

Knowing our contextualized (hi)story means being able to understand ourselves and how the world works. This kind of knowledge is key to self-awareness and self-empowerment, which also have a close connection with how we use language to communicate, to develop social interactions, to build relationships and to project our identity.

The diachronic evolution of languages is therefore a crucial part of a social being's historical situatedness. The account of this evolution, i.e. historical linguistics, has traditionally focused on formal aspects of language as a grammatical system, investigating changes affecting or reflected in orthography, phonetics-phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. More recently, however, scholarly attention has broadened its scope to include functional aspects of language use, such as strategies and conventions of communicative practices over time, thus giving rise to historical pragmatics. In this special issue, the contributions encompass three main areas within historical pragmatics: language use in earlier periods (pragmaphilology), the development of language use (diachronic pragmatics) and causes of language change (discourse-oriented historical linguistics). In particular, the papers offer complementary insights into communicative affordances, examining interactional strategies in classical languages, politeness phenomena in grammar and discourse, the evolution of discursive practices, the pragmatic use of lexemes and the teaching of sociopragmatics.

Significantly, the issue presents a cross-linguistic approach, since it considers pragmatic phenomena in English, Korean, Italian, Slavonic languages, Ancient Greek and Latin, thus helping us understand how current discursive forms are in fact both unique and comparable in several languages and cultures.

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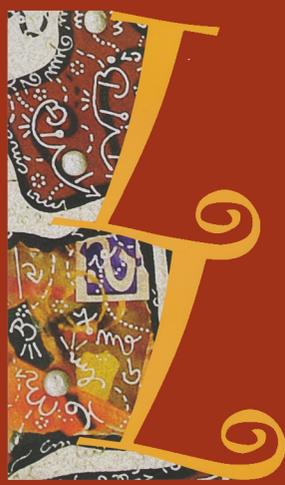
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Lingue & Linguaggi

vol. 31 - Special Issue 2019



Doing things with words across time.  
Snapshots  
of communicative practices  
in and from the past

*a cura di*  
*Sara Gesuato*  
*Marina Dossena*  
*Daniela Cesiri*

Lingue & Linguaggi

vol. 31 - Special Issue  
2019



Università del Salento

# Lingue & Linguaggi

31/2019

Numero speciale

**Doing things with words across time.  
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a cura di

Sara Gesuato  
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# LINGUE E LINGUAGGI

Pubblicazione del Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università del Salento. Tutti i contributi pubblicati in *Lingue e Linguaggi* sono stati sottoposti a double-blind peer-review.

Numero 31/2019

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Copertina di Luciano Ponzio: *Ecriture* (particolare), 2007.

© 2019 University of Salento - Coordinamento SIBA  
<http://siba.unisalento.it>  
ISSN 2239-0367  
eISSN 2239-0359 (electronic version)  
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it>



**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “Language use across time: What you didn’t know you’ve always wanted to know about historical pragmatics”**

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CHAPTERS

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# DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN FEMINIST SPEECHES

## A diachronic analysis from the Late Modern period to the present day

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**Abstract** – The date of birth of the feminist movement is usually set in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Since then, the feminist movement has been divided into three waves, each of which can be distinguished for both a different focus on women’s rights and a different kind of activism. The feminist propaganda has always used language as a communicative strategy that, through slogans, aims at reaching the collective psyche; it tries to persuade the public opinion of its claims through a specifically designed rhetoric that finds one of its best representations in the speeches delivered during public events. The present study analyzes a corpus of 12 speeches delivered by feminist activists. The speakers are chosen as representative personalities of the three waves into which the feminist movement is commonly divided. The speeches are investigated by means of corpus linguistics methods so as to identify discursive practices. The aim is to establish the diachronic evolution of these practices from the Late Modern period to the present day. Corpus data are analyzed by taking into consideration the variables of the period of time in which the speeches were delivered and the age of the speakers. The findings show that, in the three waves, the speeches are characterized by the use of specific terms which mark the general commitment of the feminist movement to women’s empowerment. A closer look at the individual periods shows that each wave is characterized by specific words that reflect an interest in more specific socio-political issues. Age also appears to be a relevant factor in shaping discursive practices. Indeed, the more mature speakers show a preference for terms denoting more general concepts, while the younger speakers refer to more tangible concepts and real events.

**Keywords:** feminism; feminist discourse; discourse analysis; corpus linguistics; diachronic pragmatics.

## 1. Introduction

The present study analyzes the discursive features that characterize feminist speeches. It is meant to identify the linguistic patterns that help the speakers convey their message so effectively that they are regarded as representatives of the corresponding wave into which the feminist movement is traditionally

divided (cf. Mayhall 1995; Phillips-Anderson 2012; Ferree, Hess 2000). In addition, the diachronic analysis considers if and to what extent the practices present in these speeches have changed since the Late Modern period. Using *WordSmith Tools 7.0*. (Scott 2017), both quantitative and qualitative analyses are conducted. The investigation proceeds by means of corpus linguistics methods of analysis: first, a keyword analysis identifies the most frequent terms and expressions used in each speech; then, data are contrasted to the discursive features found in the other speeches; the variables of period of time and age of the speaker are used to interpret the findings.

