

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Stylistic Devices And Argumentative Strategies In Public Discourse



As the famous discourse analyst Norman Fairclough states, “it is time social theorists and researchers delivered on their promissory notes about the importance of language and discourse in contemporary social life” (Fairclough 2003, p.204).

The *aim* of the paper is to analyse the use of the major stylistic devices and argumentative strategies in public discourse, in particular, to reveal the frequency of their use in the given genre of speech. The *research questions* are: a) whether the use of stylistic devices and argumentative strategies is determined by the subject of the speech, b) whether it is determined by gender differences, c) whether there are typical “male” and “female” devices and strategies. As the *material for investigation* was taken “Contemporary American Speeches” (Johannesen 2000). Following I. Galperin’s idea that “the necessary data can be obtained by means of an objective statistical count based on a large number of texts” (Galperin 1991, p.332), we have used the *methods* of statistical and corpus-based analyses, as well as the *method* of comparative analysis.

First, a general statistical and comparative analysis has been made. The total number of speeches is 53, among them 34 speeches belong to males, whereas 19 speeches to females, that is 63 percent of speeches belongs to males vs 37 percent of female speeches. According to the subject of speech, the distribution of the figures is as follows:

concerns of minorities: 9/7m, 2f **[i]**

military and foreign policy: 8/7m, 1 f

technology and the environment : 8/6m, 2f

economic and social issues: 7/6m, 1f

the political process: 7/4m, 3f

contemporary morals and value: 7/3m, 4f

concerns of women: 7/1m, 6f.

As can be easily seen, in the majority of cases (with the exception of the two last topics – morals and value and women's concern) within one and the same topic male speeches prevail in number.

Below will be presented the results of the statistical and comparative analysis of the use of stylistic devices and argumentative strategies based on the whole corpus of speeches:

*1. Rhetorical question: 137/88m, 49f*

a) rhetorical question as interest factor: 87/64m, 23f; b) rhetorical question as reservation or challenge: 21/12m, 9f; c) rhetorical question as transition: 13/8m, 5f; d) rhetorical question as attention material: 8/4m, 4f; e) rhetorical question as a concluding device: 8/8 f, om

*Example: 137/81m, 56 f*

a) example as specific instance: 93/45m, 48f; b) brief example: 38/32m, 6f; c) extended example: 4/3m, 1f; d) hypothetical example: 2/1m, 1f

*1. 2. Enumeration: 136/91m, 45f*

*2. 3. Quotation: 106/66m, 40f*

a) quotation as testimony: 57/39m, 18f; b) quotation as amplification: 21/15m, 6f; c) quotation as a concluding device: 20/9m, 11f; d) quotation as an introductory device: 8/3m, 5f

*1. 4. Comparison and/or contrast: 101/61m, 40f*

*2. 5. Statistics: 98/72m, 26f*

*3. 6. References as devices for focusing attention: 81/54m, 27f*

a) reference to self: 25/14m, 11f; b) reference to the occasion/context: 19/15m, 4f; c) reference to a historical (or past) event: 12/9m, 3f; d) reference to the audience: 11/5m, 6f; e) reference to a recent event: 8/6m, 2f; f) direct reference to the subject: 6/5m, 1f

*1. 7. Metaphor: 64/54m, 10f*

*2. 8. Credibility building (ethos): 62/44m, 18f*

a) demonstrating personal qualities as credibility building: 28/25m, 3f; b) showing good will as credibility building: 19/12m, 7f; c) indicating qualifications as credibility building: 12/4m, 8f; d) reducing hostility as credibility building: 3/3m, 0f

1. 9. *Parallelism*: 60/43m, 17f
2. 10. *Antithesis and antithetical phrasing*: 57/43m, 14f
3. 11. *Reasoning*: 52/41m, 11f

a) reasoning to consequences: 20/17m, 3f; b) causal reasoning: 13/9m, 4f; c) parallel case reasoning: 8/8m, 0f; d) reasoning from circumstance: 4/4m, 0f; e) reasoning from reciprocity: 3/1m, 2f; f) alternative reasoning: 2/2f, 0m; g) reasoning from class: 1/1m, 0f; h) sign reasoning: 1/1m, 0f

