



Politeness as a strategy of attack in a gendered political debate – The Royal-Sarkozy debate

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Béatrice Fracchiolla. Politeness as a strategy of attack in a gendered political debate – The Royal-Sarkozy debate. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2011, Women, Power and the Media, 43 (10), pp.2480-2488. 10.1016/j.pragma.2011.02.006 . halshs-01700024

HAL Id: halshs-01700024

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01700024>

Submitted on 11 Feb 2020

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Author's last version- published as: Béatrice Fracchiolla. « Politeness as a strategy of attack in a gendered political debate – The Royal-Sarkozy debate ». *Journal of Pragmatics*, Elsevier, 2011, *Women, Power and the Media*, 43 (10), pp.2480-2488

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Bio-note (2011):

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Abstract

This article examines the televised debate between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy which took place on May 2, 2007, a few days before the second round of the French presidential election. The objective is to assess whether or not the fact that, for the first time in French history, one of the candidates qualified for the second round was a woman had an impact on the debate, and to examine how the two French presidential candidates addressed each *other* during the two-hour debate. Transcriptions analyzed using the *Lexico3* software developed by the SYLED-CLA2t at University of Paris 3 serve as the basis of the content and statistical analysis. Results indicate differential strategies: Nicolas Sarkozy makes excessive displays of deferential politeness, and uses a wide range of registers; Ségolène Royal is more combative and formal. While Ségolène Royal makes use of a series of coordinated sentences, concrete explanations and examples, Nicolas Sarkozy on the other hand tends to refer to abstraction, as I will explain. I hypothesize that this is informed by gender assumptions about politeness and the ethos of discourse of power – meaning manipulation and control through discourse in the political domain.

Keywords: anthropological communication – political discourse – gendered language – verbal violence – politeness –

1. Introduction

This article examines the televised debate between the two candidates qualified for the second round of the 2007 French presidential election, Ségolène Royal (SR) and Nicolas Sarkozy (NS). The Royal-Sarkozy debate took place on May 2, 2007, four days before the second round, and was the last media appearance allowed by French law. This was the first French presidential election, and hence the first debate, in which one of the two remaining candidates was a woman. As such, this is an unprecedented opportunity for evaluating whether a female candidate is perceived as equal to a male candidate. Gender stereotypes have had a significant

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impact on the progress and reception of women in politics (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003) and have been shown to exert a powerful influence on voting patterns and political success (Fox & Smith, 1998; Kahn, 1996; Koch, 2000; Dolan, 2004). Research has also provided evidence that the media tend to use and reinforce gender stereotypes (Kahn, 1992, 1996; Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1995; Ross, 1995; Bystrom et al., 2001). In contrast to men who are often portrayed as forceful, female politicians are often represented as passive (Lithgow, 2000) and less competent (Sereni et al., 1998; Gidengil & Everitt, 1999; Scharrer, 2002). Intuition here suggests that equality is not achieved in this campaign, as shown by other contributors in this volume. The numerous attacks of which SR was the object did seem to be motivated, in part, by gender. This paper endeavors to assess whether the female candidate was treated by her opponent in a way that could indicate a gender-bias.

I shall focus on the way each candidate addressed the *other* during the two-hour debate with special attention to their use of pronouns. The use of pronouns can explicitly reveal how the other is framed by the speaker. The study is based on the transcription of the debate, which was formatted for statistical textual analysis. The analysis, which was conducted using the *Lexico3* software, provides quantitative data, supplemented by qualitative analysis. How the *other* is framed by pronouns and other linguistic features is examined against the framework of interactional pragmatics (Goffmann, 1975; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1990, 2006, 2007; Tannen, 1993; Christie, 2000). In this way, this paper intends to identify differences in the discourse of the two candidates and to examine whether these differences are of a gendered nature.

The first part of the article considers the general issue of expectations relating to political speech and politeness, and how these interact with gender. The second part introduces the context of the debate and presents the contrastive linguistic features, discursive stylistic features, and rhetorical strategies.

2. Gender, Discourse and Language

In her seminal work *Language and Woman's Place*, Robin Lakoff (1975) presents features which could be specific to the language of women. Cutting across phonology, prosody, lexicon and syntax, Lakoff observed that women's speech in English is characterized by hesitations. Women also tend to make more use of standard markers. Lakoff argued that this style is derived from a sense of inferiority.

