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INGROUP / OUTGROUP DYNAMICS
AND AGENCY MARKERS
IN ITALIAN PARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE:
A GENDER-BASED
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE SPEECHES OF MEN
AND WOMEN ¹ DEPUTIES (2001 - 2006)

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ABSTRACT: *The most recent literature on gender differences in language use has shown that the Italian political communication enacted by men and women parliamentarians only partly reflects and reproduces the asymmetries and stereotypes widespread in society. Starting from an anti-essentialist perspective, which holds that language differences between men and women speakers are much less extensive than claimed in the past, we analysed 463 parliamentary speeches in the course of the XIVth legislature (5-2001 / 4-2006) in four parliamentary pairs, differentiated by gender and political orientation. The general aim was to explore the socio-psychological constructs of agency and ingroup/outgroup dynamics as revealed by linguistic behaviour in men/women parliamentarians. The two constructs were detected by specific linguistic markers in the interventions of men/women parliamentary pairs. Specifically, for agency, we detected: (1a) pronoun variations between singular and plural first person (I, we); (1b) amplitude of we as either specific or superordinate; (1c) conditional modal form of verbs. For ingroup/outgroup dynamics, we detected: (2a) pronoun variation between first and second plural person (we vs. you) and (2b) their valence. Lexicographical analysis was carried out with statistical packages TaLTaC2 and TreeTagger on a corpus of 432,671 words. Chi-square and χ -test were applied to word frequencies, while Student's t-tests were applied to gender comparisons. The results showed reduced variability between men/women parliamentarians in the use of linguistic devices, confirming the weakness of the essentialist and binary logic that has long dominated the field of studies on language and gender.*

KEYWORDS: *Parliamentarian speeches - Gender differences - Ingroup/outgroup - Agency - Linguistic devices - Textual analysis - Quantitative and qualitative - Lexicographical analysis.*

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¹ We will always use the words 'women', 'men' deputies, MPs, or parliamentarians, and not 'female', 'male' deputies because of the reference to the cultural, fluid dimension related to gender, whereas the labels 'female' and 'male' are referred to sex, a more stable biological dimension that tends to crystallize differences.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PARLIAMENTARY speeches are a specific form, a sub-genre, of political communication characterised by high level of formality. In recent years in Italy, formality was contrasted by movementist political forces, such as the League North, or the 5 Stars Movement, that, using a very trivialised language, have made parliamentary language closer to common language (Bolasco, Galli de' Paratesi & Giuliano 2006; D'Agostino 2015; Galli de' Paratesi 2009; Iannaccaro & Cortinovis 2012; Petrilli 2015). Nevertheless, parliamentary speeches present fixed and recurrent communication patterns (Ilie 2006, 2010), largely defined by their contextual properties (van Dijk 2003, 2004), and partially reworked by the technicians who transcribe the spoken language of parliamentarians (Giuliano 2015; Piemontese & Villani 2007; Treimane 2011; Villani 2006, 2015).

Parliamentary discourse has been observed and studied from different points of view, both methodological and disciplinary. From a methodological perspective, there are two different traditions that recently tried to integrate. The first, of mainstream derivation, uses a quantitative approach to big data with textual automatic analysis and is mainly performed by statisticians, linguists, political scientists, and, in some cases, social psychologists (Bara, Weale & Biquelet 2007; Chung & Pennebaker 2014). The second tradition, of critical origin, uses a qualitative point of view and is more commonly used by sociolinguists, discourse analysts, psycholinguists, and social psychologists with a sociocentric vocation. In recent years, there have been interesting attempts at integrating the two traditions – once considered to be mutually incompatible – in the analysis of political communication in general (Baker, Gabrielatos, KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski, McEnery & Wodak 2008; Gabrielatos, McEnery, Diggle & Baker 2012), and of parliamentary discourse, in particular. In this last case, stimulating results were obtained, based on a synergy between critical discourse analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistic analysis (CLA) (Bi-jeikienė & Utkā 2006; Formato 2014).

In addition to this type of study, in Italy there exists a research tradition that uses both quantitative corpus linguistic analysis and qualitative contextual analysis without referring to CDA (Bolasco, Di Pietro & Giuliano 2015; Rimano 2015; Senseales & Areni 2015, 2016; Senseales, Areni & Giuliano 2017; Senseales, Giuliano & Areni 2016). The theoretical framework of our study is based on the social representation tradition, and shares a sociocentric perspective with CDA. It strongly relies on the idea of the opacity of language, and assumes that language is tightly connected to values, ideologies, and power relations, by means of strategic use by social actors (Flick 1998; Wagner, Duveen, Farr, Jovchelovitch, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Marková & Rose 1999). It also assumes that language is particularly sensitive toward gender representations (Arruda 2003; Kruse, Weimer & Wagner 1988). In such a theoretical framework, the aim of the researcher is to render this implicit network of relationships intelligible, showing how language is embedded in social roles and norms, and, at the same time, how it can reveal the potential the social actors have to force language freely from these social constraints.

