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The Language of Advocacy in the US Women's Caucus: A Stylistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT: This study provides a stylistic examination of advocacy speech within the U.S. Women's Caucus, concentrating on the role of linguistic choices in advancing women's rights and contesting gender-based disparities in political settings. Utilizing Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic approach, the study analyzes specific excerpts from a Beijing +30 Shadow Report generated by the U.S. Women's Caucus. The approach emphasizes the various types and functions of advocacy, specifically structural, evidence-based, evaluative, and policy-oriented advocacy, and examines their manifestation through vocabulary choice, grammatical structure, rhetorical techniques, and contextual framing. The results indicate that advocacy discourse is marked by the deliberate employment of evaluative lexis, abstraction, modality, enumeration, and statistical evidence to establish legitimacy, allocate responsibility, and stimulate institutional action. The research illustrates that stylistic choices are not neutral; rather, they are ideologically driven, serving as persuasive instruments that construct gendered identities and reveal structural inequities. This study emphasizes the significance of stylistics in elucidating the role of language as a potent tool in feminist political discourse, by employing a stringent stylistic framework to political advocacy texts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The advocacy for women's rights has gained prominence in American politics, with caucuses functioning as vital platforms for negotiation, representation, and the pursuit of gender equality. This is particularly applicable to women's caucuses. Members of these groups create collaborative environments that enable them to champion causes often overlooked in politics. In this context, language functions as a tool for advocacy and the formation of identity. It can sustain prevailing power structures, while it can also be employed to demolish them in a significant, transformational manner. Despite comprehensive research on the political and policy ramifications of women's caucuses, there exists a notable deficiency in studies concerning speech advocacy linguistics and its political style. The discourse of political caucuses originates from and is subject to restricted analysis through a stylistic lens, particularly regarding elements such as diction, syntax, and the application of rhetorical devices. Consequently, it is essential to investigate stylistics in this domain to delineate discourse on women's rights advocacy, the formation of gendered identities, and power dynamics. This study seeks to examine American caucus advocacy from a stylistic perspective. Specifically, it aims to:

1. Identify the linguistic characteristics employed in caucus speeches to advocate for women's rights.
2. Investigate how these features function to shape gendered identities and either promote or contest patriarchal norms.

The discourse of caucuses is posited to exhibit intentional linguistic and stylistic selections that encode and shape gendered identities. These selections, articulated through diction, grammar, and rhetorical techniques, simultaneously mirror and

challenge patriarchal frameworks, so serving as potent instruments of advocacy in altering public perception and impacting policy.

2. LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Language and style are crucial elements of communication, as they augment a writer's or speaker's efficacy in conveying messages to their audience. They facilitate the clear and readable transmission of ideas while allowing the communicator to access and present information that is pertinent and significant to the audience's requirements (Ndimele, 2003). Language is characterized by numerous scholars as a system of systems; Hockett (1958) describes it as 'a system of systems' and 'a complicated system of habits,' whereas Wardhaugh (1972) defines language as '*a system of arbitrary vocal symbols employed for human communication.*'

Communication encompasses speech, writing, and signing, with writing facilitating the clear and effective expression of thoughts and feelings. The caliber of writing is contingent upon the chosen style, which assesses the robustness of the argument. Style refers to the method by which language is employed to communicate meaning to the reader, establishing a connection between form and meaning. It encompasses selections that indicate variation in meaning, including lexical elements, grammatical constructions, graphological symbols, and rhetorical devices. Consequently, style encompasses the aggregate of linguistic characteristics unique to an author and the voice perceived by the reader. The distinguishing factor that differentiates one writer from another is style, which is examined by the field of Stylistics (Hamawand, 2024).

2.1 Stylistics

The study of stylistics investigates the ways in which language is utilized in a variety of modes of communication, including verbal and written forms. It takes into consideration the linguistic and structural decisions that authors make, as well as the ways in which these decisions interact with one another to generate what is referred to as a style (Leech and Short 2007: 1). It investigates the attribution of stylistic elements in language. The genre, the context, and other frameworks, such as the historical time and the author, are all things that are investigated and incorporated into this study. This approach takes a methodical approach to analyzing style and makes use of a wide range of linguistic models and approaches in order to comprehend style in its most comprehensive form (Leech: 2008, p.54). The use of language in a communication setting is another aspect that is described by the field of stylistics. This analysis takes into consideration the situational context as well as the author's intention to describe the effect of communication. It describes the ways in which authors choose deliberate and exact linguistic choices in order to convey their thoughts and feelings, as well as the ways in which these choices assist the reader (Hamawand, 2024, page 6). In the middle of the 20th century, stylistics evolved as a response to ambiguous and impressionistic literary criticism. It sought to strike a balance between personal interpretation and language reference (Giovannelli, Mason, & Clayton, 2018, p. 3). In a similar vein, Paul Simpson (2014) makes the observation that the field of stylistics is constructed upon three core principles: rigorouslyness, retrievability, and reproducibility. In contrast to rigid analysis, which is the outcome of a set of criteria that is generally acknowledged within the field of stylistics, retrievable analysis places a greater emphasis on the explicit framework and terms of

