
Feminizing Political Discourse
British and Spanish Debates
on Domestic Violence

AURELIA CARRANZA MÁRQUEZ

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PREFACE

Man, as Aristotle would have it, is best defined as a «political animal» who will be bound to make avail of whatever possible tool is within his reach to achieve his most pressing goals. It is an undeniable fact that a major, if not the most powerful, strategic tool that man can possibly use, is language. Politicians, of course, are the kind of people who are expert at making the most of this. In Chilton's words taken from his *Analysing Political Discourse* (2004): «politics is very largely the use of language», or should we see it perhaps from a more radical angle and agree with Joseph (*Language and Politics*, 2006) that «language is political from top to bottom».

Aurelia Carranza's present work aims at revealing how politicians make a use and even abuse of language in order to put across their beliefs and desires, and indeed to convince and persuade their audience of the validity of their proposals and viewpoints. Admittedly, political discourse is more about persuasion than about information, as suggested by Dedaic. It is also deliberately manipulative, since political discourse, improvised parliamentary debates included, is rarely unplanned; hence the importance of unveiling hidden readings of strategic uses which are inherently interwoven into the rhetoric of political messages or lie underneath the surface of that type of discourse.

The present book is particularly original and attractive for it focuses on the language politicians use as seen from a gender perspective. One could perhaps say that it is doubly original, since the fact of attempting a linguistic analysis of political language is, undoubtedly, of a relatively recent concern. We should remember that the first actual linguistic analysis of political language was Geis's *The Language of Politics* published in 1987. However, if, to the general linguistic analysis we add a further parameter, that of gender differences, then we are able to scrutinize the different 'roles' and identities language helps speakers build up in political interventions.

Politicians, both male and female, tend to adopt a variety of roles when presenting their ideas and standpoints which are supposed to be characterized by particular features of speech that constitute their



particular 'style'. The various 'stylistic shifts' will inevitably respond to their needs and goals at every stage of their interventions. We are faced, then, with discursive strategies specifically designed to achieve specific «things», that is, we actually have language employed as «action», as Coupland (*Style: Language Variation and Identity*, 2007) has convincingly argued. Hence the need to look for an appropriate linguistic model that underlines these facts and Aurelia Carranza takes this into account when explicitly drawing on Edward and Potter's 'Discursive Action Model'.

One further, perhaps more novel, point to be borne in mind is the undeniable fact that politicians are building up «social» meanings while pursuing their concrete goals in a specific setting, as Rickford and Eckert (*Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*, 2001) aptly put it: «The speaker thus is not simply a responder to context but a maker of context, defining situations and relationships.»

In sum, this book deals with a highly topical subject, for it surveys two key linguistic domains of analysis: on the one hand, it insightfully tackles the discursive uses in the political arena; on the other, it centres on concrete «feminine» uses of language and, more specifically, on the strategic, «deliberate» and markedly feminine –or should we say feminist– uses of language. Carranza has cleverly managed to combine both dimensions and, as a result, she presents us here with a highly interesting and revealing socio/psycho-linguistic piece of research.

One particularly appealing aspect of this book is its comparative, cross-cultural character, as, for a sheer lack thereof, more comparative studies of this kind in the current literature on political discourse are missing. In *Feminizing Political Discourse*, the author analyzes an extensive *corpus* of parliamentary debates held in the British and Spanish Parliaments. The excellent choice of two largely similar laws («*Ley de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género*» and «*Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill*»), also debated in the same period –summer 2004–, makes her study even more relevant.

This is definitely not the work of a newly-arrived researcher. As some readers may perhaps have suspected, Aurelia Carranza is an apt researcher with long experience in discourse analysis. More concretely, she has expertly dealt with political discourse analysis and gender studies. I have had the great pleasure of having supervised both her research dissertation and doctoral thesis and feel honoured to have done so, and I have also been fortunate enough to collabo-



rate with her in several other publications on the issues stated above. Her research dissertation entitled «*El lenguaje del fanatismo: la nueva cruzada del siglo XXI*», presented in 2003, revealed a brilliant and shrewd researcher who, besides her genuine interest in linguistic matters, committed herself to the hard task of unveiling the underlying reasons and intentions of politicians under the thin, seemingly transparent cloth of their language. In that work, she skilfully showed how politicians can ‘play’ with their addressees and persuade them of the pressing need of something as dangerous and serious as war. Her equally brilliant doctoral thesis, «*Voces femeninas y feministas en los foros parlamentarios español y británico. Aplicación de un modelo de acción discursiva*», received general acclaim, while settling the basis for future work aimed at deepening her analysis on the strategic use of «gender» as a dialectic weapon within the parliamentary sphere.

Her progress as a researcher has run parallel to her maturing as a critic of contrastive linguistic models of analysis. She has skilfully dissected the advantages and shortcomings of functionalist models such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Billig, Chilton, Fairclough, Kress, van Dijk, van Leeuwen, Wetherell, Wodak...) and hybrid models such as that of Discursive Psychology (Edwards, Potter and Wetherell). Her felicitous choice of the latter in this work, more specifically of Edwards and Potter’s ‘Discursive Action Model’ (DAM) first published in 1992, was based on the need to resort to a model of analysis that was able to see through the strategic uses of language as a vehicle aimed at achieving concrete, practical goals.