### **1.1. The Feminist Movement**

Even though the first instances of feminist writings in England can be traced as far back as the Early Modern period (Hodgson-Wright 2006), the proper date of birth of the feminist movement is usually set in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which she suggests that women's education is the only way to overcome female oppression (Freedman 2002). Another shared assumption about the feminist movement, according to feminist studies, is its chronological subdivision into three waves, each of which can be distinguished not only for a different focus on the specific set of women's rights being claimed, but also for a different kind of activism.

The first wave (1830s-1920s) starts several decades after 1792. It will be only in the 1820s-1830s that essays and treatises, mostly written by patronizing men, discuss the pros and cons of a more active role of women in society as distinguished from their traditional role in the domestic sphere (Sanders 2006). The 1830s, in particular, see the surge of an activism that aimed at obtaining practical results in women's conditions, especially as regards their recognition as separate individuals, not legally belonging to their husbands. This is illustrated by the famous *Norton Cases*, in which a woman fought for her right to her child's custody and to ailments after divorce. This case prompted the English Parliament to issue Acts and Bills that filled the gaps in marriage legislation for a more equal standing of women and men against the law (Sanders 2006).

The 1850s generally saw a major resurgence of feminist activity, and was perhaps the most important decade of the nineteenth century for Victorian women. The two Norton cases helped air long-standing concerns about the legal position of married women, while the growing numbers of single middle-class women looking for economic independence as an alternative to marriage drew attention to their limited employment options. Partly through personal networking, and partly through the eruption of individual crises and the discovery of individual needs, a series of important legislative and social changes were introduced over the next decades. (Sanders 2006, p. 20)

The legal cases prompted also a wave of activism that aimed at claiming women's right to self-determination and the fight for the recognition of women's civil rights to achieve gender equality. In this period feminist fights spread on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, with the American activist movement fueling protests in England, and vice versa. Their aim was the recognition of women's "civil liberties" (Sanders 2006, p. 22), which included women's right to private property, accessing education, personal and professional independence.

The second wave of feminism (1960s-1980s) sees a more radical turn. This stage of the movement, which begins around the year of publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) aims to eliminate inequalities in the workplace and gender discrimination, as well as to achieve liberation from the patriarchal system (Spencer-Wood 2017). This also meant a liberation from social stigma and oppression in terms of women's sexuality, relationships, birth control and abortion. The feminist movement in this period is brought forward thanks to organized groups, instead of individual efforts as in the first wave, through

the process of '**consciousness-raising**' – the move to transform what is experienced as personal into analysis in political terms, with the accompanying recognition that 'the personal *is* political', that male power is exercised and reinforced through 'personal' institutions such as **marriage**, child-rearing and sexual practices. (Thornham 2006, p. 26; original emphasis)

The radical turn that characterizes the second wave is symbolized by explicit language in writings, effective slogans in speeches, and public demonstrations, such as assembly gatherings and street protests (Thornham 2006). It is during this period that proper feminist theories are created. They will pave the way to the development of the ideological basis for the movement and subsequent development of the next wave (Thornham 2006) as well as to the creation of lobby-like groups that promoted laws to increase gender equality (Spencer-Wood 2017).

The third wave of feminism (1990s-2000s), a.k.a. *postfeminism* (Gamble 2006), extends the fight to the elimination of discrimination aggravated by ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and social class. Claims for LGBTQ (i.e., 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer people') rights are also included in the third wave. This later development of the movement uses traditional and digital media to spread its message. While the first wave of the movement saw the involvement of intellectuals, and the second wave of political figures and theorists, the 'frontwomen' of the third wave are personalities popular among the general public such as celebrities from the world of music (e.g., The Spice Girls and Madonna; cf. Gamble

2006), cinema (e.g., Emma Watson, who is also the founder of the ‘HeForShe’ movement), and ‘pop culture’ in general. In this wave, support to the feminist agenda is also publicly professed by an increasing number of men who are not afraid to speak out for the feminist cause; these can be influential politicians such as former US President Barack Obama or famous actors (e.g., the late Alan Rickman, Ryan Gosling, etc.). In this third wave, we also find the support of important leading female politicians, such as former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama, former First Lady and well-known advocate for civil rights during her years as a lawyer in Chicago.

It must be said, however, that the present account of the feminist movement has summarized the claims that were found in the European and American ‘branches’. The movement, in fact, is much more complex than this, since it encompasses several branches that aim at vindicating women’s rights all over the world, varying its claims and campaigns according to the specific socio-cultural situation of women in individual countries (such as Indian Feminism, Chinese Feminism, African Feminism, etc.; cf. Ferree, Tripp 2006), or communities, such as the Black Feminist movement, which fights against racial as well as gender discrimination (Hooks 2015), or Islamic Feminism, which claims rights for Islamic women (Kynsilehto 2008).