2.1.1. Leech & Short's Stylistic Model

Leech and Short's stylistic model offers a systematic and comprehensive framework for the linguistic analysis of texts by connecting formal language elements to their stylistic and interpretive functions. The approach, rooted in the tradition of linguistic stylistics, asserts that stylistic analysis must begin with meticulous description prior to interpretation, so guaranteeing analytical objectivity and methodological rigor (Leech & Short, 2007).

The core of this concept is the Checklist of Linguistic and Stylistic Categories, which categorizes textual analysis into four primary levels: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. The approach analyzes word selection at the lexical level, focusing on evaluative adjectives, abstract nouns, and ideological keywords, which are crucial in advocacy discourse since they include values, attitudes, and moral judgments. Grammatical categories emphasize sentence structure, transitivity patterns, voice (active/passive), and modality, all of which elucidate agency, responsibility, and power dynamics within the text.

The approach meticulously considers figures of speech, including metaphor, simile, and parallelism, regarding them as stylistic elements that enhance persuasive and emotional resonance. In advocacy texts, these rhetorical methods are frequently utilized to delineate social issues, forge collective identities, and validate appeals for political action. Cohesion and context pertain to the interconnection of textual parts via reference, repetition, and discourse markers, alongside the influence of stylistic choices determined by the communicative context and target audience (Leech & Short, 2007).

Leech and Short's stylistic paradigm combines linguistic description with interpretive analysis, allowing academics to reveal how meaning is generated through systematic language patterns. This concept is particularly effective in feminist campaigning for elucidating how stylistic choices operate ideologically to emphasize women's rights, contest institutional injustices, and galvanize support in political debate.

2.2 Advocacy

The term advocacy derives from the Latin word *advocare*, signifying the deliberate act of influencing a decision-maker, stakeholder, or audience to undertake activities that either promote or hinder the implementation of human rights (Bysaha, 2023, p. 1). The provision of evidence-based recommendations to decision makers, stakeholders, and their influencers is an advocacy process (Bochenek, 2019). Advocacy seeks to influence government, societal perceptions, power dynamics, social interactions, and institutional operations. Advocacy occasionally emerges to confront inequalities, discrimination, and injustices, or to uphold the criteria for a healthy environment, social justice, or democracy by empowering participants, particularly women and children (McKenzie, Lohman, Park, Phillips, & Prestholdt, 2011, p. 92). Advocacy can be defined as a systematic array of acts aimed at altering public policy, societal attitudes, or political processes through interconnected initiatives that pursue change at several levels. This include, but is not confined to, enhancing community awareness, through which the community exerts direct pressure on the State to respond more effectively in preventing and penalizing human rights violations, as well as to shape law and policy development. It is an active process involving multiple interconnected arrangements aimed at influencing decision-making and the change process (Sharma, 1995, p. 12).

2.2.1 Functions of Advocacy

Advocacy is categorized into three types: individual, neighboring, and structural.

1. Individual advocacy entails professionals championing modifications to address a patient's unfulfilled needs, impacting both the patient and their relatives.
2. Adjacent advocacy, conversely, modifies the patient's surroundings without necessarily amending policies. It frequently entails mobilizing others to advocate for individuals or groups with particular needs, although it fails to achieve lasting, structural transformation.
3. Structural advocacy fundamentally transforms policies, regulations, and resources, diminishing the probability of future unjust or inequitable health outcomes. Instances of structural advocacy encompass physicians advocating for a ballot initiative to increase tobacco prices in Colorado, a Canadian neurosurgeon modifying building codes to avert children from falling from windows, and altering access to dialysis for undocumented individuals or amending water supply systems to prevent lead poisoning.