Our research is focussed on 463 parliamentary speeches performed in the course of the XIVth legislature (5-2001/4-2006) by four parliamentarian pairs, differentiated by gender and political orientation. The four pairs were all part of non-movemen-

tist political forces, which rendered them comparable to each other. We combined a quantitative with a qualitative analysis, matching CLA and contextual analysis, with the aim of exploring the socio-psychological constructs of agency and in-group/outgroup dynamics in the linguistic behaviours of men/women parliamentarians (MPs). The two socio-psychological constructs were explored through specific linguistic markers related to personal pronouns and verbal forms used in the parliamentary interventions of men/women MP pairs. In studying gender differences in parliamentary speeches, we assumed an anti-essentialist perspective, particularly sensitive to the linguistic context in which gender identities were formed and negotiated (Weatherall & Gallois 2003). In other words, we avoided the binary essentialist opposition of a feminine/masculine linguistic style in favour of comparisons conducted in the context where real interactions develop. In this framework, we explored gender stereotyping and counter-stereotyping linguistic behaviours in the assumption that the inextricable interrelation between language, culture and society constructs social roles and identities (Bazzanella 2009b).

1. 1. *Gender differences in parliamentary speeches: a field of study*

The most recent literature on gender differences in language use has shown that the political communication performed by men and women parliamentarians only partly reflects and reproduces asymmetries and stereotypes widespread in society (Bei Yu 2014; Bijeikienė & Utkā 2006; Bright 2012; Christie 2002; Formato 2014; Sensales & Areni 2015; Sensales, Areni, & Giuliano 2017; Wodak 2003). In other words, the surveys on parliamentary speeches proved that the essentialist explanations of linguistic variations are inadequate to understand the findings obtained. This stimulated to overcome the binary logic that had prevailed in the studies about gender, sex, and language until the beginning of the 1990s (Freed 2003). Starting from the classic work of Lakoff (1975), and moving to further contributions, such as West and Zimmerman's (1983) and Fishman's (1983), the essentialist binary tradition, typical of the research in the 1970s and 1980s, conditioned the field of study on the language and gender relationships until the social constructionist turn in the 1990s, thanks to feminist works (see Ehrlich 2008a, 2008b). This change in theoretical perspective also impacted the research on political communication, and induced to dispute the legitimacy of the notion of a "women's style" in political language (Shaw 2009, 2011) and of gender as a static two-faced attribute (Wodak 2015), in favour of more nuanced gender linguistic differentiations, themselves rooted in fluid identities intersecting with multiple group memberships.

These nuanced differentiations can be found in the speeches of men and women MPs and are even more important if we consider that the norms of parliamentary interactions are fundamentally androcentric, because they were created by men for a supposedly typically masculine domain (Shaw 2000). In this case, the minor differentiation can be considered as the result of an accommodation process in which women, in an asymmetric relationship, assume the masculine norm to be accepted more easily (Wood & Eagly 2010, 2012). However, if we think that parliamentary speeches represent a specific form of political communication, characterised by a general conflictive style and experienced by women in parliament as alienating (Francescato & Mebane 2011; Martín Rojo 2009), it may be interesting to study how women cope with this experience of alienation through their linguistic

choices, assuming or contrasting the typical conflictive linguistic register of parliamentary speeches.

Concerning the more recent international research on this topic, we will consider both the critical and the mainstream perspective. In the first case, Chris Christie (2002), over a period of two weeks in July 1999, gathered the parliamentary speeches of men and women to control for the use of apology behaviours in parliamentary debate. She demonstrated some gender differences in the uses of politeness resources that the author explains with the construct of “communities of practice”. The author conceptualises gender “as an aspect of identity that is achieved through language use rather than an attribute that precedes and in some way determines language use” (Christie 2002; §1. 2.), and underlines the salience of shared practices in specific contexts that construct gender identity.

