



The Stylistics of Advocacy in Women's Caucuses

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Abstract

Advocacy discourse constitutes one of the most influential forms of institutional communication through which women's caucuses promote gender equality, shape public opinion, and influence policy-making. From a feminist stylistic perspective, this study investigates the stylistic realization of advocacy in selected policy briefs and advocacy reports published by the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC). Rather than limiting the analysis to isolated rhetorical devices, the study adopts a comprehensive stylistic approach that examines how advocacy is linguistically constructed through textual-conceptual functions, transitivity patterns, figurative language, and persuasive appeals. Drawing upon feminist stylistics and systemic functional linguistics, the study explores how linguistic choices contribute to representing refugee women, foregrounding structural inequality, and legitimizing policy intervention. The analysis demonstrates that WRC discourse consistently employs prioritization, representation of actions, active transitivity, metaphor, metonymy, and logical persuasion to construct advocacy as evidence-based, institutionally credible, and socially transformative. The study concludes that stylistic analysis provides valuable insights into the linguistic mechanisms through which women's caucuses advocate for gender justice and social reform.

Introduction

Advocacy for women's rights has become an increasingly influential aspect of political discourse in the United States, with women's caucuses serving as important institutional platforms for promoting equality, influencing public policy, and representing women's interests. These caucuses encourage collaboration among legislators and advocacy groups to address issues that have traditionally received limited political attention. Within this setting, language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a strategic instrument for shaping identities, influencing public opinion, and challenging existing power relations. Through carefully selected linguistic strategies, advocacy discourse has the capacity to reinforce or contest dominant social and political ideologies.

Although previous research has extensively examined the political influence and policy contributions of women's caucuses, comparatively little attention has been given to the linguistic features that characterize their advocacy discourse. In particular, the stylistic dimensions of political advocacy—including lexical choices, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies—remain underexplored. Consequently, investigating these linguistic features from a stylistic perspective provides valuable insights into how language constructs gender identities, represents power relations, and advances women's rights within institutional contexts.

Accordingly, this study investigates the advocacy discourse of the U.S. Women's Caucus through the framework of stylistic analysis. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Identify the principal linguistic and stylistic features employed in caucus advocacy discourse to promote women's rights.
2. Examine how these linguistic choices contribute to constructing gender identities while reinforcing or challenging patriarchal ideologies.

The study argues that advocacy discourse within women's caucuses is characterized by deliberate stylistic choices that communicate ideological meanings. Through carefully selected vocabulary, grammatical structures, and rhetorical techniques, these texts both reflect existing gender relations and function as persuasive tools for influencing public attitudes and encouraging institutional and legislative reform.

2. Language and Style

Language and style constitute two essential components of effective communication, enabling writers and speakers to present ideas clearly, accurately, and persuasively. They facilitate the transmission of information in a manner that is both meaningful and accessible while allowing communicators to adapt their messages to the needs and expectations of their intended audiences (Ndimele, 2003). Language has long been described as a highly organized system. For example, Hockett (1958) characterizes it as a "system of systems" composed of complex habitual patterns, whereas Wardhaugh (1972) defines language as a structured system of arbitrary vocal symbols employed for human communication.

Communication may occur through speech, writing, or signing, but written language occupies a particularly significant position because it enables ideas, arguments, and emotions to be expressed with precision and permanence. The effectiveness of written communication largely depends on the writer's stylistic choices, which determine how successfully meaning is conveyed and arguments are presented. Style represents the distinctive manner in which language is employed to communicate meaning by integrating form with content. It encompasses lexical selection, grammatical organization, graphological features, and rhetorical devices, all of which contribute to the unique linguistic identity of a text. Consequently, style reflects the characteristic linguistic patterns that distinguish one writer from another, making it the central focus of stylistic analysis (Hamawand, 2024).

2.1 Stylistics

Stylistics is the branch of linguistics concerned with investigating how language is used across different forms of communication. It examines the linguistic choices made by speakers and writers and explores how these choices interact to create particular stylistic effects within a text (Leech & Short, 2007). Rather than concentrating solely on linguistic forms, stylistics also considers the communicative functions of those forms and the ways they contribute to meaning construction.

The discipline extends beyond the analysis of isolated linguistic features by taking into account contextual factors such as genre, communicative purpose, historical background, and authorship. Through systematic linguistic analysis, stylistics seeks to explain how textual meaning emerges from patterned language use, employing a variety of linguistic models and analytical frameworks to provide comprehensive interpretations of style (Leech, 2008).