Since then, many linguists have considered the existence of a feminine speech style and have attempted to describe it. This style results from gendered culture and education: the *difference theory* put forward by Tannen suggests that women and men develop different styles of talking because, in fact, they are segregated during significant parts of their lives (Tannen 1990, 1991, 1993). Learned gender differences are also strengthened by the representations that are associated with femininity in the grammar and lexicon of each language (Irigaray, 1990). Among many other languages, and unlike English, French distinguishes the grammatical gender of nouns in a way that indicates the gender of nouns – and especially of animates, whose gender is motivated by whether they are male or female. Such indications are provided by pronouns, which may reveal different politeness and discursive strategies. An example of such strategies is given by lexical forms used as terms of address. Apart from terms of address reserved for men or women (Fracchiolla, 2006), there is a socially structured lexical distinction between the use of *Madame* and *Mademoiselle* which is parallel to the English *Mrs.* and *Miss*. Politeness is a structuring factor of language use, and the view that feminine discourse is more polite, as put forward in early feminist linguistics research (Lakoff, 1975; Brown & Levinson, 1978), has been reassessed in recent work (Christie, 2000; Watts, 2003; Mills, 2003; Talbot, 2010). There is a need to take into account the

pragmatic and contextual dimension of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Duranti, 2008). This is illustrated by our corpus, which provides a counterpoint to the general claim that politeness is a feminine trait, as the male candidate makes notable use of politeness strategies. Such contextual strategies call for a situated analysis, which is further made necessary by cultural and historical evolution. Since World War II, gender equality has significantly improved in industrial societies. This change must inform current studies in their assessment of the relevance of a gendered discourse.

My argument is that, in this debate, gender acts more as an interpretative category than as a productive category. Though Royal is not adopting a gendered discourse, her discourse is nonetheless received as gendered. Ségolène Royal has a specific way of addressing people, and during the campaign her specific manner did reflect her project of change for French society. SR does not shy away from expressing her way of seeing things as her own and the emotions that go with it. Her style can be characterized by the concept of *pragmatic empathy* (Bonnafeous, 2002; Perry, 2005), as defined by Perry, summarizing Bonnafeous' definition, as involving "a firm, explicit rejection of Manichean or simplistic judgments; a very concrete mode of expression, not given to metaphor, rooted in daily life; the absence of irony or aggression towards one's opponents or detractors; frequent evidence of concern for and solidarity with one's potential audience; a call for grassroots action and active citizenship, coupled with reference to 'life' or even 'real life'" (Perry, 2005: 339). Royal's concerns were often termed in a nurturing, motherly style that has been fiercely attacked by some as inappropriate (Marcela Iacub, 2007). These traits are not feminine in themselves, yet they are interpreted as illustrating a feminine type of speech, and this is disfavored in the political realm (Lithgow, 2000; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). Arenas of power discourage the expression of feelings and emotions, which is perceived as a sign of weakness. This is incompatible with power, since weakness would indicate incompetence (Fahey, 2007), as would being passive (Lithgow, 2000). Interestingly, it was frequently alleged, during and after the presidential campaign, that Royal was incompetent. One example is a comment from a close ally of NS, the then Defense minister Michèle Alliot-Marie: "Ségolène Royal changes ideas as often as she changes skirts", a sexist statement also referring to the centuries-old French saying attributed to king Francis I: "Souvent femme varie, bien fol est qui s'y fie" meaning *he, who relies on a woman for even temperament is quite mad* — a statement that quite often, and without justification, reproduces the stereotype of female irrationality. This, I feel, is especially gendered, and I hypothesize that claims of incompetence stem from Royal's departure from the conventional masculine political discourse in referring to her feelings and emotions. Others have contended that SR was put under higher scrutiny simply because she is a woman (Geneviève Fraisse, 2007). Other criticisms focused on her clothing, behavior, language and a number of her actions¹.

In this paper, I focus on the differences between the candidates' speech styles. SR affirms her emotions and beliefs and speaks openly about what she wants; NS stresses the actions he will take – in keeping with the ethos already projected in previous televised debates (Kerbrat-Orecchioni & De Chanay, 2007). This can be best revealed by the examination of lexical features used in the candidates' speech, their discursive styles and rhetorical strategies. This relates to their presentation of the other and of themselves (Amossy, 1999; Goffman, 1973). For each dimension, I will show the exploitations of popular stereotypes associated with women and conventionally feminized speech styles (such as hysteria, weakness, politeness,

¹ For further details on how women's clothing interferes with power, see Bard, Christine, 2009. *Ce que soulève la jupe*. Autrement, Coll. Mutations/Sexe en tout genre, Paris.

talkativeness) by the male candidate to serve his electoral purpose. Stereotypes of women are also resorted to by SR, as we shall see below. All in all, I analyze the debate and examine it against the background of established cultural and linguistic expectations.