The flexibility of the chosen model has allowed the author to adapt it to her own needs in a most effective way, while incorporating concepts borrowed from CDA, Conversational Analysis and Pragmatics. To a great extent, she has improved and widened the applicability of the model beyond its usual boundaries of short texts, and demonstrated that it proved a perfectly valid framework for the study of lengthy texts such as those of the parliamentary sessions under survey.

After a detailed analysis of the sessions held in both the Spanish and British forums, while paying special attention to the strategic use of formulae of address, and the particular features of the «roles» adopted by politicians in parliamentary speech (through use of pronouns, direct and indirect quotations, testimonies, chronicles, etc.), she concludes that the strategic use of ‘gender’ both by female and male politicians becomes a most relevant parameter in the political



sphere. It just seems to depend on the parallel relevance of gender differences in the issue under discussion, in other words, its strategic value is mainly determined by the topic under discussion. Politicians, thus, tend to appear gender-biased or not, depending on the socio-political nature of the debate, that is, when it is beneficial and convenient in a particular debate in which sex differences appear to be relevant.

The readers of this rigorous yet enjoyable book will undoubtedly find reasons to recommend its dissemination as eagerly as I do now.

MARÍA DEL MAR RIVAS CARMONA

Universidad de Córdoba

12 September 2009

Introduction

Female language has been approached from different perspectives. In the past, many studies focused on female language from a purely empiric perspective, giving emphasis to the computation of particular linguistic structures. More recently, female language is normally approached with a more global orientation, combining considerations of a different nature (social, cultural, etc.). However, at a sub-level, social determinants already existed in the first studies describing «how women talked». The interpretation of the data «obtained» in the analysis reflected these determinants.¹ In fact, it is possible to track down the evolution of these interpretations according to the social position of women at the historical moment at which the study was conducted.

The aim of this work is to revise the strategic use of factor gender in two particular instances of the current political panorama. In this sense, we will take into account the strategic value of biological sex at a discursive level as well as the personal and social attitude towards it (feminism, for example).

Thus, when we speak of «feminizing» in this work we are viewing this term from a dynamic perspective. We will analyze the functional value of factor gender taking into account discursive contextual-situational factors. We will not focus on politics and «the way women speak» but rather on the discursive use that men and women make of the female gender in the political arena in order to achieve certain goals in communication.

¹ We highlight the term «obtained» in the sense that, in many cases, the source of the information was not reliable, and nor were the results of the interpretations drawn from them.



The goal is not to arrive at generic conclusions since we are going to concentrate on two particular debates and we will only refer to these situations. However, we have considered an intercultural *corpus* in order to perform a comparative analysis that allows us to distinguish behaviours which are typically cultural from those which cannot be considered as such. The content of the *corpus* has been considered in order to maintain a analytical coherence.

We have studied the debates corresponding to the drawing up of two similar laws contentwise, one in the British Parliament (Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Bill) and one in the Spanish Parliament (Ley de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género, «Law on Integral Protection against Gender Violence»). Both laws were debated during the summer of 2004.

The *corpus* has to be related to a topic allowing gender issues to shine through. In this way, it will be possible to clearly visualize how factor gender works in those contexts incumbent on it. We have chosen two laws with different approaches to violence: gender violence vs. domestic violence. The comparison drawn from this analysis may clarify how this factor works from different socio-political perspectives.

Our *corpus* is necessarily very wide in order to carry out a detailed and representative study permitting the obtaining of meaningful conclusions. However, its size may also be an obstacle in the application of a specific methodology.

We will focus on the practical function of language in its social and, in this case, political context. Therefore, we needed a theoretical base mainly oriented towards action, that is, language as a vehicle to achieve specific goals. We have found this approach in the Edwards and Potter Discourse Action Model (DAM) (1992). This model is framed within Discursive Psychology. The interdisciplinary nature of the latter can enrich our analysis as it combines concepts from different theories such as Critical Discourse Analysis, in its interest for political discourse and power imbalance, or Conversational Analysis.

However, this model presents one difficulty: rather than being an application model it is a «conceptual scheme that captures some of the features of participants´ discursive practice» (Edwards and Potter, 1992: 154). So far, it has been applied to analyze very specific aspects of one particular sample. Consequently, our first challenge has been to check its validity at a practical level for this particular *corpus*. If this is not the case, we will adapt the model to facilitate its application to more extensive texts, and, more important, in a systematic and



practical way, that is, we will design a model of application.

We have also integrated other theories that could contribute positively to this work. Considerations of politeness are vital in a context where manners are strictly ruled by internal regulations. In this sense, they can be especially revealing.

However, we do not intend to divide this work into two blocks where theory and practice are worked with independently. Any theory proves its validity through its application. Therefore, from the very beginning, we will combine theoretical concepts with practical applications. This will give us the key to the appropriateness of the theoretical concepts discussed.

In conclusion, our goal is to find a flexible and integrating theoretical framework, that facilitates the study of the strategic uses of factor gender in the contexts of the British and Spanish Parliaments, and that is able to enshrine the systematic study of a wide *corpus*.