Much has been written from the political, sociological, and anthropological perspective on feminism and its corresponding political waves, as the references given so far demonstrate. In fact, the amount of literature available on feminism is so astounding that it is not possible to give here a full account of the state of the art. Suffice it to say that studies investigate the relationship between feminism and literature (LeBihan 2006), between feminism and philosophy (Fricker, Hornsby 2000), medicine and biology (Roberts 2007), feminism in the arts (Pollock 2013), feminism and postcolonial theory (Lewis, Mills 2003).<sup>1</sup> Quite scarce, however, is the literature available on the discourse of feminism. It was not possible to trace any relevant study except for Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1995), in which the authors apply discourse analytical tools to psychology from a feminist perspective, and Von Flotow (2016), in which the author discusses the problem of translation and gender in the era of feminism. Certainly, studies on gender-based linguistic variation are numerous, such as the groundbreaking Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003). However, the present author could not trace any investigation on the ‘feminist meta-language’, namely the kind of language and discourse that characterize feminist

<sup>1</sup> This list is only indicative of the literature available on the different sub-topics.

speeches, or writings,<sup>2</sup> which lay the foundations for the waves in which the movement is divided, and which influence the subsequent writings and speeches typical of each wave. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

## 2. Corpus and methodology

### 2.1. Material Analyzed

Generally speaking, the feminist propaganda is known for its slogans, through which it reaches the collective psyche, and also for its rhetoric, through which it tries to persuade the public opinion of its claims. One of the best representations of this rhetoric are the speeches delivered during public events by feminist activists. The corpus collected for the present study is composed of a total of 12 speeches, listed in Table 1:

Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Sojourner Truth (1851), <i>Ain't I a Woman</i> [ST, 54]	Betty Friedan (1970), <i>Call for a Women's Strike</i> [BF, 49]	Hillary Clinton (1995), <i>Women's Rights Are Human Rights</i> [HC, 48]
Christabel Pankhurst (1908), <i>Speech after her release from prison</i> [CP, 28]	Gloria Steinem (1971), <i>An address to the women of America</i> [GS, 37]	Emma Watson (2014, 2016), <i>HeForShe Campaign</i> [EW, 24]
Emmeline Pankhurst (1913), <i>Freedom or Death</i> [EP, 55]	Germain Greer (1971), <i>Townhall Speech</i> [GG, 32]	Michelle Obama (2016), <i>New Hampshire Speech</i> [MO, 52]
Virginia Woolf (1928), <i>A Room of One's Own</i> [VW, 46]	Phyllis Schafly (1972), <i>What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women</i> [PS, 48]	Malala Yousafzai (2013), <i>UN Youth Takeover Speech</i> [MY, 16]

Table 1  
List of speeches analyzed *per* wave.<sup>3</sup>

The activists selected have been officially recognized as representatives of the corresponding wave (cf. Mayhall 1995; Phillips-Anderson 2012; Ferree, Hess 2000). The first wave is represented by the first known activists, such as

<sup>2</sup> Spoken texts, texts written to be spoken, and written texts are produced for/in different communicative situations and, thus, they contain different linguistic strategies that characterize them. Since this is a field still unexplored in feminist material, the present study will focus only on texts written to be spoken. Future research might focus on the other types of material to identify differences/similarities in terms of linguistic or discursive choices that will allow generalizations on feminist discourse (see Conclusions).

<sup>3</sup> In Table 1, the letters in the square brackets are the initials of the speakers, while the numbers indicate the age of the speaker at the time when she delivered the speech.

Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, mother and daughter respectively, who are widely known for their political commitment and for being leaders of the British suffragette movement. Sojourner Truth, an American freed slave, became one of the most famous black women orators thanks to her eloquence despite her complete lack of formal education. She devoted her life to the abolition of slavery and to promoting equal rights. Virginia Woolf's commitment to the feminist cause is known through the speech here analyzed. *A Room of One's Own* is considered a key work in early feminist writing, presenting education as the key to women's emancipation.

Second-wave feminism is represented in the first three speeches listed in Table 1. They were all delivered during public assemblies, and each one of them marked a key moment in the second stage of the movement, since they established significant steps in the future political agenda. Phyllis Schafly's speech is unusual, in that it advocates against equal rights for women. It was chosen for inclusion in the list of second-wave speeches because it makes it possible to investigate if the discourse of anti-feminism women could vary from that of the pro-feminism activists, or if it used the same discursive choices, but in support of the opposite perspective.