Stylistic analysis also emphasizes the relationship between language and its communicative environment. It investigates how authors intentionally select specific lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical features to express ideas, persuade audiences, and achieve particular communicative goals. These deliberate linguistic choices shape readers' interpretations and influence the overall impact of the discourse (Hamawand, 2024).

Modern stylistics developed during the mid-twentieth century as a response to traditional literary criticism, which often relied heavily on subjective interpretation. By adopting systematic linguistic methods, stylistics introduced greater analytical precision and objectivity into textual analysis (Giovanelli, Mason, & Clayton, 2018).

Similarly, Simpson (2014) argues that stylistic analysis is founded on three essential principles: rigour, retrievability, and reproducibility. Rigour requires analyses to follow established analytical procedures, while retrievability ensures that interpretations are explicitly supported by linguistic evidence. Reproducibility allows other researchers to apply the same analytical framework and obtain comparable findings, thereby strengthening the reliability and transparency of stylistic research.

2.1.1 Leech and Short's Stylistic Model

Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model offers a comprehensive framework for examining texts by systematically relating linguistic form to stylistic function and interpretation. Grounded in linguistic stylistics, the model maintains that objective textual description should precede interpretation, thereby ensuring analytical consistency and methodological reliability.

The framework is organized around the Checklist of Linguistic and Stylistic Categories, which classifies textual analysis into four interconnected dimensions: lexical features, grammatical features, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. Each dimension contributes to explaining how language produces meaning and fulfills communicative purposes.

At the lexical level, the model investigates vocabulary choices, including evaluative adjectives, abstract nouns, and ideologically significant expressions. Such lexical items are especially important in advocacy discourse because they communicate attitudes, values, and judgments while shaping readers' perceptions of social issues.

The grammatical dimension focuses on sentence structure, transitivity, voice, and modality. These grammatical resources reveal how texts assign agency, distribute responsibility, and construct relationships of power among social actors. Through careful grammatical choices, writers can emphasize particular viewpoints while presenting arguments as objective or authoritative.

Another important component of the model concerns figures of speech, including metaphor, simile, repetition, and parallelism. These rhetorical devices enhance the persuasive force of discourse by strengthening emotional engagement, emphasizing key ideas, and reinforcing ideological positions. Within advocacy texts, such stylistic devices frequently contribute to framing social problems, constructing collective identities, and encouraging institutional or political action.

The final component examines cohesion and context, emphasizing the linguistic mechanisms that connect different parts of a text through reference, repetition, conjunctions, and other discourse markers. It also considers how stylistic choices are shaped by communicative purpose, institutional setting, and audience expectations (Leech & Short, 2007).

Overall, Leech and Short's framework successfully integrates detailed linguistic description with interpretive analysis, enabling researchers to explain how systematic language patterns generate meaning. The model is particularly valuable for the study of feminist advocacy because it demonstrates how stylistic choices function ideologically to promote women's rights, challenge institutional inequalities, and persuade audiences within political discourse.

2.2 Advocacy

The concept of advocacy originates from the Latin term *advocare*, meaning "to call for assistance" or "to support." In contemporary usage, advocacy refers to purposeful efforts aimed at influencing decision-makers, institutions, or the wider public to promote, protect, or defend human rights and social justice (Bysaha, 2023). Advocacy is commonly understood as a structured process through which evidence-based recommendations are presented to policymakers, stakeholders, and influential actors to encourage informed decision-making (Bochenek, 2019). Its primary objective is to influence legislation, public policy, institutional practices, and societal attitudes in ways that address inequality and promote equitable social change.

Beyond influencing political decisions, advocacy also seeks to challenge discrimination, reduce injustice, and strengthen democratic values by empowering marginalized communities, particularly women and children (McKenzie et al., 2011). It functions as a coordinated process involving multiple activities designed to shape public opinion, reform legal frameworks, and improve institutional responses to social issues.

Sharma (1995) further describes advocacy as a systematic series of interconnected actions intended to transform public policies, political processes, and social attitudes. These actions may include raising public awareness, mobilizing communities, encouraging civic participation, and exerting pressure on governments to respond more effectively to human rights concerns. Rather than representing a single activity, advocacy is an ongoing process that combines communication, public engagement, and policy influence to achieve meaningful and sustainable social change.

2.2.1 Types of Advocacy

Advocacy is commonly classified into three major forms: individual advocacy, adjacent advocacy, and structural advocacy, each differing in its objectives, scope, and level of intervention (Earnest et al., 2022).