In a similar critical theoretical approach, Ruth Wodak (2003) conducted a study on women in the European Parliament, demonstrating the multiple identities of women Members of European Parliament (MEPs, henceforth) and their construction of gender roles in an extremely complex way because of a multilingual, multinational, and multi-ideological environment. In this way, women MEPs demonstrate the great impact of gender in combination with other variables according to a process that, in subsequent years, Wodak defined as “intersectionality”.¹ In Wodak’s words, “membership of a gender constitutes a performative act and not a fact” (Wodak 2015: 701). The starting point of Wodak’s work about MEPs was that parliamentarians, as members of an elite, should be able to come to terms with the requirements of conflicting roles as they develop their individual images in order to be accepted in the political arena. Therefore, their identities – national/gender/political/professional – are discursively constructed according to the context, that is, the audience to which they address, the situation of the act of discourse, and the topic discussed. In this manner, their identities are dynamic, vulnerable, fragmented, and ambivalent, according to a context-sensitive point of view.

In this critical research tradition, Bijeikienė and Utkā (2006) explored both lay representations of men and women politicians in relation to their linguistic behaviors and effective gender differences in the linguistic corpus of Lithuanian parliamentary discourses. On the one hand, the authors gathered 89 questionnaires from students in a Lithuanian university, where they examined attitudes and expectations of how men and women parliamentarians speak. On the other hand, by analysing the linguistic gender characterization of a parliamentary corpus, over the span 1990-2004, they controlled whether actual parliamentary language supported students’ expectations about gender-specific linguistic variations. The results showed beliefs about differences in men’s and women’s speeches, in accordance with the traditional polarization between men/women linguistic styles as the “linguistic softness, politeness and indirectness of women politicians as well as linguistic straightforwardness and rationality of men” (Bijeikienė & Utkā 2006: 87). However, the corpus analysis of parliamentary speeches showed no great matching between students’ expectations and the language actually spoken in Parliament. In particular, a lack of matching was found in linguistic politeness, with no gender differences.

¹ For the first use of this concept, see Crenshaw 1989, and in recent years, Collins & Bilge 2016; Cooper 2016.

Also from a mainstream perspective, the results in part contrast the language-related gender stereotyping in parliamentary communication. Jonathan Bright (2012) analysed the parliamentary debates in the UK's House of Commons during the past 75 years in the period 1936-2011, and also explored gender differences. Working on a corpus of 740 million words spoken, he found no great gender differences, as in the case of the number of interruptions that sees women and men treated more or less equally in parliament, with minor fluctuations across time.

Bei Yu (2014) examined gender differences in Congressional US speeches between 1989 and 2008. She found a strong formal language style – with a trend toward a less formal style in recent speeches – without important gender differences. At the same time, she found in women legislators the use of both feminine style (e.g., more emotion words, adjectives, third-person pronouns, and possessive first-person pronouns) and masculine style (e.g., more nouns and long words) over the past 20 years, regardless of the topics and of the number of women in the House. In this way, women appear to conform to the normative masculine style without abandoning some typical feminine language characteristics, also overcoming the rigid binary logic opposing masculine to feminine verbal behaviour.

The overall results concerning the expectations of linguistic behaviours adopted by men and women politicians seem to reproduce the trend widely attested in the literature having overestimated gender differences (Unger & Crawford 2004). These results also confirmed an anti-essentialist point of view by contrasting the idea of stable gender attributes in linguistic behaviours showing, on the contrary, that there are fluid and dynamic processes, often context-sensitive, in “doing gender”, that is, in performative acts. As Wodak (2015) confirms, these performative acts convey “the relationship between sexes, the dominance of ‘man’ and its normativeness”, but at the same time, the possibility of a creative, transformative answer to power relationships.

In Italy, only a few studies can be found about gender differences in linguistic behaviours in the Italian parliament. These studies show trends partly similar to those described by the international literature, and highlight the salience of context. This is the case of Federica Formato's study (2014), who analysed 13 parliamentary debates in the *Camera dei Deputati* (Lower Chamber) during the xvith legislature (2008-2011) about violence against women. Aiming at exploring the construction of gender at its intersection with political roles, the author also focussed on the use of the pronominal *We* forms and found differences between men and women in referring to this pronoun. While for men MPs, the most important reference to *We* was related to the “MP's same party”, and therefore the gender group “men” was not salient, women clearly referred to the superordinate gender group of “women”. Formato points to the fact that, in some cases, women MPs referred to themselves as “female politicians” and as “women”, probably as a sign of “a quest for [the] visibility and legitimation of their position in the Camera dei Deputati (and) in a male chauvinist society” (Formato 2014: 3).