Finally, the third wave of the movement is represented by four speeches that have helped the shaping of the feminist agenda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The speech by Hillary Clinton – delivered when she was First Lady – is considered a landmark moment, since she challenged the traditional non-commitment policy of First Ladies. This speech also set her political agenda that was later developed, in 2000, when she became the first female Senator elected in the State of New York. Michelle Obama's speech has become famous for similar reasons: it was a climatic moment of Mrs Obama's career as a lawyer defending civil rights, but it also set her political agenda as an activist supporting her husband's Presidency agenda. Young actress Emma Watson's speech was chosen, since it is fundamental for the creation of the 'HeForShe' movement (endorsed by the United Nations), which is "an invitation for men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for a gender equal world" (<https://www.heforshe.org/en>). The last speech, by Malala Yousafzai, was included among the third-wave speeches, since it reports and supports the struggle for equality and against discrimination of girls and women in 'third-world' countries. Malala Yousafzai is the youngest Nobel Prize winner: she was awarded the Prize when she was only 17 years old because of her commitment to women's rights, and after she survived severe injuries after a Taliban attack to prevent her attending school. She had already been known since the age of 11 for her popular blog – also supported by her family, and especially her father, an education activist himself – from which she challenged Taliban's rule in her home country, Pakistan, criticizing in

particular their treatment of girls and women.

The speeches collected were chosen not only for their representativeness of each wave but also according to a generational criterion: they were delivered by leaders or activists (four for each wave) of different ages, two being younger activists, and two more mature speakers. The generational factor was taken into account in order to see whether differences in the speeches are also to be attributed to the age of the speaker, not only to the period in which they live(d). The only variable not taken into consideration is the level of education: except for Sojourner Truth, all the speakers are educated, middle-class/upper-middle class women.

## 2.2. Methodology

The transcripts of the speeches investigated in this study could all be retrieved online. The second-wave and third-wave speeches are all available on dedicated websites, on the personal website of the speakers, or on the website of the event during which the speech was delivered. As regards the first-wave speeches, in the case of Sojourner Truth's speech, the official transcript available to the public has been cross-checked by several scholars according to the witnesses that provided the first transcripts, and historical resources.<sup>4</sup> As for the texts of the speeches written by the other three speakers in the first-wave group, they can be found on *The Guardian's Great Speeches of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* website for Emmeline Pankhurst's speech, and on *The British Library Archive* website for Christabel Pankhurst's and Virginia Woolf's speeches.

The speeches thus collected were compiled into a corpus which was, then, searched with *Wordsmith Tools 7.0* (Scott 2017) to conduct a keyword analysis. The keyword analysis was chosen because it indicates not only "the 'aboutness' [...] of a particular genre, it can also reveal the salient features which are functionally related to that genre" (McEnery *et al.* 2006, p. 308). The keywords are subsequently analyzed in their context (and co-text) of occurrence to identify recurrent communicative practices common to all speeches, or typical of individual cases. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the keywords, conducted by means of concordances, will help identify possible pragmatic implications in the discursive choices of the speakers.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the documents available on *Women's Rights National Historical Park* website (<https://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/sojourner-truth.htm>), and the dedicated *The Sojourner Truth Project* website (<https://www.thesojournertruthproject.com/compare-the-speeches/>).

### 2.2.1. Quantitative analysis: stylistic description of the corpus

Table 2 shows the quantitative data that can be used for a stylistic description of the corpus. The FLOB corpus (Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English) and the BNC (British National Corpus) were used as reference corpora. The FLOB is a corpus of general English containing samples from 1991 through 1996, while the BNC comprises samples of written and spoken language for a total of more than 100 million words. It was compiled between the 1990s and 2007 from a wide range of genres collected to be representative of a consistent portion of British English.

	Feminist Speeches (1851-2013)	FLOB (1991-1996)	BNC (1990s-2007)
Tokens	68,647	1,237,424	97,860,872
Types	7,752	45,089	512,588
STTR	41.32	45.52	42.66
Average word length (characters)	4.37	4.35	4.68
Number of sentences	2,821	52,674	4,754,513
Average sentence length	24.30	23.49	20.59

Table 2

Quantitative data of the corpus of feminist speeches, and reference corpora.

Considering the ratios for the two reference corpora, the STTR (Standardized Type-Token Ratio) for the corpus of feminist speeches indicates that this is rich in word use, since “a high type/token ratio suggests that a text is lexically diverse” (Baker *et al.* 2006: p. 162). Mean word length values are similar in the three corpora, and the number of sentences is commensurate to their respective size, as it is also confirmed if we calculate the proportion of the number of sentences with respect to the full size of the corresponding corpus. In this case too, figures are similar in the three corpora. In fact, sentences in the corpus of feminist speeches are 4.11% of the full corpus, while in the FLOB and in the BNC corpora we have the percentages of 4.26% and 4.86%, respectively. The average sentence length is also similar in all the three corpora but, interestingly, in the feminist speeches sentences are longer, indicating that the speeches are constructed with complex sentences, a feature typical of “a more formal style” (de Haan, van Esch 2007, p. 198). These characteristics along with the STTR figure (41.32), which is slightly lower than in the reference corpora, indicates that the texts in the corpus of feminist speeches were written to be spoken, namely that the speakers read from written texts that were constructed to be delivered orally.