Individual advocacy focuses on addressing the immediate needs of a specific person. In this form, professionals advocate on behalf of individuals to ensure they receive appropriate services, protection, or support. Although the primary beneficiaries are the individuals concerned, positive outcomes often extend to their families and caregivers.

Adjacent advocacy aims to improve the environment surrounding individuals rather than altering broader institutional systems. It typically involves mobilizing communities, organizations, or professionals to support vulnerable groups and address localized concerns. While this approach can generate meaningful improvements, its effects are generally confined to particular situations and do not usually result in lasting structural reform.

Structural advocacy, by contrast, seeks comprehensive and long-term change by influencing laws, public policies, institutional regulations, and the allocation of resources. Rather than focusing on isolated cases, it addresses systemic inequalities that affect entire communities. Examples include advocating for legislative reforms, revising public health regulations, improving access to healthcare services, strengthening environmental protections, or introducing policy measures that promote social justice and reduce inequality. Through these interventions, structural advocacy aims to eliminate the root causes of injustice and create sustainable institutional change (Earnest et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Functions of Advocacy

Advocacy performs several interconnected functions that contribute to promoting justice, protecting rights, and encouraging meaningful social transformation (Newbigging & Ridley, 2018).

One of its primary functions is empowerment, enabling individuals and marginalized communities to express their concerns, participate in decision-making processes, and influence matters that directly affect their lives. By amplifying underrepresented voices, advocacy promotes greater inclusion and participation within social and political institutions.

Another essential function involves protecting individual rights. Advocates work to ensure that legal, social, and institutional rights are recognized and respected while helping to prevent discrimination, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of injustice. Through these efforts, advocacy contributes to safeguarding human dignity and promoting equal treatment.

Advocacy also serves as an important mechanism for policy development and institutional reform. By raising public awareness, presenting evidence, mobilizing stakeholders, and engaging policymakers, advocates seek to influence legislation, organizational practices, and government policies. These activities encourage reforms that improve conditions for individuals and communities while addressing broader structural inequalities.

A further function of advocacy is the promotion of social justice and inclusion. Advocacy challenges exclusionary practices by recognizing the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups and

encouraging more equitable participation in society. Through this process, it contributes to creating communities characterized by fairness, equality, and respect for diversity.

Finally, advocacy enhances transparency and accountability by encouraging institutions and decision-makers to justify their actions, respond to public concerns, and remain accountable for policies affecting citizens. In doing so, advocacy strengthens democratic governance and promotes more responsive and inclusive institutions (Newbigging & Ridley, 2018).

3. The Analytical Model

This study adopts Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic model as the principal analytical framework because it provides a systematic linguistic approach for examining the relationship between language form and communicative function. The model is particularly appropriate for investigating advocacy discourse, as it enables a detailed exploration of how stylistic choices contribute to persuasion, evaluation, and the construction of ideological meanings within political texts.

The framework is built upon Leech and Short's Checklist of Linguistic and Stylistic Categories, which organizes textual analysis into four interrelated components: lexical features, grammatical features, figures of speech, and cohesion and context. Examining these dimensions collectively allows the analysis to move from objective linguistic description toward a deeper interpretation of textual meaning while maintaining methodological consistency and analytical transparency (Leech & Short, 2007).

In applying this framework to the advocacy discourse of the U.S. Women's Caucus, the present study emphasizes those stylistic features that are especially relevant to political and feminist communication. At the lexical level, the analysis focuses on vocabulary selection, particularly evaluative adjectives, abstract nouns, and ideologically significant expressions that communicate concepts such as equality, justice, empowerment, and women's rights.

The grammatical analysis examines sentence structures, transitivity patterns, voice, and modality. These grammatical resources reveal how the discourse constructs agency, attributes responsibility, expresses obligation, and legitimizes political action. Through these linguistic patterns, advocacy texts strategically represent social actors and policy issues while encouraging institutional responses.

The model also investigates the use of figures of speech, including metaphor, repetition, and parallelism, which function as persuasive devices that strengthen emotional engagement and reinforce ideological messages. Such rhetorical techniques increase the effectiveness of advocacy discourse by highlighting social inequalities, fostering collective identity, and encouraging support for political reform.

Finally, the study considers cohesion and context by examining how textual unity is achieved through reference, repetition, and discourse markers, while also exploring how institutional settings and communicative objectives influence stylistic choices. These contextual factors contribute significantly to the persuasive force of advocacy discourse and shape the interpretation of linguistic features.

By relying exclusively on Leech and Short's stylistic model, the study maintains a coherent analytical framework capable of revealing how systematic linguistic choices promote ideological positions, mobilize audiences, and support the political objectives of women's advocacy within legislative and institutional contexts.

