}{r+1} = \frac{2(0.15)}{0.15+1} =$$

The adjusted correlation coefficient R is higher than r but still reflects a weak positive relationship. This suggests a minor improvement in the correlation strength after adjustment.

The variation in the results of each speech context reflects that the setting (e.g. academic ceremonies, IWD speeches, DNC speeches), demographics or the characteristics of the audience and the speaker, effect on the application of each strategy and then on each feminist stylistic device (the speaker choices in language use).

Conclusion:

The analysis of the speeches said by Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama across various contexts demonstrates the profound influence of situational factors on language use and rhetorical strategies. The findings underscore the importance of

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context in the use of FSDs and accommodation strategies, and how the two speakers adapt their language based on the setting (e.g., academic ceremonies, International Women's Day, Democratic National Convention) and the characteristics of their audience. For example, in a formal setting like the DNC, both Clinton and Obama might use more authoritative and policy-focused language, whereas in a more informal or celebratory context, like an academic ceremony, they might focus on inclusivity and motivation. For the International Women's Day (IWD) context, both Hillary Clinton (HC) and Michelle Obama (MO) strategically adapt their language to emphasize inclusivity, empowerment, advocacy, and solidarity, aligning with the themes of IWD. On this occasion, they use Feminist Stylistic Devices (FSDs) that resonate with the audience's expectations of unity, gender equality, women empowerment, and the celebration of women's achievements. This adaptability is key to their effectiveness in achieving their communicative goals, whether it is to unite, persuade, or mobilize their listeners.

In formal contexts, such as the Democratic National Convention, they employ authoritative and policy-oriented language to convey seriousness and rally support. In contrast, during academic ceremonies, their focus shifts toward inclusivity and motivation, using language that fosters connection with a diverse audience. The International Women's Day speeches particularly highlight their strategic use of Feminist Stylistic Devices (FSDs), which emphasize themes of empowerment, unity, and advocacy, resonating deeply with the audience's expectations for gender equality and celebration of women's achievements.

Overall, the adaptability exhibited by Clinton and Obama underscores the critical role of context in shaping rhetorical effectiveness. Their ability to tailor language to fit various audiences and occasions not only enhances their

communicative goals but also highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics of context in public speaking.

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تحليل إسلوبى نسوي للموائمة في خطابات عامة لقيادات نسوية¹

حوراء محمد طالب

الأستاذ الدكتور أحمد صاحب جابر مبارك

المستخلص:

انطلاقاً من اعتقادنا بأن القيادات النسوية تختار نوعاً خاصاً من استخدام اللغة، وإثباتاً لأن لكل واحدة منهن أسلوباً خاصاً من أجل التقارب مع الجمهور أو الانحراف عنه، وأن كل مناسبة تحدد هذا الاختلاف، فإن هذه الدراسة تطبق الأسلوبية النسوية لفحص الموائمة باستخدام استراتيجيتي: التقارب والتباعد، من خلال 21 أداة أسلوبية للتقارب و19 أداة أسلوبية للتباعد في ست خطابات عامة ألقتها قائدتان بارزتان. وتوضح هذه الأدوات التي تمتد على المستويات الصوتية والدلالية والنحوية، كيف يمكن للغة أن تتقارب مع الجمهور أو تتباعد عنه. و على حد علم الباحث، فإن فكرة (تحليل أسلوبى نسوي للموائمة في خطابات عامة لقيادات نسوية) لم تحظ بالاهتمام اللازم، مما خلق فجوة تحاول الدراسة الحالية سدها.

وعليه تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التحقيق في كيفية تأثير سياق كل خطاب على استخدام المتحدث لأدوات الأسلوبية النسوية و استراتيجيات الموائمة التواصلية، مع التأكيد على أن سياق كل خطاب ضروري في تشكيل استخدام المتحدث لأدوات الأسلوبية النسوية واستراتيجيات الموائمة، ودفعه إلى ملائمة لغته من خلال الشمولية، أو الدعوة، أو الرمزية، أو السلطة، أو الدعاية السياسية تلبية لتوقعات الجمهور وأهدافه الخاصة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هيلاري كلينتون، ميشيل أوباما، التحليل الأسلوبى النسوي، نظرية الموائمة التواصلية، التقارب، التباعد.