### 3. Keyword analysis

Considering the small size of the corpus of feminist speeches, and the even smaller size of each text composing the corpus, the list of keywords generated for each speech is quite short. As regards the selection of the keywords, only what Scott (1997) calls “key keywords” were included in the present investigation. Key keywords are keywords which occur at least twice in a given corpus and, thus, “a key keywords list reveals how many texts a keyword appears in as key” (Baker 2004, p. 350). Moreover, since the aim was to explore the discursive choices of the speakers with respect to the communicative aim towards their audience, for the present study functional words were excluded from the analysis. The only exception are pronouns, which were included because of the speaker/audience relationship they help establish in the speeches. Tables 3 contains all the lists, subdivided for each speaker, indicated with her initials (see Table 1).

Wave 1	Speaker	Keywords
	ST	children, women, woman
	CP	women, vote, deputations, Parliament
	EP	women, men, suffrage, militant, we, vote, militancy, woman
	VW	women, woman, mind, fiction, Brönte, Austen, I, sex
Wave 2		
	BF	women, our, we, oppress, power, us, propose, revolution, awesome, conditions, confront
	GS	we, us, people, world, remember
	GG	artist, masculine, ego, artists, achievements, our
	PS	women, us, rights, equal, American, wife, husband, amendment, marriage, woman, motherhood, laws, support
Wave 3		
	HC	women, rights, families, world, human, violation, lives, children
	MO	Hillary, we, women, election, President, Barack, opponent
	EW	men, I, gender, women, equality, heforshe, rights, feminism
	MY	education, Taliban, sisters, we, rights, brothers, dear, peace, terrorists

Table 3  
List of keywords extracted *per* speaker.

The lists of keywords provided in Table 3 clearly show that the content of the speeches represent the key issues around which the three waves of feminism revolve. In the case of the first wave, in fact, the recurrent keywords in the four speeches are terms such as WOMAN/WOMEN, VOTE, SUFFRAGE that point to the importance of claiming fundamental rights, such as the right to vote. The lexical choices of two speakers in particular are worth detailing, namely Emmeline Pankhurst and Virginia Woolf. In the former case, we find reference to a more politically oriented vocabulary than in the other speeches, considering the presence of terms such as MILITANT and MILITANCY, which reflect Emmeline Pankhurst's commitment as an activist and suffragette. In the case of Virginia Woolf, instead, we notice the presence of literary references (BRONTË, AUSTEN, FICTION), which indicate her main focus on reclaiming female writers' place in the literary panorama at the same level as male writers.

As regards second-wave feminist speeches, the keywords reflect the radical turn and greater political activism of the movement with the recurrence of terms such as OPPRESS, POWER, REVOLUTION, ACHIEVEMENTS. It is also worth noting the presence of words such as PEOPLE, WORLD, ARTISTS which appeal not only to action on a global scale but also to specific categories which might have some influence on society. Moreover, we can notice the use of the inclusive pronouns WE, US, OUR,<sup>5</sup> a specific, direct reference to women united in sisterhood (Thornham 2006) that are called to act as one, united corp. As already mentioned, Phyllis Schafly's anti-feminism speech was chosen to contrast pro-feminism speeches in a period – like the 1970s – during which, more than in the other waves, the heritage of the patriarchal system was resisting against the more active upsurge of feminist claims. The list of keywords for this speech reveals that terms such as WOMEN, RIGHTS, EQUAL are used, but that they are accompanied by terms which refer to the traditional, domestic role of women (WIFE, MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD). The presence of terms like LAWS and SUPPORT is a clear reference to the support given by the institutions to women, thus presenting the needs of women exclusively in relation to the domestic sphere and to their husbands.

The list of keywords for third-wave speeches summarizes the commitment typical of this phase, with specific characterizations that reflect the speakers' individual commitment to the cause. Thus, we find words

<sup>5</sup> Even though OUR is a possessive determiner, it was included in the group of pronouns because of their function in the noun phrase with respect to communicative aim of the feminist speakers. In fact, as Biber *et al.* (1999, pp. 270-271, italics in the original) put it; “possessive determiners specify a noun phrase by relating it to the speaker/writer (*my, our*), the addressee (*your*) or other entities mentioned in the text or given in the speech situation (*his, her, its, their*). This series of possessive determiners corresponds to the series of personal pronouns”.

common to all the speakers, such as WOMEN and WE, which are also present in the preceding waves. As for the individual speeches, the list of keywords for Hillary Clinton's and Michelle Obama's speeches reflect their political commitment in institutional contexts (RIGHTS, VIOLATION, ELECTION, OPPONENT). The lists for the other two speakers clearly reflect their agendas, more practical, considering their age and life story: in the case of Emma Watson the focus is on her project, HEFORSHE, as well as on the principles on which it is grounded (GENDER, EQUALITY). Interestingly, she is the only speaker in the corpus who directly refers to FEMINISM, which indeed appears in the list of keywords, signifying its 'keyness' in her speech. As for Malala Yousafzai, her keyword list reflects her story: her appeal to PEACE and EDUCATION, in a society whose members she sees in terms of SISTERS and BROTHERS, strikingly contrasts with less positive terms such as TALIBAN and TERRORISM. These two terms are used, in fact, as constant reminders of the forces at work to contrast the claim for equality, peace and right to education which she has endured (and many others still do) since she was a little girl.