3. Analysis of the debate

3.1 Context

Although the campaign had been running for several months and there were not many new topics to be discussed, the debate before the presidential election gave French voters an occasion to understand the candidates' respective political positions and projects. Overall, the media treated the debate as a major political event, a dramatic moment of confrontation between a potential winner and loser. A debate at this point in the campaign has been organized ever since 1974, with the exception of 2002 when Jacques Chirac refused to face far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. The 2007 debate was special for two reasons. First, it was preceded for the first time by a series of televised debates between each of the main candidates and a panel representing the electorate; second, it was the first time ever that one of the candidates was a woman.

The confrontational nature of the debate is epitomized by the setting. Oppositions are enhanced by the contrasted colors of the candidates' outfits in the advertising video for the debate as well as through the shape of the setting (which is round, with white and blue corners visible in the background). During their introduction, the candidates are standing back to back. They turn progressively around and end up facing each other. Ségolène Royal (SR) is on the left of the screen; she wears a white blouse with a banded collar and a black jacket. She faces Nicolas Sarkozy (NS) who is on the right of the screen, in a black suit, with a white shirt and blue tie. The use of opposed colors in the candidates' outfits accentuates the gender divide. Their position reflects their political stance, the two well-known French journalists and neutral moderators hosting the debate, Patrick Poivre d'Arvor (PPDA) and Arlette Chabot (AC), a man and a woman, are facing the audience, PPDA being on the left near SR and Arlette Chabot on the right near NS – so as to create a gender balance. On each side of the polygonal desk, which hides the feet of the candidates, is a clock indicating how long each candidate is to speak and when their time is up. Each candidate is entitled by law to equal time.

3.2 Linguistic characteristics of the debate

While each candidate is to speak exactly the same amount of time, this does not say anything about the number of words they use. As shown in Table 1, NS's total word count is higher than SR's, and the measure of his vocabulary, in terms of the number of forms used only once, shows a slightly richer lexicon. His total speaking time is 3 minutes less than that of SR, which could either mean that he has a faster speech delivery than SR, or that he interrupts her more often (a fact that the clock does not take into account). It is well-known that "men interrupt women more than they interrupt other men, far more than women interrupt men, and more than women interrupt other women" (Jones, Singh and *alii*, 1999: 87; see also Coates, 1993: 107-113 and Zimmerman and West, 1975, cited by Coates, 1998: 418). It could also be an indicator of NS's aggressiveness towards SR (Monière, 1995). In any case, this appears as one of the objective markers of difference between the candidates' speech.

Table 1. Formal features of each intervention

Candidate	Occurrences	Forms	Hapax	Maximal Frequency	Form

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Royal	15032	2226	1122	537	De
Sarkozy	15746	2286	1162	608	De

The relation between the candidates is indicated in particular by their use of pronouns. The *Lexico3* statistical textual analysis yields the following results:

Table 2

Forms	Je	On	Nous	Vous	Ils/elles	Ceux/celles
Sarkozy	356	193	66	238	37	20
Royal	432	55	57	198	65	20

SR uses the first person pronoun *je* and third person plural pronouns *ils/elles* at a greater frequency than NS. She thus establishes a link between herself and the voters. Her emphasis is on what she wants to do for them. On the other hand, NS speaks in a more impersonal way using the indefinite third person "on" (roughly equivalent to "one") which, being more impersonal and collective, has a vaguer referent – this makes him less authoritarian but more consensual. Another characteristic of his speech is to address his debate partner in a very direct manner. Neither candidate addresses the other with the informal second person singular "tu", as "vous" must prevail between them. The count of forms for the second person plural verbs in *-ez* are 200 for SR and 199 for NS; they address one another to a comparable degree in that respect. The count of presentative forms "voilà" - *here is* also shows balance (14 times for SR, 13 for NS) as are the occurrences of "je dis" - *I say* (SR: 11/ NS: 12), and of the infinitive forms of the verbs.