1. 12. *Motivational appeal*: 51/40m, 11f
2. 13. *Allusion*: 50/35m, 15f
3. Personal recollection or illustration: 49/22m, 27f
4. 15. *Conclusion (devices used in)*: 42/33m, 9f

a) appeal: 15/10m, 5f; b) challenge: 8/8m, 0f; c) summary: 6/5m, 1f; d) reference to the introduction: 6/4m, 2f; e) statement of personal intention: 4/3m, 1f; f) personal reference: 3/3m, 0f

1. 16. *Humour*: 38/20m, 18f

a) humour in the text: 26/13m, 13f; b) humour as a device for focusing attention: 12/7m, 5f

1. 17. *Refutation*: 29/18m, 11f
2. 18. *Repetition*: 29/16m, 13f
3. 19. *Definition*: 27/14m, 13f
4. 20. *Analogy*: 20/16m, 4f
5. 21. *Alliteration*: 19/15m, 4f
6. 22. *Transition*: 17/16m, 1f

a) signal word as transition: 13/12m, 1f; b) linking phrase as transition: 4/4m, 0f

1. 23. *Irony*: 17/12m, 5f
2. 24. *Immediacy (Urgency)*: 12/9m, 3f
3. 25. *Personification*: 11/7m, 4f
4. 26. *Climax*: 10/6m, 4f
5. 27. *Apologetic strategies*: 9/9m, 0f

a) bolstering: 5/5m; b) differentiation: 2/2m; c) denial: 1/1m; d) transcendence:

1/1m

1. 28. *Illustration as a device for focusing attention*: 9/2m, 7f
2. 29. *Labelling*: 8/7m, 1f
3. 30. *Imagery*: 7/7m, 0f
4. 31. *Parenthetical Statement*: 7/5m, 2f
5. 32. *Play on Words*: 7/1m, 6f
6. 33. *Simile*: 5/4m, 1f
7. 34. *Refrain*: 5/1m, 4f
8. 35. *Restatement*: 4/3m, 1f
9. 36. *Hyperbole*: 3/3m, 0f.

The total number of all the stylistic devices and argumentative strategies is 1576, among them 1059 are used by males, whereas 517 by females.

For the analysis to be more precise, in the second part of the research equal number of male and female speeches (3 for each sex) has been taken. The speeches are devoted to various topics, each of them “voiced” by one male and one female. Thus, the speeches by Mario M. Cuomo “Teaching Values in Public Schools” and by Phyllis Schlafly “The Teaching of Values in the Public Schools” are devoted to contemporary morals and values, the speeches by Ronald Reagan “Eulogics for the *Challenger* Astronauts” and by Virginia I. Postrel “The Environmental Movement: A Skeptical View” are devoted to technology and environment, finally, the speeches by D. Stanley Eitzen “Problem Students: The Socio-Cultural Roots” and by Christine D. Keen “Human Resource Management Issues in the ‘90s” – to economic and social issues. The statistical and comparative analyses have revealed the following:

1. 1. *Enumeration*: 23/14m, 9f
2. *Quotation*: 17/4m, 13f
  - a) quotation as testimony: 12/2m, 10f; b) quotation as a concluding device: 3/1m, 2f; c) quotation as amplification: 1/1m, 0f; d) quotation as an introductory device: 1/1f, 0m
3. *Rhetorical question*: 16/8m, 8f
  - a) rhetorical question as attention material: 5/4m, 1f; b) rhetorical question as interest factor: 5/3m, 2f; c) rhetorical question as transition 3/1m, 2f; d) rhetorical question as reservation or challenge: 3/3f, 0m

4. *Example: 16/1m, 15f*

a) example as specific instance: 15/1m, 14f; b) extended example: 1/1f, om

5. *Reasoning: 15/10m, 5f*

a) reasoning to consequences: 8/7m, 1f; b) causal reasoning: 4/3m, 1f; c) alternative reasoning: 2/2f, om; d) reasoning from reciprocity: 1/1f, om