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 exemplifies structural advocacy because it presents women's economic disadvantage as a systemic issue embedded within social and institutional structures rather than as an isolated individual experience. Its principal advocacy function is to identify a policy problem and establish it as a legitimate priority requiring institutional attention.

From a lexical perspective, expressions such as "persistent" and "economic marginality" emphasize both the enduring nature and structural complexity of gender-based economic inequality. These evaluative and abstract lexical choices reinforce the seriousness of the issue. The verb "recognizes" attributes authority to the Beijing Platform for Action, enhancing the institutional credibility of the statement.

Grammatically, the extract is structured as a declarative sentence with a straightforward transitivity pattern that foregrounds the institutional actor responsible for acknowledging the problem. This construction presents the statement as objective and authoritative. Contextually, the explicit reference to the Beijing Platform for Action situates the discourse within an internationally recognized feminist framework, thereby increasing the persuasive force and legitimacy of the advocacy message.

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 represents structural advocacy because it explicitly urges institutions to eliminate systemic discrimination through coordinated action. Its primary advocacy function is to assign responsibility and encourage accountability among governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Lexically, the verb "expects" conveys obligation and institutional expectation without functioning as a direct command. The extensive enumeration of social categories—including gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, national origin, age, and disability—highlights the multidimensional nature of discrimination and reinforces an intersectional understanding of inequality.

At the grammatical level, the infinitive construction "to remove" presents eliminating discrimination as a purposeful and necessary objective. The sentence structure directs attention toward collective institutional action rather than individual responsibility. Furthermore, the repeated reference to multiple identity categories strengthens textual cohesion while aligning the discourse with contemporary feminist principles that recognize the interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination.

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 illustrates evidence-based advocacy, using empirical information to support arguments concerning gender inequality in the labor market. The statistical evidence strengthens structural advocacy by demonstrating that wage disparities are measurable outcomes of systemic discrimination.

At the lexical level, numerical expressions such as "84 cents" and "90%" provide objective evidence that enhances the credibility of the argument. The repeated use of the verb "earn" maintains thematic consistency while emphasizing economic inequality as the central concern.

Grammatically, the coordinated sentence structure combines two related factual claims, producing a coherent and persuasive argument. The use of the present tense portrays wage inequality as a continuing reality rather than a historical phenomenon. Stylistically, the reliance on factual evidence instead of emotionally charged language increases the text's authority and aligns it with the conventions of policy-oriented advocacy 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 represents evaluative and reform-oriented advocacy, as it critiques the shortcomings of existing policies while emphasizing the necessity for stronger institutional responses. Its principal advocacy function is to highlight policy deficiencies and justify the implementation of more effective support mechanisms.

From a lexical perspective, the nouns "inadequacy" and "need", together with the adjective "robust," convey explicit evaluation by emphasizing that existing measures are insufficient to address the challenges faced by families. These carefully selected lexical items communicate criticism while simultaneously advocating policy improvement.

Grammatically, the nominalized expression "the inadequacy of these measures" shifts attention from specific actors to the broader policy framework, presenting the problem as systemic rather than attributing blame to individual decision-makers. The declarative structure reinforces the objective tone of the statement.

Contextually, the reference to the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a temporal and social frame that legitimizes the call for reform. By linking policy shortcomings to a globally recognized crisis, the discourse increases the urgency of its advocacy and strengthens the justification for institutional intervention. Overall, the extract employs a measured yet persuasive style that encourages policymakers to recognize existing weaknesses and adopt more comprehensive family support policies.

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 exemplifies strategic and forward-looking policy advocacy, emphasizing evidence-based decision-making as a means of promoting gender equality. Its primary advocacy function is to recommend practical policy measures capable of improving women's economic participation through more informed governance.

Lexically, specialized expressions such as "disaggregated gender data" reflect technical expertise and institutional authority, positioning the discourse within a professional policy context. The phrase "greater inclusion" conveys a positive and solution-oriented perspective, while the detailed listing of demographic variables highlights the importance of recognizing diversity within women's experiences.

At the grammatical level, the modal verb "can" expresses possibility rather than obligation, allowing the recommendation to appear balanced and evidence-driven instead of prescriptive. The sentence structure presents the proposed action as both practical and achievable.