Marchand and Dupuy (2007) pointed out that NS significantly integrates his debating partner through frequent terms of address such as *Madame*, *Madame Royal* and *vous*. He tends to project himself in the presidential role. This is reinforced by the frequency of repeated segments such as "si je suis Président de la République" - *if I am President of the Republic*, "si je suis élu Président de la République" - *if I am elected President of the Republic*. SR asserts her convictions through sequences in the first person such as *I think that, I believe that, I have been*. Her discourse also refers to a variety of social categories: *women, youth, social partners, business people, researchers*. She refers to the presidential function only twice, and refers to it in the feminine (Présidente de la République) when she does. NS refers to the presidential function 28 times, with 8 occurrences of "si je suis Président de la République" - *if I am President of the Republic*.

Pronouns and their distribution reveal other interesting aspects. The statistical analyses indicate that, in addition to the use of the first person, SR mostly elaborates coordinated sentences with a very peculiar rhythm of voice – wave-like – every time she adds an argument. This cumulative style may give the impression that she proposes an argument (or makes a statement) without actually developing it, something that NS will criticize. This is despite her more frequent use of causal markers.

Table 3

Forms	Je	Moi je	Et moi je	Et moi	Et je	Et bien, et que	Donc	Et donc	Parce que	Car	Et
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						etc.					
Royal	37 9	34	10	11	39	221	53	19	100	25	360
Sarkozy	29 6	20	1	4	18	135	28	3	54	7	239

SR uses a cumulative style to build a discourse that refers to what is concrete. She achieves a sense of proximity to people and an interest in defending the dispossessed by marshaling descriptions of people met, their hopes and difficulties, and she voices their wishes through frequent use of "je veux" - *I want* (47 occurrences vs. 34 for NS). SR uses both verbs *croire* and *penser*, "je crois" - *I believe* 48 times (vs. 16 for NS) and "je pense" - *I think* 42 times (vs. 20 for NS), which may lead the audience to perceive her speech as less rational and more emotional, with a tendency to *want* things, rather than *do* things,

Contrary to SR, NS throws himself into action: 1/ "la passion de ma vie porte un nom, c'est l'action" - *the passion of my life has a name, it is action* 2/ "je crois à l'action" - *I believe in action*, 3/ "je veux agir" - *I want to act*, 4/ "je veux passionnément agir" - *I passionately want to act*, 5/ "ils nous choisiront pour agir" - *they will choose us to act*. His objections are marked by frequent occurrences of "mais" - *but* 80 times (vs. 59 for SR), and by negation, as pointed out by Marchand and Dupuy (2007), "est pas" - *is not* 65 times (vs. 37 for SR – including "c'est pas", "ce n'est pas" - *it isn't*), "pas" *not* 299 times (214 for SR). NS also develops a discourse based on wishes and propositions: "je souhaite" - *I wish* 23 times (vs. 7 for SR), and "je propose" - *I propose* 17 times (vs. 9 for SR). He is characteristically factual about things and employs a lot of presentative forms: "c'est": 238 times (vs. 141 for SR).

The verb "devoir" - *must* in all its forms is more widely used by NS (34 times vs. 20 by SR), and so is the other verb "falloir" - *to have to* with 62 occurrences for NS (vs. 44 for SR) – and more specifically "Il faut" - *It is necessary* (29 for SR vs. 42 for NS). He uses the deontic discourse of what "needs to be done". This also appears in his repeated formula: "il n'y a pas que des droits, il y a aussi des devoirs" - *there aren't only rights, there are also duties* (7 occurrences, vs. 2 for SR which correspond only to NS's reported speech: which means that this is a very specific formula of his).

NS speaks in a more familiar register with positive superlative adjectives ("formidable" - *formidable* 5; "extraordinaire" - *extraordinary* 2, "passionnément" - *passionately* 1 vs. 0). He uses his voice and tone of voice to a greater extent than SR, which makes him, as a whole, more persuasive and allows him to attract greater attention. His casual style of speech can be seen in his syntax: NS: "ok" (1), "bon" - *all right* (21 vs. 2 SR); "c'est/c'était" - *it is/it was* (242 vs. 143 for SR); "ça" - *it* (41 vs. 86 for SR, reinforced by "cela": 36 vs. 21) and in the way he uses incomplete negation (since in French, a complete negation would be composed with "ne...pas"): "c'est pas" (24 vs. 2 for SR).

This shows how each candidate develops a different style. NS pleads for himself, whereas SR pleads for others. He develops a discourse in order to convince the voters that he is the best person to become President; she develops a discourse to convince people that she is the best person to defend them and their interests.