6. *Statistics: 12/11m, 1f*

7. *References as devices for focusing attention: 10/6m, 4f*

a) reference to the occasion/context: 3/2m, 1f; b) direct reference to the subject: 2/2m, of; c) reference to the audience: 2/1m, 1f; d) reference to self: 2/2f, om; e) reference to a recent event: 1/1m, of

1. 8. *Comparison and/or contrast: 9/4m, 5f*

9. *Refutation: 7/1m, 6f*

1. 10. *Credibility building (ethos): 6/5m, 1f*

a) demonstrating personal qualities as credibility building: 4/3m, 1f; b) showing good will as credibility building: 1/1m, of; c) indicating qualifications as credibility building: 1/1m, of

1. 11. *Definition: 4/1m, 3f*

2. 12. *Allusion: 3/2m, 1f*

3. 13. *Parallelism: 2/2m, of*

4. 14. *Analogy: 2/2m, of*

5. 15. *Metaphor: 2/2m, of*

6. 16. *Conclusion (devices used in): 2/2m, of*

challenge: 2,2m

1. 17. *Climax: 2/1m, 1f*

2. 18. *Irony: 2/1m, 1f*

3. 19. *Personal recollection or illustration: 2/1m, 1f*

4. 20. *Summary: 2/1m, 1f*

a) summary in conclusion: 1/1m, of; b) internal summary: 1/1f, om

1. 21. *Humour as a device for focusing attention: 2/2f, om*

2. 22. *Imagery: 1/1m, of*

3. 23. *Antithetical phrasing: 1/1m, of*
4. 24. *Labelling: 1/1m, of*
5. 25. *Motivational appeal: 1/1m, of*
6. 26. *Personification: 1/1m of.*

The total number of all the stylistic devices and rhetorical strategies under consideration is 161, among them 84 are used by males and 77 by females. Thus, as can be easily seen, also in case of equal number of male and female speeches the number of devices and strategies used by men prevails (though insignificantly). Another important conclusion is that males use comparatively larger variety of types and subtypes of stylistic devices and argumentative strategies, which is presented as follows:

*males: 25 types / 35 with subtypes*

*females: 17 types / 28 with subtypes.*

At the next stage of our investigation aiming to find out whether the frequency of the use of stylistic devices and argumentative strategies is determined by a topic of speech, taken at the same time the factor of gender differences, 3 "male" and 3 "female" speeches on one and the same topic – the political issues – were analysed. These are the following speeches: "The Watergate Affair" by Richard N. Nixon, "Inaugural Address" by John F. Kennedy, "The Rainbow Coalition" by Jesse Jackson, "The Feminization of Power" by Eleanor Smeal, "Democratic Convention Keynote Address" by Barbara Jordan and "Inaugural Address as Mayor of the District of Columbia" by Sharon Pratt Dixon. The results of the analysis are presented below:

1. 1. *Parallelism: 29/18m, 11f*
2. 2. *Apologetic Strategies: 24/24m, of*

a) bolstering: 11/11m; b) transcendence: 8/8m; c) denial: 3/3m; d) differentiation: 2/2m

1. 3. *Allusion: 23/10m, 13f*
2. 4. *Antithesis and antithetical phrasing: 21/18m, 3f*
3. 5. *Statistics: 18/15m, 3f*
4. 6. *Enumeration: 18/8m, 10f*
5. 7. *Repetition: 17/5m, 12f*

8. *Metaphor: 15/12m, 3f*

## 9. Credibility building: 13/9m, 4f

a) demonstrating personal qualities as credibility building: 10/9m, 1f; b) indicating qualifications as credibility building: 3/3f

1. 10. *Motivational appeal*: 10/8m, 2f

2. 11. *Reference*: 9/6m, 3f

a) reference to the occasion/context: 4/3m, 1f; b) reference to self: 2/1m, 1f; c) reference to a historical (or past) event: 2/1m, 1f; d) reference to a recent event: 1/1m, of

1. 12. *Example*: 9/4m, 5f

a) example as a specific instance: 7/3m, 4f; b) brief example: 2/1m, 1f

1. 13. *Rhetorical question*: 8/4m, 4f

a) rhetorical question as interest factor: 4/1m, 3f; b) rhetorical question as transition: 2/2m, of; c) rhetorical question as challenge: 1/1m, of; d) rhetorical question as attention material: 1/1f, om

