***Gender, Power and Political Speech: Woman and Language in
the 2015 UK General Election***

**Deborah Cameron and Sylvia Shaw (2016)
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Reviewed by Lei Fan and Weiwei Fan

Addressing the relationship between gender, speech, and politics, *Gender, Power and Political Speech: Woman and Language in the 2015 UK General Election* explores the influence of gender on political speech by analysing the performance of three female party leaders who took part in televised debates during the 2015 UK General Election (GE) campaign. The book pursues two aims: first, to find out whether women have ‘a different voice’ from men in the debates; and second, to reveal how the media coverage of the campaign takes up women’s voices, which in turn has great impact on shaping people’s perception on female politicians.

The book consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 raises the major research concerns, defines the key terms such as ‘voice’, sets the theoretical framework, and introduces the methodology of the current research. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of the linguistic behaviour of the party leaders in two televised debates in the GE2015 campaign by closely observing the distribution of their speaking turns and speaking time, and examining their use of adversarial and cooperative strategies. Chapter 3 studies the representation of the three female party leaders in a sample of campaign coverage taken from UK national newspapers. It focuses on the rhetorical and linguistic devices recurred in the commentary on women. Chapter 4,

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the concluding chapter, recaps the key findings, stresses the speech articulation and authenticity of the female political leaders, and discusses possible implications of the research in real life practice.

The book achieves its aims through the four chapters. The empirical study impresses readers with its meticulous representation of the party leader debates, and its new findings may challenge some perceptions and the stereotype people have on women's language. The book hence makes an important contribution to the descriptive research on gender language in political institutions, and, specifically, stands out from at least three perspectives.

First, the book distinguishes itself in the studies of gender and speech style by means of original inspections to female party leader performances in a uniquely chosen occasion to give a real sound of their voices. Although different gender speech styles have been investigated in previous studies (Gilligan 1982; Tannen 1990; Grey 1992), and women's language has been touched upon in self-report manner in political institutions (Childs 2004), scant attention has been paid to the real turn-by-turn talk-in-interaction performance of women politicians. The book fills this gap with on-spot evidence and description of women politicians' turn-taking and adversarial debate strategies. In particular, the explicit analysis of female politician speech in the book has addressed several intractable issues in gender speech research, such as the way in which women's 'different voice' has been stereotyped as more personal, supportive, cooperative and less abstruse (Childs 2004). The empirical study of the book proves that the adversarial language is not assigned exclusively to male party leaders. Rather, female leaders are responsible for some of the most 'aggravated' cases in the debate, such as interruption, raising the voice, and continuing to speak after the moderator had already given the floor to other speakers. In other words, the book paints a picture in which male-female similarities appear much more than their differences. Another example is the representation of female party leaders by the newspapers in the campaign. One issue of controversy is media's tendency to trivialise female politicians by focusing on their appearance and their personal/domestic lives (Jackson and Thorsen 2015). To verify this point, the authors investigate relevant newspaper reports they sampled which identify a mixture of women's images, reflecting not only the usual parading gender-biased attitudes but also the 'iron lady' recognition and approval. The findings help form a balanced criterion of gender report in political contexts.

Second, the dual approach design adopted in this book is methodologically innovative for gender language related research. Chapter 2 approaches male and female languages with discursive conversation analy-

sis on selected debate segments, while Chapter 3 does so with discourse analysis on corresponding newspaper reports. These two approaches offer complementary viewpoints on gender language at both micro and macro levels, focusing on performance and representation respectively. The analysis of the extracts from two TV debates transcription in Chapter 2 highlights the intricate turn allocation mechanism, which cannot be achieved via the analyses on newspaper reports in Chapter 3. In addition, the dual approach makes a clear comparison of practical and perceptual dimensions of gender language, which reveals that female party leaders may not verbally gain and use their floor in accordance with the generally perceived clear-cut male-female ideology.

Last, the book contributes theoretically to gender speech studies by discussing multiple factors that may attribute to 'different voice' practice other than gender. The authors do not deny women's preference for collaborative and egalitarian speeches, typically exemplified by their sister hug at the end of the BBC TV debate and their challenge to the male leaders as 'the old boys' network at Westminster (page 60). However, the authors also consider the status of the party these female leaders represent, the experience of their political career and their personal strengths as important influencing factors to their voice. This point gets support from Edelsky and Adam's classic study of US gubernatorial debates (Edelsky and Adam 1990), in that incumbency, party affiliation, and political experience are all found to advantage speakers in competition for the floor. This clarification is helpful because it is beneficial for acknowledging that the most effective political speakers could be both male and female, as long as they could use a range of linguistic resources to construct a voice of their own.

However, the book has its limitations. First, the size of language samples used may be limited to fully represent the language of female politicians. The data for the case study only cover two televised debates in the 2015 UK GE campaign. It would be enriching if data from other countries, from other professional and monologic political contexts (e.g. public speech) were employed. Second, the data type for female language reception and representation analysis could be more diversified. For example, in Chapter 3, the authors only analyse the media coverage to women party leaders on key national newspapers, leaving aside other forms of mass media like radio, TV, magazine, as well as the now much popular social media release. Interviews and questionnaires to sampled audience and readers could also help contribute first-hand information of public acceptance in receiving those party leader performances. Third, the structure of the book could be revised/offer alternative organisation. For example, in the concluding chapter, a whole section is used to discuss the performance of one female

party leader, Nicola Sturgeon, who stands out in the campaign debates. It would seem more practical to integrate the section to the debate analysis in Chapter 2.

Yet, in spite of our final suggestions, Cameron and Shaw offer genuine insights into gender language practices in political contexts. Undoubtedly, their book will be of interest not only to those in the area of discourse power in a more competitive global context, but also to those in general gender studies.

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