4. Politeness and gender strategies in a political debate

Politeness essentially consists in a special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account other people's feelings (Brown, in Coates, 1998: 83-84). The way to show consideration for people's feelings can thus be related to the notion of face (Goffman, 1974 ; 1975; Talbot, 2010: 84). The notion of face is structured by the desire not to

be imposed upon (negative face), and desires to be recognized (positive face). How can these desires find a place in a competitive debate? Pressures from the audience force both candidates to *show* that they are polite to each other, but they also should try to impose upon one another in order to be *preferred* to the *other* candidate by the voters. Hence, politeness may become an element for the winning strategy, as does the use of gender representations. Contrary to the assumption that women are generally more polite than men, SR seems here to be less polite than NS.

Does SR attack NS? Indeed, she is the first to attack, only a few minutes into the debate. Her first attack directly concerns NS's responsibilities as a member of the government, while NS tries to avoid actual confrontation. Generally speaking, SR's attack strategy remains more allusive, defensive and less systematic. She sends out messages without insisting on them: "construire des logements sociaux dans des communes qui, telles que la vôtre (Neuilly/Seine), ne respectent pas la loi!" - *building social housing in towns such as yours that do not conform to the law!*. Then, when she asks him to justify the 'fiscal shield', bringing up the case of a woman who received an enormous check from the state, he makes a *lapsus linguae* that she uses to her own advantage, NS: "ce que je propose, c'est pire/ SR: oui, c'est pire, vous avez raison!" - NS: *what I offer is worse/ SR: yes, it is worse, you are right!*. On the subject of immigration: SR: "non, ne plaisantez pas avec ces sujets, ne faites pas de dérision, ce n'est pas correct humainement vis-à-vis des personnes..." - *No, don't make fun out of these topics, don't laugh about them, it is not humanly correct towards people....*. On the subject of Europe, she obviously doesn't want to let him have the last word. She struggles to keep her turn to speak, (going back to polemics) raises highly contentious issues, and finally ends her own speech with the word "révolte" - *revolt*.

Also, SR defends herself against NS's strategies of attack by unveiling them. A little more than an hour into the debate, while he has constantly prevented her from making her point, cutting her off repeatedly, she accuses him: "cessez de m'interrompre, je connais bien la technique" - *stop interrupting me, I know the technique very well*. Instantaneously, he stops and lets her speak. Her response – a direct face-threatening act – unveils another indirect type of face-threatening act to the public – because it makes his technique obvious to everyone and prevents him from using it from then on. From this point on, NS will not interrupt her as much as he did before.

Another such exchange can be illustrated by the following excerpt:

SR: Je connais vos techniques, vous vous posez en victime dès que vous êtes attaqué. - *I know your techniques, you present yourself as a victim as soon as you are attacked*

NS: Avec vous madame, ce serait une victime consentante. - *With you, Madam, I would be a consenting victim*

SR: Tant mieux, au moins, il y a du plaisir. - *I am glad, at least, that there is some pleasure*

This example illustrates how the French tradition of tolerance for the other gender is used by NS as a response. This puts the female candidate on the defensive (as oblique or allusive remarks do according to Guigou (1997: 104), cited by Perry 2005: 343), and SR, I believe, has to answer in the same tone and register.

As can be seen, gender plays a role in the strategies used. Although SR does not rely on *her* femininity to reinforce her argumentation during the debate – except in her conclusion – she does use others' stigmata (Goffman, 1975). She raises and then focuses on issues concerning

women and the social injustice suffered by the poor and the weak: the status of women working in the police, the rape of two police women; the general economic injustice towards women; the pension system, unfair to women; the arrest of a grandfather in front of his grandson's school; the integration of children with disabilities in regular schools. The criticism she addresses to NS for being brutal in the second part of the debate also resorts to gendered stereotypes.

- (1) vous êtes très brutal. Remettre à plat, ce n'est pas démolir
you are very brutal: reconsidering doesn't mean destroying
- (2) n'utilisez pas ce sujet de façon aussi brutale
don't use this subject [Turkey] in such a brutal manner
- (3) construire une France où l'on pourra réformer sans brutaliser
building a France where it will be possible to make things change without being brutal

Men are brutal, and so is NS.