1. 14. *Personal recollection or illustration*: 6/5m, 1f

2. 15. *Comparison and/or contrast*: 5/3m, 2f

3. 16. *Quotation*: 5/2m, 3f

a) quotation as amplification: 3/2m, 1f; b) quotation as an introductory device: 1/1f, om; c) quotation as a concluding device: 1/1f, om

1. 17. *Alliteration*: 4/3m, 1f

2. 18. *Conclusion (devices used in)*: 4/2m, 2f

a) appeal: 2/2m, of; b) reference to the introduction: 1/1f, om; c) statement of personal intention: 1/1f, om

1. 19. *Immediacy*: 4/1m, 3f

2. 20. *Humour in the text*: 3/2m, 1f

3. 21. *Climax*: 3/1m, 2f

4. 22. *Personification*: 3/1m, 2f

5. 23. *Imagery*: 2/2m, of

6. 24. *Play on words*: 2/1m, 1f

7. 25. *Irony: 1/1m, of*
8. 26. *Labelling: 1/1m, of*
9. 27. *Parenthetical statement: 1/1f, om.*

The total number of all the stylistic devices and rhetorical strategies used in the analysed corpus of speeches is 258, among them 166 are used by males, whereas only 92 – by females. Besides, the types and subtypes of the devices and strategies used by men are more diverse compared with those used by women, which is represented as follows:

*males: 26 types/ 35 with subtypes*

*females: 23 types / 31 with subtypes.*

The comparative analysis of 6 speeches on different subjects, on the one hand, and of 6 speeches on political issues, on the other hand, shows that the number of strategies and devices used in the latters is significantly larger (258 vs 161), and what's more, this conclusion refers to the usage by both females and males. In other words, political speeches are the most concentrated from the point of view of the usage of stylistic devices and argumentative strategies, which can be explained by the genre of political speeches itself characterized by utmost persuasiveness and emotional force.

The general statistical and comparative analysis aimed at revealing the frequency of strategies and devices in different types of public speeches shows that among the most frequent ones are enumeration, statistics, example, rhetorical question, quotation, comparison and/or contrast, references, credibility building, metaphor, parallelism, allusion, whereas among the least frequently used ones are hyperbole, restatement, refrain, simile, summary, illustration (as a device for focusing attention), play on words, parenthetical statement,, imagery, labelling, analogy, irony, climax, personification.

Let us give some illustrations of the most frequent devices:

*Enumeration:* “By pressing a key, a clerk obtains your profiles that includes voting history, address, family composition, model of car, neighborhood characteristics, ethnic group, and even indication of sexual orientation” (David F. Linowes, “The Information Age: Technology and Computers”, p. 44).

*Rhetorical question:* “That’s still the question today when we ask: Are women in journalism, especially now that there are more of us, some of us in positions of



leadership, making a difference? Given the impact of the media in shaping our social, political, and economic life, are we seeing changes not only in numbers in the newsrooms, but in the agenda and priorities of society?" (Joan Konner, "Women in the Marketplace: Have Women in Journalism Made a Difference?", p. 96).

*Parallelism*: "There is a proper season for everything. There is a time to sow and a time to reap. There is a time to complete, and a time to cooperate" (Jesse Jackson, "The Rainbow Coalition", p. 383).

Below are examples of the least frequent devices:

*Labelling*: "While Reaganomics and Reaganism is talked about often, so often we miss the real meaning. Reaganism is a spirit. Reaganomics represents the real economic facts of life" (Jesse Jackson, "The Rainbow Coalition", p. 388).

*Play on Words*: "You are ever aware that *your* right to freely practice your faith is only as secure as *other* people's right to believe differently. You are eternally *intolerant of intolerance*" (Faye Wattleton, "Sacred Rights: Preserving Reproductive Freedom", p. 272).

*Personification*: "A nation struggling for its soul against a backdrop of smiling cynical corruption and immorality in the highest offices of its government, its industry, its religious institutions" (Eleanor Smeal, "The Feminization of Power", p. 245).