Parliamentary speeches analysed in Sensales and Areni' study (2015) and in Sensales, Areni, and Giuliano' study (2017) also revealed some differences and overlaps in the use of specific linguistic indicators. The authors highlighted how the oratorical style of the two pairs of men and women MPs was marked by a different gender identity, in intersection with the historical cultural context. Actually, the

authors focussed on a double comparison, diachronic and of gender, for the parliamentary interventions made by two pairs of politicians in the First Republic¹ (between 1976 and 1993) and the Second Republic (between 1994 and 2009), showing the relevance of temporal context in relation to gender linguistic behaviours. Differences in man/woman dyads were salient only in the speeches given in the First Republic. In this case, the findings were partly in line with the expectations of stereotypical linguistic behaviours, with men more agentive and conflictive than women, as shown by greater use of the pronominal forms *I*, *We*, and *You*, whereas there were no gender differences in the use of conditional verbal forms. Conversely, there were no significant gender differences at all for parliamentary speeches made during the Second Republic by two other pairs of MPs.

1. 2. *Strategic use of the personal pronouns I, We, and You in the political arena*

Various research traditions explored the use of the personal pronoun *We* in different contexts and from different disciplinary fields. In social psychology, the seminal work of Mulhaüsler and Harré (1990) focussed on pronouns as referents to people and agency, moral responsibility, point of view, rights in the study of identity construction. The authors underlined the complexity of the pronominal system as a multi-faceted system, including dimensions such as cognition, status, office, generation, formality/informality, public/private discourse, intimacy, social distance, and high degree of emotional excitement. For Mulhaüsler and Harré (1990), pronominalisation – referring to oneself and others – has communicative functions that can be studied by analysing real and symbolic interactions involved in lexical organization.

A theoretical approach more attentive to the pronominal system as such, is that of discourse analysis (van Dijk 2012: 23-25), in which the principal focus concerning the political domain is on conversational place (De Fina 1995; Liebscher, Dailey-O’Cain, Müller & Reichert 2010; Yates & Hiles 2010), with incursions into mass media communication (Allen 2007; Boyd 2013; Bull & Fetzer 2006; Iñigo-Mora 2013; Kuo 2002; Proctor & I-Wen Su 2011; Suleiman & O’Connell 2008).

Bazzanella (2014) suggests that:

In politics, the persuasive force of the first person plural is not only significant in its negative possibility of contrasting people, but also, rather more commonly, in its positive possibility of constructing alliances, tightening and reinforcing links between people, and also identifying groups and expanding them fictively (p. 143).

In this sense, the *We* marker is a helpful means to detect the agentive and the conflictive (in relation with the *You/Them* markers) dimensions in political discourse.

In more recent years, some research has also studied parliamentary debates, considering pronouns as a marker of identity (van Dijk 2010: 50), assuming that “since power is one of the major dimensions of the political domain, this also means that the Group Relation category is often articulated in the polarised terms

¹ The expression “First Republic” in Italy refers to a proportional electoral system, centered on the role of political parties, with very few women in Parliament, whereas the expression “Second Republic” refers to a majority electoral system, with a centrality of leaders, a mediatization of politics, and an increase of women in Parliament.

of (positive) *Us* and (negative) *Them*, where the Others are often the enemy” (van Dijk 2010: 53).

In previous years, van Dijk (2000) accurately studied the role of the pronominal system in providing social representations of the polarisation of ingroups/outgroups in parliamentary speeches. Isabel Íñigo-Mora (2004) also studied the strong interrelationship between the concept of community, in this case represented by the House of Commons (British Parliament), and the use of a strategic linguistic behaviour, namely, the pronoun *We*. The author studied the relationship between the purpose of the *We* reference and the construction of a sense of community, showing that the MPs prefer the exclusive form of *We* (a form excluding the listener because it refers to “I + my group”), keeping a distance between speaker and listener. After a few years, the same author (Íñigo-Mora 2010) studied British and Spanish parliamentary discourse practices, examining eight extracts devoted to the discussion of the Iraq conflict. She showed that the politicians of both parliaments used the pronoun *We* strategically in order to describe a conjunct and repetitive reality known by speakers and listeners. In this way, they constructed a shared socio-psychological reality built on a set of beliefs and experiences common to speaker and listener in which the division between *We* and *You* reflects a partisan reality expressing clear identification processes (Íñigo-Mora 2010).

In another study, conducted on the Portuguese Parliament, Marques (2010) explored the uses and functions of the most common deictic markers, namely the first person pronouns (singular and plural) that organize the debate on interpellation to the government. She demonstrated that the pronominal occurrences coincide with stressing the various forms of collective and individual identities and classifies the contextual use of the personal pronoun *We* in four different ways. These can be organized from a circumscribed, restricted dimension to a more inclusive dimension: the parliament as the center of the democratic institutional power, the political group – Party and/or Government – Portuguese people, and the country.