Yet, brutality is not NS's strategy, which relies on what could be termed courteous attack. He delivers his attack while appearing excessively polite. His use of "Madame" (115 times, i.e. the most frequent noun of the entire corpus), and "Madame Royal" whereas SR uses "Monsieur" only 7 times, addressing him this way 6 times and once as "Nicolas Sarkozy". Such a use of "Madame" is remarkable as it shows extreme deference. It also integrates the adversary in NS's own sphere. First of all, etymologically, "Madame" means "*my lady*". In this sense politeness here leads to possession. The frequent use of "Madame" also reminds the audience that SR is a woman and that NS is the man. Although his use of "Madame" very clearly distinguishes him from her, parallels are at the same time drawn between them. Overall, as shown by Rosier (2006), extreme politeness, as the insisting use of the titles "Mr." or "Mrs.", can also be insulting. NS insists on their similarities and differences more than she does, in underlining their "divergences" - *points of disagreement* (2) and "points d'accord" - *points of agreement* (she also refers to the latter; they both use the expression twice), or just to say that he agrees with her (8 times).

The fact that he shows extreme politeness and linguistic hypercorrection when he addresses her is also interesting as the audience could not, at first, say that it is sexist to be polite. So the immediate understanding of the debate is that he shows a great amount of respect and behaves like a gentleman. With regards to this, one of the interactions is remarkable: he tries to answer, but she keeps on attacking him. In order to gain the right to respond, he addresses her with the most extreme politeness: "Madame, est-ce que vous **souffrez** que je puisse faire une phrase?" - *Would you please be so kind as to allow me to finish a sentence?*. The formal aspect of the formula has to do with the social *persona* NS wants to put forward of himself, as being the one who knows (Irvine, 2009). In fact, it is such elevated style that it has been misunderstood in the first two transcriptions of the debate that I used (*Le Monde*, May 4, 2007; and another provided by my lab). After this sentence, SR has no choice but to let him talk. Other typical words of politeness from NS are "excusez-moi" - *excuse me* (5 times, none for SR), "pardon" - *I beg your pardon* (4 times, none for SR). This way, he manages to mask some of his most aggressive attacks under the cover of a double discourse. While NS's attacks are rather well disguised by the variety of registers that are used, SR keeps to formal grammar and style throughout the debate.

NS tends to compliment and insist on the respect he has for SR – an attitude that follows a

certain pattern of gendered behavior – while SR does not use these strategies. For Holmes (in Coates, 1998: 107; as in Talbot, 2010: 85), "compliments addressed to women have the same function as praise given to children, that is serve as encouragement to continue with the approved behavior. They could be regarded as patronizing socialization devices." And she adds a little further "as Wolfson (1984: 243) suggests... the fact that women receive more compliments than men reflects their subordinate status in society as a whole". This kind of strategy appears in NS's discourse several times: 1/"j'ai trop de respect pour vous pour vous laisser aller dans le mépris" - *I have too much respect for you to let you go into contempt* – which is at the edge of being patronizing, as if he could control what she says – but also: 2/ "madame Royal le sait très bien, que je respecte son talent et sa compétence (...) j'ai du respect pour le parcours qui a été celui de madame Royal." - *Mrs. Royal knows very well I respect her talent and competence (...) I have respect for the trajectory that has been hers*. "The way compliments function and the way they are perceived by their recipients are affected by the power relationship between complimenter and recipient, and also by what genre of interaction they are engaged in. (...) Compliments are always open to being interpreted as assertions of hierarchical relationships, even if that is not the way the complimenter intends them to sound. It is possible to interpret a compliment as a patronizing 'put-down'" (Talbot, 2010: 87). This use of compliments may also be part of NS's strategy to gain power over SR in the eyes of the audience: "women because of their role in the social order, are seen as appropriate recipients of all manner of social judgments in the form of compliments... the way a woman is spoken to is, no matter what her status, a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society." (Wolfson, 1984: 243, quoted by Holmes, in Coates, 1998: 107; Talbot, 2010). On the other hand, SR does not *feel* respected: at one point, as the hosts try to make the candidates respect the speaking time, SR addresses PPDA: "vous permettez, parce que moi aussi j'ai l'intention de me faire respecter..." - *Allow me to answer, because I too intend to be respected* – which is an indirect spoken act implying NS does not respect her. Although he constantly *talks* about the fact that *he* respects her and shows her respect, and *she* does not, as this example shows: NS: "Ce n'est pas une façon de respecter son concurrent" - *this is no way to respect one's contender* - or "je ne me serais jamais permis de parler de vous comme cela" - *I would never have presumed to talk to you like this*.