## 4. Concordance analysis

The concordance analysis was conducted on each speech, taking the keywords as node words. Only a selected group of keywords for each wave are here analyzed to show how, even though they use the same word, the speakers manage to give it different connotations and implications, which – as already said in the previous Section – all reflect the particular focus of each wave. The words selected are WOMAN/WOMEN, and personal pronouns. The choice fell on the former because it is the purpose of the feminist speeches in the corpus to talk about women's condition and claims, while the use of pronouns was chosen to investigate how different women, from different age groups and in different periods of time, address their audience while talking about topics that directly involve(d) and touch(ed) both the speakers and the audience itself.

### 4.1. Woman/women

The word that is obviously used by all the speakers is WOMAN (or in the plural form, WOMEN). The analysis of the concordances generated for the speech reveals that Sojourner Truth repeats this term in contrast to MAN to stress the fact that both women and men equals and, thus, women must have the same possibilities, as in example (1):

- (1) And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it (SJ\_1851).

However, the sentence “when I could get it” is a bitter remark, hinting at the fact that women not only are treated as inferior to men, but they have also more difficult access to food. The same use of the word WOMEN to stress the vindication of women to be treated equally is found in Christabel Pankhurst (as exemplified in 2):

(2) Therefore, women tax payers are entitled to vote (CP\_1908).

As we can see, here the reference is on the active role that women play in society. Moreover, WOMEN is used to refer to their actions to claim the vote and on a meta-analysis of their effectiveness:

- (3) The reasons why women should have the vote are obvious to every fair-minded person (CP\_1908);
- (4) Meetings have been held and petitions signed in favour of votes for women but failure has been the result. The reason of this failure is that women have not been able to bring pressure to bear upon the government and government moves only in response to pressure (CP\_1908);
- (5) They [the Liberal Government] must be compelled by a united and determined women’s movement to do justice in this measure (CP\_1908).

In these examples, it is clear that Christabel Pankhurst’s is the speech of a full political figure who is aware of what needs to be done (examples 3 and 5), and what has not been done, to help the cause she is fighting for (example 4). Quite different is her mother’s use of the words WOMAN/WOMEN, as the examples below illustrate (emphases added):

- (6) A good deal of the opposition to *woman suffrage* is coming from the very worst element in the population, who realise that once you get *woman suffrage*, a great many places that are tolerated today will have to disappear (EP\_1913);
- (7) Well, I might spend two or three nights dealing with the industrial *situation as it affects women*, with the *legal position of women*, with the *social position of women* (EP\_1913).

Examples (6) and (7) are chosen to represent the instances found in the speech, in which WOMAN and WOMEN are used differently. In (6) we see that WOMAN is used to refer to a more abstract concept such as women’s suffrage, whereas in (7) WOMEN is used with more practical connotations to describe the past and current situation of women, and to stress what kind of difference will it make to obtain the right to vote.

A similar differentiation is found in Virginia Woolf’s speech, even though their connotations are different, as in the examples below (emphases added), in which WOMAN is used in descriptions of the conditions of women *per se* (example 8), while WOMEN is used to highlight some contrast or

comparison with men's condition (example 9):

- (8) That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if *a woman* in Shakespeare's day had had Shakespeare's genius. But for my part, I agree with the deceased bishop, if such he was – it is unthinkable that *any woman* in Shakespeare's day should have had Shakespeare's genius. For genius like Shakespeare's is not born among labouring, uneducated, servile people (VW\_1929);
- (9) But it is obvious that the *values of women* differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail (VW\_1929).

It was chosen to quote the full part of the speech in which the words occur, since they also symbolize Virginia Woolf's irony about, and insightful remarks into, the condition of women across history and during her time. For instance, example (8) illustrates the main point of her speech, namely the fact that education for women is an essential factor to achieve self-determination. She also pinpoints how no woman can raise to the same glory as Shakespeare until she can access education and improve her social status outside marriage. In example (9), instead, attention is placed on the very modern concept that women's role in society is not determined by their intrinsic worth as persons, but is imposed by male-dominated values. This is a concept that has always been adopted and further developed by the subsequent waves of feminism.

In second-wave feminist speeches, we see that only Betty Friedan and the anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly use the words WOMAN/WOMEN. In particular, Betty Friedan uses only WOMEN, referring to women as one single group who must stand united to claim their rights (10), while Phyllis Schlafly uses both terms with an important differentiation, as in examples (11) and (12):

- (10) And so we face now the awesome responsibility of this beautiful miracle of our own power as women to change society (BF\_1970);
- (11) These laws and customs decree that a man must carry his share by physical protection and financial support of his children and of the woman who bears his children (PS\_1972);
- (12) The women's libbers are radicals who are waging a total assault on the family, on marriage, and on children (PS\_1972).