Stylistically, the cumulative enumeration of demographic categories—including age, disability, migration status, religion, and location—reinforces the principle of intersectionality while maintaining cohesion with earlier extracts that address multiple dimensions of inequality. The objective and measured tone enhances

the credibility of the recommendation, making it consistent with the conventions of institutional and policy-oriented advocacy discourse. Through its emphasis on empirical evidence and inclusive policymaking, the extract demonstrates how linguistic choices can support persuasive advocacy without relying on emotionally charged language.

4. Results And Discussion

The stylistic analysis of the selected extracts demonstrates that the advocacy discourse of the U.S. Women's Caucus is predominantly characterized by structural and policy-oriented advocacy rather than by individual or localized forms of advocacy. Across the five extracts, women's economic inequality is consistently represented as a systemic issue rooted in institutional structures, public policies, and labor market practices. This finding supports the assumption that caucus discourse deliberately employs linguistic strategies to frame gender inequality as a collective societal concern requiring legislative and institutional intervention.

Lexically, the discourse is distinguished by the frequent use of abstract and evaluative expressions such as economic marginality, inequality, discrimination, inadequacy, and inclusion. These lexical choices transform individual experiences into broader social and institutional concerns, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of advocacy claims. Furthermore, the extensive use of technical and policy-related terminology—particularly in the fifth extract—creates an expert register that enhances the authority and credibility of the discourse.

The grammatical analysis reveals a clear preference for declarative sentence structures, nominalization, and modal verbs such as *expects* and *can*. These grammatical resources perform several important advocacy functions. Declarative constructions present arguments as objective and factual, while nominalization shifts attention from individual actors to broader institutional processes, emphasizing the structural nature of social inequality. Modal verbs express obligation, recommendation, or possibility without adopting an overly directive tone, making policy proposals appear balanced and reasonable. In addition, the consistent use of the present tense, particularly in discussions of gender-based wage inequality, portrays discrimination as an ongoing reality rather than an isolated historical phenomenon.

From a rhetorical perspective, enumeration and statistical evidence emerge as two of the most prominent persuasive techniques. Extensive lists of social categories reinforce an intersectional understanding of discrimination by demonstrating that inequality affects multiple dimensions of identity simultaneously. Likewise, numerical evidence provides objective support for advocacy claims, increasing their credibility while reducing reliance on emotional appeals. Rather than employing highly emotive language, the discourse adopts a measured, factual, and evidence-based style that reflects the communicative conventions of institutional and legislative advocacy.

Contextual references also contribute significantly to the persuasive force of the discourse. References to internationally recognized frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action, together with contemporary events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthen the legitimacy of advocacy demands by connecting domestic policy concerns with broader global commitments and urgent social realities. These contextual elements reinforce the ideological orientation of the discourse while emphasizing the necessity of institutional reform.

Overall, the findings indicate that the stylistic features of U.S. Women's Caucus advocacy are neither accidental nor purely aesthetic. Instead, linguistic choices are employed strategically to construct institutional accountability, legitimize policy reform, and encourage collective action. The discourse uses language not merely to describe gender inequality but to persuade audiences, shape public understanding, and promote meaningful legislative and social change.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the advocacy discourse of the U.S. Women's Caucus through the analytical framework proposed by Leech and Short (2007) in order to investigate how stylistic choices contribute to feminist political advocacy. The analysis demonstrates that the discourse primarily reflects structural advocacy, presenting women's economic inequality as a systemic problem that requires institutional reform and policy intervention rather than individual solutions.

The findings indicate that stylistic resources—including evaluative vocabulary, abstract language, modality, enumeration, and statistical evidence—play a central role in constructing persuasive advocacy messages. These linguistic features enhance the authority and credibility of the discourse while supporting arguments that challenge patriarchal structures and promote gender equality. Through deliberate stylistic choices, advocacy texts simultaneously represent existing power relations and encourage social and institutional transformation.

The study also illustrates the broader value of stylistic analysis beyond literary contexts. By applying a systematic linguistic framework to political advocacy, it demonstrates how language functions as a strategic instrument for persuasion within institutional discourse. Consequently, the research contributes to the growing field of feminist stylistics by revealing the linguistic mechanisms through which advocacy is constructed in legislative settings.

Furthermore, the findings provide a foundation for future investigations into comparative advocacy discourse across different political, cultural, and institutional contexts. Additional research may explore cross-cultural stylistic variation, multimodal advocacy strategies, and comparative analyses of women's caucuses operating in diverse sociopolitical environments.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that effective advocacy depends not only on policy initiatives and institutional action but also on the strategic use of language. Stylistic choices shape public understanding, construct gendered realities, and serve as powerful instruments for advancing equality and promoting sustainable social change.

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