Earnest, Wong, Federico, and Cervantes (2022, p. 208)

2.2.2 The Functions of Advocacy

Advocacy has many functions as follows:-

- I. Advocacy is essential for empowering individuals, safeguarding rights, shaping policy, advancing social justice, and enhancing openness and accountability.
- II. It empowers marginalized individuals by enabling them to articulate their needs and experiences, and to engage in decisions regarding their care, treatment, or social conditions.
- III. Advocates provide the recognition and protection of persons' rights, thereby preventing abuse, neglect, or discrimination.
- IV. They impact policy and systemic change by altering legislation, institutional practices, raising awareness of concerns, rallying support, and advocating for reforms that benefit individuals and communities.

- V. Advocacy seeks to foster more inclusive and fair communities by affirming personal experiences and narratives, particularly for excluded groups.

(Newbigging & Ridley, 2018, p. 38)

3. THE MODEL

The study adopts Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model as its principal framework for analysis. This model provides a systematic and linguistically grounded approach to stylistic investigation by linking formal language features to their functional and interpretive significance. It is particularly suited to the analysis of advocacy discourse, as it allows for a detailed examination of how linguistic choices contribute to persuasion, evaluation, and ideological positioning within political texts.

Leech and Short's model is organized around a Checklist of Linguistic and Stylistic Categories, which guides the analysis through multiple levels of language. These include lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. By examining these interconnected levels, the model enables the analyst to move from detailed description to interpretive explanation, ensuring methodological rigor and analytical transparency (Leech & Short, 2007).

In applying this model to the context of advocacy discourse produced by the U.S. Women's Caucus, the study adapts the checklist to focus on stylistic features that are central to political and feminist advocacy. At the lexical level, the analysis examines word choice, including evaluative adjectives, abstract nouns, and value-laden terms that articulate commitment to equality, justice, and women's rights. At the grammatical level, attention is given to sentence types, transitivity patterns, voice, and modality, as these structures play a key role in constructing agency, assigning responsibility, and legitimizing political action.

The model further incorporates an analysis of figures of speech, such as metaphor, parallelism, and repetition, which are treated as stylistic resources that intensify persuasion and emotional appeal in advocacy texts. Finally, the study considers cohesion and context, examining how reference, repetition, and discourse markers contribute to textual coherence and how stylistic choices are shaped by the institutional and political context of the U.S. Women's Caucus.

By relying solely on Leech and Short's stylistic model, this study ensures a focused and consistent analytical framework. The model enables a comprehensive examination of advocacy discourse by revealing how patterned linguistic choices function stylistically to promote ideological positions, mobilize audiences, and advance the political objectives of women's advocacy within a legislative settings.

3.1 Data Analysis

Extract 1

““The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes women’s persistent economic marginality as one of its key areas of concern.”

This extract is an example of structural advocacy since it recognizes the economic marginalization of women as a systematic and institutional issue rather than a problem that is experienced by individuals. Establishing economic disparity as a genuine policy concern that requires intervention is the core function of this organization, which also serves as a problem identification and agenda setting organization.

Lexically, the use of abstract and evaluative concepts such as "persistent" and "economic marginality" emphasizes continuity and structural depth. This is according to the stylistic analysis conducted by Leech and Short. The verb "recognizes" is used to delegate authority to institutions, which helps to strengthen legitimacy. When it comes to grammar, the declarative sentence form and the straightforward transitivity pattern bring the institutional actor to the forefront, which lends the statement an air of impartiality and authority. Within the context of the discourse, the reference to the Beijing Platform places it within a global feminist framework, which strengthens the persuasive power of the discourse.

Extract 2

“The Beijing Platform for Action expects governments and non-governmental enterprises to remove inequality and discrimination at all levels on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, national origin, age, and disability.”

This extract exemplifies structural advocacy, as it explicitly calls for institutional action to dismantle discrimination. Its primary function is accountability and obligation, assigning responsibility to governments and non-governmental actors. At the lexical level, *“expects”* functions as a modalized verb expressing obligation. The extensive enumeration of social categories operates as a stylistic intensifier, emphasizing the breadth of inequality. Grammatically, the infinitive clause *“to remove”* constructs action as necessary and goal-directed. Cohesively, the repetition of inclusive categories aligns the extract with intersectional feminist discourse.

Extract 3

“Women working full-time and year-round earn an average of 84 cents for every dollar a man earns in the US, and in over 90% of occupations, women earn less than men.”

This extract represents evidence-based advocacy, functioning to legitimize claims through empirical proof. It supports structural advocacy by demonstrating the material consequences of gender discrimination in economic terms. Lexically, numerical data (*“84 cents,” “90%”*) enhances credibility and objectivity. The repetition of *“earn”* reinforces thematic focus. Grammatically, the coordinated clause structure balances two related facts, while the present tense universalizes inequality. Stylistically, the reliance on factual register rather than emotive language strengthens persuasive appeal within policy discourse.