In examples such as the one reported in (11), WOMAN is used positively in reference to her position as a child-bearer as granted by religion and patriarchal tradition, without any reference to the woman as an individual or with an active role in family life, while in cases as in example (12), WOMEN is associated with 'libbers' (i.e., "liberationist(s)", OED) and used with negative connotations, in a derogatory sense to mean that women who fight for civil rights, and thus self-determination without a man's help, are a danger to society.

Finally, in third-wave feminist speeches, Malala Yousafzai is the only one that does not mention women, even though she repeatedly addresses the audience with *my dear sisters*. Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and Emma Watson use only the term WOMEN to refer to women's rights (examples 13, 14, 15; emphases added):

- (13) If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that *human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights* once and for all (HC\_1995);
- (14) Remember this: in 2012, *women's votes were the difference between Barack winning and losing in key swing states*, including right here in New Hampshire (MO\_2016);
- (15) I was appointed six months ago and the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that *fighting for women's rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating*. *If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop* (EW\_2014).

Even when they generally refer to women's rights, the three speakers manage to set the main point of their respective political agendas: if Hillary Clinton is committed to improving women's conditions on a larger scale (13), Michelle Obama specifically refers to the role that women played to elect her husband, Barack Obama, as 44<sup>th</sup> President of the USA (14). In so doing, she indirectly encourages women to vote as they too, and not only men, can make a difference in the world. On the other hand, Emma Watson (15) is more focused on the presentation of her project and the benefits that fighting for women's rights can bring to men as well.

Beside using WOMEN to generally refer to women's rights, each one of the three speakers uses the word in a very specific context, adding specific connotations when they describe women's condition around the world; connotations which reflect their personal commitment (examples (16), (17), (18)):

- (16) Women must enjoy the rights to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries, if we want freedom and democracy to thrive and endure. It is indefensible that many women in nongovernmental organizations who wished to participate in this conference have not been able to attend – or have been prohibited from fully taking part (HC\_1995);
- (17) This was a powerful individual speaking freely and openly about sexually predatory behavior, and actually bragging about kissing and groping women (MO\_2016);
- (18) Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals (EW\_2014).

In example (16), Hillary Clinton's political commitment – as a politician, not just as First Lady – is even more evident: she is not afraid of mentioning facts that directly involve the organization of the event during which she is delivering her speech. On the other hand, Michelle Obama's interest in

supporting Hillary Clinton as Presidential candidate is evident in example (17), as she refers to the opposing candidate (i.e., Donald Trump) as a danger to women's rights and to what has so far been achieved by American women. Finally, Emma Watson (in example 18) reinforces her ideas about men and women cooperating together to achieve gender equality, which is the *leitmotiv* of her commitment.

## 4.2. Pronouns

The keyword analysis showed that pronouns in the corpus are not 'key' to all the speakers. In the first wave only Emmeline Pankhurst and Virginia Wolf have a consistent use of pronouns WE and I, respectively. The examples below illustrate their use of pronouns with respect to the communicative purpose of their speech:

- (19) That is what we women have been doing, and in the course of our desperate struggle we have had to make a great many people very uncomfortable (EP\_1913);
- (20) It would have been extremely odd, even upon this showing, had one of them suddenly written the plays of Shakespeare, I concluded, and I thought of that old gentleman, who is dead now, but was a bishop, I think, [...] (VW\_1929).

In example (19) it is clear that the first person plural pronoun is a clear use of the so-called *inclusive we form*, aiming at creating a sense of shared values, and common struggle, in the fight to obtain women's right to vote. Virginia Woolf, on the other hand, uses the first person singular pronoun, as would be expected considering the nature of her speech, which she was requested to deliver for her socio-cultural role. Thus, she reports her own thoughts, guesses, and impressions while talking about the condition of women across time and how it was reported by male intellectuals across history.

Three out of four second-wave feminists show pronouns in their keyword list. Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly use pronouns WE, US, and the possessive adjective OUR, but with different communicative intentions, as exemplified in (21) to (24) below:

- (21) We have the power to restructure the institutions and conditions that oppress all women now, and it is our responsibility to history, to ourselves, to all who will come after us, to use this power NOW (BF\_1970);
- (22) We are here and around the world for a deep democracy that says we will not be quiet, we will not be controlled, we will work for a world in which all countries are connected. God may be in the details, but the goddess is in connections. We are at one with each other, we are looking at each other, not up. No more asking daddy (GS\_1971);
- (23) Or worst of all we were meant to be both, which meant that we broke our hearts trying to keep our aprons clean (GG\_1971).

(24) But let's not permit these women's libbers to get away with pretending to speak for the rest of us (PS\_1972).