Another conclusion is that gender factor is crucial as regards the use of the devices and strategies, that is compared with women men not only use the latters more actively, they also use more diverse types and subtypes. Besides, the comparative analysis has revealed typical "male" devices (that are not used by females or that are preferred mainly by males) and, on the contrary, typical "female" devices and strategies. To "male" devices and strategies belong reasoning, statistics, devices used in conclusion, credibility building, in particular, demonstrating personal qualities, parallelism, analogy, metaphor, antithetical phrasing, imagery, labelling, motivational appeal, personification, apologetic strategies, irony, reference, alliteration, personal recollection or illustration. To "female" devices and strategies belong definition, example, humour, quotation, refutation, reference to self as a device for focusing attention, repetition, indicating qualifications as credibility building immediacy, parenthetical

statement.

It is worth mentioning that the use of specific “male” devices and strategies is common, as a rule, for all types of speeches, in other words, the repertoire of “male” devices with some exceptions is the same irrespective of the subject of public discourse. Whereas typical “female” devices and strategies are “scattered” thematically: some of them are used in political speeches only, while others – in speeches devoted to other subjects.

Let us give some examples of “male” devices:

*Statistics:* “What you *don’t* read about is that \$3 billion of those losses – \$3 billion of the \$3.8 billion – were attributed to a mere 20 institutions – less than one percent of the total number of savings and loans.... What you *don’t* read about is that 2,774 solvent institutions, holding 90 percent of total industry assets, reported first-quarter profits... and that the percentage of profitable institutions rose to 69 percent from 65 percent, quarter to quarter” (Theo X. Pitt, Jr., “The Truth about Savings and Loan Institutions: State and Federal Bungling”, p. 101).

*Metaphor:* “But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred” (Martin Luther King, Jr, “I Have a Dream”, p. 367).

*Alliteration:* “My constituency is the damned, disinherited, disrespected, and the despised” (Jesse Jackson, “The Rainbow Coalition”, p. 383).

*Irony:* “He cuts energy assistance to the poor, cuts breakfast programs from children, cuts lunch programs from children, cuts job training from children and then says, to an empty table, “let us pray”. Apparently he is not familiar with the structure of a prayer. You thank the Lord for the food that you are about to receive, not the food that just left” (Jesse Jackson, “The Rainbow Coalition”, p. 387).

Below are typical examples of “female” devices:

*Repetition:* “Together, we can plant strong and lasting anchors in every neighborhood in this community. Together, we can put back hope in the hearts of our children. Together, we can give the people of this great city the honest deal they deserve and expect” (Sharon Pratt Dixon, “Inaugural Address as Mayor of

the District of Columbia", p. 354).

*Quotation:* "When I first announced that I would run for office, I quoted Ecclesiastes, "there is a time and a season for everything and everyone" (Ibid, p. 351).

*Example:* "I believe the change is bubbling up from the people, especially women. For example, in California activist women are determined to change the state legislature..." (Eleanor Smeal, "The Feminization of Power", p. 247).

*Reference to self as a device for focusing attention:* "But there is something different about tonight. There is something special about tonight. What is different? What is special? I, Barbara Jordan, am a keynote speaker" (Barbara Jordan, "Democratic Convention Keynote Address", p. 370).

The research has, thus, revealed 1) that though, as I. Galperin correctly mentions: "It will be no exaggeration to say that almost all typical... stylistic devices can be found in... oratory" (Galperin 1991, p.299), the frequency of their use is very different, 2) that the concentration of devices and strategies is in direct connection with the subject: the political speeches are in this respect the most concentrated, 3) that gender factor is crucial as regards the use of devices and strategies: males not only use more diverse devices and strategies, but also use them more intensively compared with females, 4) that there are typical "male" and "female" devices and strategies.

To sum up, it will be appropriate to quote the following words by Karlyn Campbell: "*Never has the need to understand the nature of persuasive discourses and to develop techniques and standards by which to analyse and evaluate them been more crucial. ...In short, we shall have to become working rhetorical critics*" (Campbell 1972, p.79).

## NOTES

**[i]** M stands for male speeches, f – for female speeches.

## REFERENCES

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