Extract 4

“The inadequacy of these measures and the need for more robust family support came to light with the COVID-19 pandemic”

This extract performs evaluative and reform-oriented advocacy, highlighting policy failure and the necessity for improvement. Its function is problem escalation, using crisis to justify renewed intervention. Lexical items such as *“inadequacy”* and *“robust”* are evaluative and judgmental, signaling criticism. Grammatically, the nominalization of *“inadequacy”* abstracts responsibility, framing the issue as systemic. Temporally, the reference to the COVID-19 pandemic contextualizes urgency and legitimizes critique.

Extract 5

“Disaggregated gender data focusing on age, dis/ability, migration status, religion, and location in the US can provide useful policy directions for women’s greater inclusion in the economy.”

This extract reflects strategic and forward-looking policy advocacy, with the function of recommendation and capacity building. It promotes evidence-based governance as a solution to inequality. Lexically, technical terms such as *“disaggregated gender data”* convey expertise and institutional authority. The modal verb *“can”* introduces cautious optimism rather than imposition. The cumulative listing maintains thematic cohesion with earlier extracts. Stylistically, the measured tone enhances credibility and aligns the text with policy-oriented discourse.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The stylistic analysis of the chosen excerpts indicates that the advocacy within the discourse of the U.S. Women’s Caucus is primarily structural and policy-focused, rather than individualistic or peripheral. In all five extracts, women’s economic inequality is always shown to be a systemic problem that is built into institutional practices, labor markets, and policy frameworks. This substantiates the theory that caucus advocacy employs intentional linguistic selections to frame gender inequity as a communal and structural issue for legislative response.

The frequent use of abstract and evaluative terms such as economic marginality, inequality, discrimination, insufficiency, and inclusion shows that the speech has a certain ideological bent. These words help turn personal experiences into generic

situations, which makes advocacy claims more credible. The use of technical and policy-oriented language, especially in Extract 5, puts the conversation in an institutional and expert register, which makes it more credible and authoritative.

The study reveals a grammatical tendency for declarative phrases, nominalization, and modal verbs such as "expects" and "can." These grammatical constructions have different advocacy functions, such as putting the blame on institutions, making people feel obligated without forcing them to do something, and suggesting answers in a careful and planned way. Using the present tense, especially in Extract 3, makes inequality seem like a normal part of life rather than something that happened in the past.

From a rhetorical point of view, listing things and using statistics are two important stylistic tools. Long lists of social categories stress intersectionality, and numbers give empirical evidence that makes arguments more convincing. Instead of using emotive language, the discourse uses a factual and objective tone, which is in line with the rules of communication in policy advocacy and legislative settings.

When talking about global frameworks like the Beijing Platform for Action and crises like the COVID-19 epidemic, these references serve to legitimate advocacy demands and make them more urgent. These contextual anchors strengthen the ideological stance of the discourse and connect national advocacy to global obligations and current issues.

In general, the data show that the style choices used in caucus advocacy discourse are planned and methodical. Language is used not only to talk about inequality, but also to build accountability, make reform seem right, and get institutions to change.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined advocacy discourse in the U.S. Women's Caucus from a stylistic perspective, employing Leech and Short's (2007) model to analyze how linguistic choices function within feminist political advocacy. The analysis has shown that caucus advocacy is predominantly structural in nature, framing women's economic inequality as a systemic issue that demands policy intervention rather than individual adjustment.

The findings confirm that stylistic features such as evaluative lexis, abstraction, modality, enumeration, and statistical evidence play a central role in shaping advocacy messages. These features enable speakers and writers to construct authoritative, credible, and persuasive discourse that challenges patriarchal norms while promoting gender equality. Through deliberate stylistic selection, advocacy discourse simultaneously reflects existing power relations and seeks to transform them.

By demonstrating how language operates as a strategic tool in political advocacy, this study highlights the relevance of stylistic analysis beyond literary texts and affirms its value in examining institutional and policy-oriented discourse. The research contributes to feminist stylistics by showing how advocacy is linguistically crafted in legislative contexts and opens avenues for further research into comparative caucus discourse, cross-cultural advocacy styles, and multimodal political communication.

The study underscores that advocacy is not only enacted through policy proposals and institutional action, but also through **language itself**, which functions as a powerful medium for constructing gendered realities and advancing social change.

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