In the first two examples (21 and 22), the first person plural pronoun is used again with its inclusive function of uniting speakers and audience (women from all over the world) into one group led by a common goal. Similarly, in example (23) the speaker is joining the public but, in this particular case, they are united by a more specific aim, that is combining their feminine nature to the nature of an artist that, historically, has been a profession reserved to men. In example (24), instead, the aim is to divide what the speaker presents as 'the enemy' (the women's libbers already seen in example 12) from the good practice of women who keep themselves into the traditional role of 'domestic angels' (the 'us' found in the speech), of which the speaker herself is an example to imitate.

In the third-wave feminist speeches, only Hillary Clinton's does not have pronouns in the keyword list. As for the others, Michelle Obama and Malala Yousafzai show the use of pronoun WE, while Emma Watson shows a predominance of pronoun I, as exemplified below in (25), (26), and (27):

- (25) And I had the pleasure of spending hours talking to some of the most amazing young women you will ever meet, young girls here in the US and all around the world. And we talked about their hopes and their dreams. We talked about their aspirations (MO\_2016);
- (26) It's a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. I don't know if I am qualified to be here. All I know is that I care about this problem. And I want to make it better (EW\_2014).
- (27) Dear brothers and sisters, we must not forget that millions of people are suffering from poverty, injustice and ignorance. We must not forget that millions of children are out of schools. We must not forget that our sisters and brothers are waiting for a bright peaceful future (MY\_2013).

In example (25), we notice the complex, but also skillful, way in which Michelle Obama addresses her audience in order to engage their attention as well as their emotional involvement: first, she uses pronoun I to draw attention on something that she has already experienced and the positive emotion that derived from it, then she uses pronoun YOU to challenge the audience's perception on the merits of the women she is talking about and, finally, she uses pronoun WE to indicate that she was fully involved in that very experience that she is now sharing with the public. In example (26), Emma Watson uses the first person singular pronoun to highlight her personal involvement but she also attracts the audience's attention with the invitation 'trust me'. However, she immediately adds 'I don't know if I am qualified to be here' to diminish the directness of her approach to the public, thus avoiding the risk of sounding patronizing and, instead, presenting herself as close to the audience, as one of them. Finally, in example (27), Malala

Yousafzai directly addresses the public with ‘dear brothers and sisters’, which, together with the use of pronoun WE, helps Malala to establish a very close relationship with her public, who becomes part of a ‘family’, which includes the speaker as well.

## 5. Final remarks and further research

The present study has analyzed feminist speeches that have not yet been analyzed linguistically or discursively, so far. The aim was to ascertain if the speeches, delivered by women of different ages in different periods of time, contained common features as well as if the speakers showed specific communicative strategies to convey their message. The keyword and concordance analyses, in particular, revealed that despite the fact that the speakers use similar discursive choices, even the same words, they construct their speeches in such a way that they manage to reach different communicative results. For instance, even though the speakers use the same kinds of pronouns (I and WE), the resulting effect is different: while the second-wave feminists use pronouns with strategies of *communicative opposition* against the patriarchal system, third-wave feminists use the same pronouns to communicate both a sense of inclusiveness (involving men in the common struggle to achieve equal rights for everyone) and personal commitment, since they present themselves as members of the audience rather than celebrities lecturing the public. Moreover, the speeches analyzed were written-to-be-spoken texts, so they lack the spontaneity of orality. This also means that the speakers’ choice of key words is even more accurate than in spontaneous communication, since it follows a deliberate strategy to attract the audience’s attention and keep it focused on the content of the message that the speaker is delivering.

As regards the diachronic change in the discursive strategies, we have seen that changes across time reflect changes in the activists’ commitment and in the focus of the feminist agenda, rather than following diachronic variation in the language from the Late Modern period to the present day. However, some ‘time-related’ differences were found in the age of the speakers: while relatively older speakers (e.g., Sojourner Truth, Emmeline Pankhurst, Betty Friedan, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Obama) tend to refer to general values such as family, the world, masculinity vs. femininity, etc., the younger speakers (e.g., Christabel Pankhurst, Gloria Steinem, Germain Greer, Emma Watson, and Malala Yousafzai) refer to more specific elements such as the right to vote and to end the oppression of women. In the particular case of Emma Watson and Malala Yousafzai, the youngest of the speakers in the third-wave group, they ‘dare’ to use more direct and explicit terms such as *feminism* and *terrorism*.

To conclude, one of the limitations of the present study is the size of the corpus which does not allow generalizations on feminism discourse as a whole. At any rate, the results obtained from this study do prompt further research on feminist speeches: for instance, it will be interesting to look into greater detail at the use of discourse markers and how they are semantically and pragmatically related to the statements they connect. Furthermore, a manual search of the speeches could reveal strategies used to address the audience, salutation formulae and any other discursive practice that a computer-driven research cannot detect. More texts and speeches could also be collected to enlarge the corpus and to investigate the presence of systematic discursive practices, which could allow sounder generalizations on the features characterizing the ‘language and discourse of feminism’.

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