Exploring the differentiation between *I* and *We*, Bijeikienė and Utkā (2006) confirmed that the use of the first person singular pronoun *I* establishes personal responsibility, being a marker of the deictic center (Wilson 1990), the most direct means of self-reference and personal involvement. Conversely, the *We* form refers to collective responsibility or to the way of distancing oneself from the deictic center. The findings concerning gender differences in the total occurrences of personal pronouns in Lithuanian Parliament indicated a slightly higher tendency for men politicians, in comparison to women, to use the explicit form of the first person singular pronoun *I*, while women politicians tended to use slightly more often the explicit form of the pronominal form *We*.

Comparing two Italian corpora of men and women MPs, Formato (2014) showed that *Noi* (*We*) is overused as the subject pronoun by men MPs compared to women MPs to a statistically significant extent. The subject pronoun *Noi* is used by men MPs to stress their agency, as they are conscious of their active parliamentary roles in solving social problems, while women MPs don't have the same confidence. In her study, Formato referred to the distinction between core and peripheral members of Parliament as a community of practice. Based on this distinction, the linguistic agentic use of *Noi* by men can be explained as a consequence of their core

role, whereas women fail to demonstrate a similar linguistic behaviour, due to their peripheral role. Regarding the amplitude of *We*, both men and women MPs most frequently referred to the “national *Noi*” (Italy/Italians), identifying themselves collectively with other Italian people or, more generally, with Italy. The men MPs overuse of *Noi* forms affiliates them to the members of their party, whereas the overuse of *Noi* by women MPs refers to “the government”, “committee/specific people in the chamber”, and sub-groups, such as “Italy/Italians”, “women”, and “women politicians”.

1. 2. 1. “I” and “We” as markers of different levels of agency

Agency is generally defined as recognition of power and attribution of responsibility. It is a construct that, starting from the 1970s, became central not only in language studies but also in the field of sociology, and later in other disciplines, such as social psychology, media studies, and cultural anthropology (Ahearn 2001; Carli 1990, 2006; Donzelli & Fasulo 2007; Hall & Donaghue 2012; Okimoto & Brescoll 2010). In recent years, Duranti (2004) assumed the possible manipulation of agency through language, particularly through the use of impersonal constructions, nominalisations, and specific verbal forms. In this framework, particular grammatical markers, such as the use of pronouns or conditional verbal forms, can be interpreted as concrete indicators of agency at work in language. An example of reference to agency is the linguistic marker related to the first person plural *We* (or its morphological marking on the verb), which implies the involvement – more or less effective – of interactants in the same linguistic expression (Bazzanella 2014). “By using *we*, the speaker selects implicitly or explicitly the corresponding group which is intended to be the referent, both by including and excluding the speaker/s herself/himself/themselves and the interlocutor/s. It works as an *identity cue* [...], and selects the relevant group, according to different specific contexts, languages, and cultures” (Bazzanella 2002: 249).

Recent empirical research has explored the role of pronouns in the processes of social categorisation reflecting social hierarchies. In particular, the results of five studies – in both experimental and natural sets – published by Kacewicz, Pennebaker, Davis, Jeon, and Graesser (2013), have led researchers to conclude that people with higher status systematically prefer the first person plural to the first person singular, using the second person singular less frequently. Sendén, Lindholm, and Sikström (2013), considering pronouns as markers of social categories and agency focussed on the use of the different pronouns in the evaluative context. Their findings showed that individuals in positive contexts tend to use self-inclusive rather than self-exclusive pronouns, as well as individual rather than collective pronouns.

1. 2. 1. *We/You* as markers of ingroup and outgroup differentiation

Ingroup/outgroup dynamics, as studied by the pioneering work of Tajfel (1982), are based on the process of social categorization that tends to order the world into meaningful categories, *We-Us/You-Them*. These categories, linguistically marked, strengthen comparisons between positive social identities of groups. In this way, the comparison is oriented toward acquiring, maintaining, and defending the prestige and status of group membership through a process of differentiation that is positive for its group and discrediting to the antagonist group. As noted by Bazza-

nella (2009a), the pronominal forms *We/Us* is likely to promote a cohesion / group identity which can also be performed through opposition to others, excluded from the identitarian / affiliative movement by references to *They/Them*, as devaluing.

In his study of parliamentary debate, van Dijk recalls that:

The opposition between *Us* and *Them*, has become prototypical of the polarization of (mental representations about) ingroups and outgroups. Also in parliamentary debates, thus, it is very useful to establish who exactly are being referred to when speakers use *We*. Given the possibly multiple social identities of speakers, the ingroups that may be denoted by *We* may range from *We*, in the Western World, and *We Dutch people*, to *We White Dutch people*, *We (all) here in Parliament*, or *We of our party* (van Dijk 2000: 95).