More specifically, NS makes more frequent use of "vous dites" (SR: 5/ NS: 12), which is a way to accuse her of challenging the validity of what she says, and often, to try to point out some incoherence in what she has to say. He also addresses her 13 times with direct questions: "est-ce que vous...?" - *do you?* (vs. SR: 3); "c'était pour être désagréable?" - *was that meant to be unpleasant?* NS appears to ask more direct questions (meaning ending with question marks) than SR in the whole debate. I find 124 question marks for him against 71 for her, in what also appears to be a sign of aggressiveness (Monière, 1995). NS uses a paraleipsis: "il faut en finir avec ces discours creux (pas le vôtre, je ne veux pas être désagréable)" - *one should put an end to these empty discourses (not yours, I do not mean to be unpleasant)*"; by saying "not yours", he in fact acknowledges that her discourse *is* empty. So at the same time he says that he does not want to be unpleasant (and this is what is heard at the first level of speech), he is also very aggressive towards her – something the audience does hear, but does not acknowledge consciously. Deciphering the different levels of meaning requires a second reading or analysis of the debate, which the audience cannot perform instantly while watching. I could argue that NS tries repeatedly to confine SR to the sphere of "women who make futile speeches" and who engage in "bavardage" (*gossip*) in a very organized manner and accuses her of "imprecision".

NS puts SR down indirectly by qualifying her discourse as "empty." He mocks her indirectly by attacking her desire to systematically negotiate and argue before making any decision as President. This is, again, supposed to be a woman's flaw: the implied idea here is that they want to talk a lot, but are incapable of taking any decision" (Aebischer, 1985). NS thus says "je vous reconnais, il y a une troisième idée, c'est une grande discussion. C'est la sixième ou septième depuis qu'on débat ensemble: la grande discussion, il faut qu'elle débouche sur quelque chose!" - *I have to admit, you have a third idea: it is to have a great discussion. It is the sixth or seventh since we started debating: but the big discussion has to go somewhere!*"; and later: "on promet tout, et quand on ne sait pas promettre, on promet une discussion" - *it is easy to promise everything, and when one doesn't know what to promise, one promises a big discussion* which he immediately opposes to *his* way: "je veux m'engager sur des résultats, sur du concret." - *I want to commit myself to results, tangible ones.*

On several occasions, NS attacks and derides SR on her lack of precision and respect towards him, and attempts to break into her discourse, to make her lose face. Every time he has the opportunity, he wishes to emphasize that she is incoherent, naïve, hysterical... like a woman... For instance, when she declares that she will decide budget transfers from the State to the regions, he clearly ridicules her as if it were something impossible and totally confusing. All NS's debate strategies lead to suggest SR is less competent than he is, and that it is because she is a woman (Serini et al. 1998; Gidegil & Everitt, 1999; Scharrer, 2002).

As I can see in the following examples, he also uses positive terms such as "sympathetic" and "nice" while addressing SR, but in an ironic (condescending) way: "c'est **sympathique**, vous dites, et c'est sympathique, et c'est juste" ; "ok , d'accord, pourquoi pas. C'est sympathique; Vous payez comment?" - *it's nice, you say, it's nice and true; ok why not ? it's nice but how do you pay for that?* - "**gentil**" - *nice* (used twice by NS): "vous voyez, c'est pas gentil pour Monsieur Jospin"/ "ce n'est pas gentil de dire des choses comme cela". - *you see, it is not nice for Mr. Jospin/ it is not nice to say such things.*

The most striking moment of this process is when SR gets angry about the law on the integration of handicapped children. On the one hand, she uses her anger to try to destabilize him, which he turns against her by accusing her of losing her temper and by asserting that it is not something that a President should do: "mais calmez-vous !" - *calm down !* And to which she responds: "non je ne me calmerai pas : il y a des colères qui sont parfaitement saines." - *no, I won't calm down: sometimes angers are justified.* The way in which he tells her to calm down has some sexist overtones: by saying this, he tries to gain the upper hand, giving her orders, something he might not have done had he been confronted to a man. Because she does not obey, he then implies that she lost her temper, which makes her unsuitable for the role of President ("vous êtes sortie de vos gonds" - *you lost your temper*) and also implicitly refers to feminine hysteria, but of course, in a very indirect and allusive manner.

On the other hand, if SR does not speak with such formal politeness as NS does, but adopts a very direct frontal way of debating from the beginning, it might be because she has learned, as a professional politician, to adopt a certain way of speaking: "women working in environments where men predominate, and thus masculine norms of behavior and speech also predominate, are forced in order to be viewed as professional to adopt those norms; however as we have seen within particular environments there is some degree of negotiation with those norms." (Mills, 2003: 195).