Analysing Italian parliamentary speeches, Serino and Pugliese (2006) demonstrated that there are often superordinate re-categorisations in political processes, using the more agentive *Noi (We)* as a strategy to build and expand consensus. In the context of confrontation between groups (inter-group condition), however, the evaluative gap between self-inclusive and self-exclusive pronouns was emphasised.

If we assume, according to Tajfel's model (1982), that the *We-Us/You-Them* oppositions refer to the dynamics of competition and conflict, especially in politics, then it is reasonable to expect that women's culture, being more tied to cooperative values (Eagly & Steffen 1984; Spence & Helmreich 1978), is less characterised by this contrapositive dynamic, although research is missing in this respect.

Based on all the research findings described so far, and from an anti-essentialist theoretical perspective, which claims that language differences between men and women speakers are much less extensive than noted in the past (Freed 2003; Wodak 2003), our study presents an analysis of the parliamentary interventions held between 2001 and 2006 in Italy by four parliamentary pairs, different in gender and political orientation.

II. METHOD

Aims

The general aim of our study was to perform a corpus-based (quantitative) and context-based (qualitative) gender comparison of eight parliamentary speakers. In particular, we explored the socio-psychological constructs of agency, ingroup / outgroup dynamics by means of specific linguistic markers, namely personal pronouns and modal conditional verbs. The personal pronouns were also identified with respect to their valence (negative, neutral, or positive) and amplitude (superordinate and specific). They were analysed in political communication performed by men/women in their parliamentary speeches. In particular, we wanted to check whether levels of agency and ingroup / outgroup dynamics were different between men and women politicians, and, if so, whether these differences went in stereotypical or counter-stereotypical direction.

In particular, we expected a) stereotypical direction to be correlated with more agency and ingroup / outgroup dynamics; b) greater superordinate amplitude of *We/Us* pronouns for men than for women. In case this trend was reversed in favour of women, this result would be interpreted in a counter-stereotypical direction; c) finally, we expected a more positive valence for *We/Us* and a more negative valence for *You*, regardless of gender.

Materials

The corpus we analysed refers to the parliamentary proceedings published by the Italian Chamber of Deputies, related to the *verbatim* reports of debates in the Assembly. The corpus has been extracted from the reports available on the website of the Chamber of Deputies in html documents. It consists of eight corpora of different interventions at the Chamber of Deputies of eight MPs, balanced by gender, and belonging to the areas of center-left and center-right during the xivth legislature (5-2001/4-2006) for a total of 463 parliamentary speeches. As for the political area, attention was paid to the two different political backgrounds present in each area – the ‘Margherita’ (Eng: ‘Daisy’) and the ‘Democratici di Sinistra’ (Eng: ‘Democrats of the Left’) for the center-left, and ‘Forza Italia’ (Eng: ‘Let’s go, Italy’) and ‘Alleanza Nazionale’ (Eng: ‘National Alliance’) for the center-right. In the xivth legislature, there were two different center-right governments, both led by Silvio Berlusconi.

To identify the MPs, we have taken into account the different methods of intervention used by the deputies in their parliamentary work, excluding the speeches given in the parliamentary committees that deal with clearly specific issues devoted to legislative work. It was also necessary to balance the speeches and speakers in order to have comparable texts. To reach internal consistency in the corpora and representativeness of the speeches of deputies presented some difficulty. Deputies, when they do not play a leadership role tend to make their speeches highly technical and specific. If the interventions chosen in the debate phase concern the amendments in legislative activity, they will be highly conditioned by the thematic context, and consequently each corpus will be very different from each other. It was therefore necessary to choose speakers who were relatively similar and with a sufficiently intense activity in the Chamber. This enabled the researcher to extract enough interventions and of adequate length to be linguistically “representative”. The corpora thus obtained fulfilled these conditions, considering that they were taken from spoken transcribed texts of normal legislative activities and debates in the Parliament, and not from spoken original interventions.

To ensure comparability between MPs, we avoided selecting assistant ministers or undersecretaries. The MP pairs were composed as follows: Centre-left – Giuseppe Fioroni / Rosy Bindi (Margherita DL-L’Ulivo – 139 total speeches) and Piero Fassino / Livia Turco (Democratici di Sinistra-L’Ulivo – 66 total speeches); Centre-right – Ignazio La Russa / Daniela Garnero-Santanchè (Alleanza Nazionale – 133 total speeches) and Maurizio Enzo Lupi / Patrizia Paoletti-Tangheroni (Forza Italia – 125 total speeches).

Operational pathway

The speeches were imported into the Notepad ++ program and ordered by leaders’ names, genders (M/W), and political parties (C-L: Margherita and Democratici di Sinistra; C-R: Alleanza Nazionale e Forza Italia). Segments not useful to our analysis, such as replication, disruption, and speeches by the House Speaker and other MPs, have been eliminated from the texts. The texts were normalised with automated procedures that make spellings, punctuation marks, accents, and

special characters homogeneous and stable in any text. Corpora created in this way were next subjected to statistical textual analysis. The two socio-psychological constructs of agency and ingroup/outgroup differentiation were detected in the output of these analyses through specific linguistic indicators related to personal pronouns and verbal modes.

1. For agency – high/low – we detected: (1a) the personal pronouns in the first person singular “*Io*” (*I*) and plural “*Noi*” (*We-Us*)¹ (individual subject *I* – less agentive – vs. collective subject/object *We/US* – more agentive); (1b) the conditional modal form of the verb² indicating low agency; (1c) the *We/Us* amplitude (superordinate as more agentive, and specific as less agentive).

2. For ingroup/outgroup differentiation, we detected: 2a) personal subject pronouns varied in the first, second plural person with the contrastive opposition *Noi/Voi* (*We-Us* vs. *You*).³

Finally, two qualitative contextual analyses by two independent judges were carried out on the pronominal forms *Noi/Voi* (*We-Us/You*). In case of discrepancy, a third judge reviewed the encodings and made the final decision. The first qualitative analysis of *Noi* (*We-Us*) identified a categorical amplitude of pronouns split into superordinate (Italy, Italian, MPs, Women, Generic, Other) and specific (Party, Government). The second analysis of *Noi* (*We-Us*) and *Voi* (*You*), identified reference to negative, neutral, or positive valence attributed to pronouns.

Statistical analyses

We used TreeTagger for grammatical tagging. This statistical program is a computational linguistics software for automatic annotation of graphical forms available for various languages (<http://www.cis.uni-muenchen.de/~schmid/tools/TreeTagger/>). TreeTagger attributes a grammatical category to each form and generates a file for each corpus that can be acquired in TaLTaC2 (Bolasco 2010, 2013), an automated software analysis and text mining, with which it builds the relevant tables of lexical forms and consequently run the usual statistical analyses and graphical displays.

In this way, we were able to obtain the occurrences of the relevant linguistic indicators and conduct further statistical analyses. After computing the occurrences for each parliamentarian, we related them to the number of speeches to establish the average occurrences for each parliamentarian, and then applied the Student’s *t* test to verify the hypothesis of differences between men and women.

We compared the use of pronouns and the conditional verbs by men and women by computing the proportion of specific pronouns in relation to the occurrences of all pronouns or verbal forms grouped for men vs. women. To verify the hypothesis about differences of proportion between the two groups (M/W), we used the χ -test. For all comparisons, between different pronominal forms and their

¹ As Bazzanella (2014) notes, «Unlike English, which neatly distinguishes between the different thematic roles of *we* and *us*, the Italian *noi* can be used as both a subject pronoun (which corresponds to the English *we*), and a direct or indirect object pronoun, which corresponds to *us*...» (p. 85).

² Unlike English, in Italian there is a specific modal conditional form for all verbs.

³ Unlike English, in Italian, the second pronominal plural person “*Voi*” is different from the second pronominal singular person “*Tu*”, so we don’t need to analyse the context to attribute the second subjective pronominal person to the singular or plural form.

valence and amplitude, we used a *chi square*-test. For a clearer understanding of the results we transformed the values related to the rates into percentages.

III. RESULTS

Descriptive analysis on the corpora

The analysis was carried out on a corpus of 432.671 words. TABLE 1 shows the occurrences of words, number of speeches, and average occurrences for speech (occurrences as related to the number of speeches) for the 8 politicians considered. When grouping the occurrences by gender, there were 278.880 total men occurrences vs 153,791 total women occurrences. The *t*-test, to compare the means between men and women, was applied to the number of speeches in men ($M = 69.75$; $SD = 26.75$) and in women ($M = 46.00$; $SD = 18.62$), with $t(6) = 1.46$; $p > .05$) and to the means of occurrences in men ($M = 1.090.64$; $SD = 461.82$) and in women ($M = 878.65$; $SD = 245.32$), with $t(6) = 0.81$; $p > .05$). In neither cases the *t*-test was significant, which means that there were no significant gender differences in the number of speeches nor in their length.