NS's modes of attack are in a way indirect. As I tried to show based on previous gender studies, all his attacks tend to implicitly confine SR in the category of futile, talkative, imprecise, and hysterical women's speech (Aebischer, 1985), using the stereotypes that have been engraved in the collective unconscious for centuries. It is extremely difficult for a

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woman to fight back publicly against such implications, when they are grounded in the cultural subconscious – whatever SR says. In this sense, her concluding intervention is a poor strategy. By recognizing that she is a woman, as a default, she validates his preceding attacks as being founded, and implicitly validates all his accusations.

5. Conclusion

Overall NS attacks SR mostly indirectly under the guise of politeness. This is for him a way of making his attack on a woman acceptable for the audience. In contrast, SR attacks her political adversary in a very frontal manner, continually trying to call him out. Her strategy, in fact, might then seem rather unfeminine in terms of traditional representations – and so it may seem shocking. On the other hand, NS, because he is *so* polite, appears to be the seducer, a nice and deferent man, who knows his manners. The use of stereotypical representations also appears in the case of the topic of integration of the handicapped and SR's anger: as she tries to insist on the fact that she is a 'strong' woman, who will not allow anyone to control her, NS tries to take advantage of the situation by redefining her anger as inappropriate and hysterical. She tries to find her place during the whole debate, juggling with her womanhood on one side and the affirmation of her ability to be a President – which, as a woman, she has to prove and is not conceded to her. She frequently uses a strategy of *captatio benevolentiae* with the audience (Bonnafoos, 2003), i.e. she is trying to move the audience by telling stories and showing her sympathetic side (which NS does, eventually, use against her). She defends herself against her adversary ("je connais vos techniques" - *I know your techniques*; "vous vous posez en victime" - *you make yourself look like you are a victim*), she has to fight and although she fights well, there is a discrepancy between what she wants to do and the way it is perceived by the audience in the very fact that she has to fight back because she is a woman. This is also why NS tries to put her in situations where she *has* to fight back.

On the other hand, NS being a man, does not have to justify his own capacity to become President. His strategy during the entire debate is to systematically suggest that because she is a woman, she is incapable, reducing her to her gender in a very subtle way. Unlike her, he shows extreme deference and politeness, in a formal way, whereas she is 'just' polite. But his general attitudes and discourse are far more aggressive (gestures, irony, sexism). According to Holmes: "Being polite means expressing respect towards the person you are talking to and avoiding offending them... If politeness is a behaviour, which actively expresses positive concern for others as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour" (Holmes, 1995: 5), then NS is certainly *not* polite. And his specific use of politeness seems, overall, to be a strategy to make SR lose face (Rosier, 2006): as I tried to show, remaining verbally polite while addressing a woman allows him to be more aggressive than he socially ought to be in terms of illocutory speech acts (Austin, 1962). However, his discourse contains all the forms of politeness – which makes it acceptable by the audience at all costs. So here, the appearance of politeness in NS's discourse might just be "a trick to keep social inferiors in their place" (Mills, 2003: 7).

In conclusion, what the debate really shows is that SR has no intention to be a dictatorial president. She argues that she wants to *debate* with all the relevant parties before making any decision. So for SR, words are acts, discourses are actions – which also means that she believes in respect and the performativity of spoken acts (Duranti, 2008). In contrast, NS does not believe in words as actions nor in discussions. He opposes both. Which could also lead us to think that he does not believe in the performativity of speech (although he might believe in the performativity of irony), so he can play on words and with words more easily, which

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indeed he does (cf. "victime consentante"). Certainly, in such a political, mediatic, linguistic and social context "gender is dispersed into contextual elements rather than being located at the level of the individual" (Mills: 2003: 5), and what could be labeled as feminine language has no role to play here. Yet I have tried to demonstrate how cultural, social and linguistic representations on gender can be manipulated in interaction.

Thus only a close look at what is really being said and how it is said allows to point to what seems genderized in both candidates' discourse. However, I want to consider the fact that, since both candidates each employed a different style and use of argumentation, the type of argumentation and style used by SR is the less appropriate and so, less successful. All in all, NS's words lead the audience – and not SR herself – to understand in a negative way that her way of speaking is feminine.

The use of women's representations is negative in the interaction. NS leads during the interaction game, because SR cannot deny being a woman, and his only strategy of attack consists in reminding the audience that she is a woman.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Anna Fahey, Fred Dervin, and Pierre Larrivée for providing language assistance.

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