TABLE 1. Occurrences of Words, Number of Speeches, and Average of Occurrences for Speech for the Eight Politicians.

Parliamentarians	Number of speeches	Lexical occurrences	Averages
Piero Fassino	38	56194	1478.79
Livia Turco	28	29280	1045.71
Giuseppe Fioroni	79	114587	1450.47
Rosy Bindi	60	61809	1030.15
Maurizio Enzo Lupi	61	55911	916.57
Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni	64	33324	520.69
Ignazio La Russa	101	52188	516.71
Daniela Garnero-Santanché	32	29378	918.06

Note. The averages of occurrences are calculated by relating the occurrences to the number of speeches for each parliamentarian.

Descriptive Analysis of Pronominal Forms

To compare trends in the use of pronominal forms in men¹ and women,² we applied the χ -test, which was not significant ($\chi = 0.654$; $p > .05$), showing that there were no gender differences in the use of pronominal forms.

TABLE 2 illustrates the frequencies of the three pronouns observed, in both absolute terms and in percentage. In general, *We/Us* was more used than *I* and *You*.

¹ Occurrences 2.444, equal to a proportion (2.444/278.880 total male occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 0.88%.

² Occurrences 1.011, equal to a proportion (1.011/153.791 total female occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 0.66%.

TABLE 2. Frequencies Distribution, in Absolute and Percentage Terms, for the Pronouns *I*, *You*, and *We/Us*, by Men and Women.

Parliamentarians	I		We/Us		You	
	Absol. fr.	% fr.	Absol. fr.	% fr.	Absol. fr.	% fr.
Men	139	5.7%	629	25.7%	194	7.9%
Women	41	4.0%	261	25.8%	121	11.97%
Total	180		890		315	

Note. The percentages of frequencies are the result of the transformation of proportions.

We compared the proportion of pronouns used by men and women with the χ^2 -test, considering each type of pronoun. The proportions were calculated on the occurrence of the specific pronoun in relation to the total occurrences of all pronouns, separately for men and women. The results showed significant differences in the use of *I* ($\chi^2 = 2.50$; $p < .05$) and *You* ($\chi^2 = 3.64$; $p < .01$). Men used the pronoun *I* more than women while the opposite pattern was found for the pronoun *You*. No gender difference was found in the use of *We/Us* ($\chi^2 = 0.01$; $p > .05$).

Amplitude of *We/Us*

TABLE 3 presents the observed and expected frequencies for the amplitude of *We/Us* in men and women. The *chi-square* test was significant (*Chi-square*(1; $N = 890$) = 12.5; $p < 0.01$), showing that men used the superordinate *We/Us* more than women, and that women used the specific *We/Us* more than men.

TABLE 3. Frequencies Distribution for the Amplitude of *We* by Men and Women.

Parliamentarians	Frequencies	Superordinate <i>We</i>	Specific <i>We</i>	Total
Men	Observed	269	355	624
	Expected	(245.4)	(378.6)	
Women	Observed	81	185	266
	Expected	(104.6)	(161.4)	
Total		350	540	890

Note. Critical $\chi^2(df = 1, .01) = \chi^2 = 12.5$

Analysis of *We/Us* and *You* valence in relation to gender and amplitude

TABLE 4 indicates the observed and expected frequencies in men and women in relation to negative, neutral, and positive valence of *We/Us*. As foreseen in general, the positive clearly prevailed over the negative value for both genders. The *chi-square* test, however, proved to be significant (*Chi-square*(2, $N = 890$) = 14.2; $p < .01$). Men attributed a more negative valence than women to *we/us*.

To study *We/Us* valence in relation to amplitude and gender we applied the *chi-square* test, and the results were not significant. Therefore, men and women referred to the superordinate and specific *We/Us* with no different valence for the superordinate *We/Us* (*Chi-square*(2; $N = 350$) = 4.61; $p > .05$), and for the specific

TABLE 4. Frequencies Distribution of the Valence of “We/Us” by Men and Women.

Parliamentarians	Frequencies	Negative valence	Neutral valence	Positive valence	Total
Men	Observed	56	202	366	624
	Expected	(44.9)	(192.8)	(386.3)	
Women	Observed	8	73	185	266
	Expected	(19.1)	(82.2)	(164.7)	
Total		64	275	551	890

Note. Critical $\chi^2(df = 2, .01) = \chi^2 = 14.2$

We/Us ($Chi-square(1; N = 540) = 2.73; p > .05$). For valence in general, however, the results showed that the superordinate *We/Us* yielded the highest occurrences in neutral valence (203) compared to positive (85) and negative valence (62). The specific *We/Us* showed the highest occurrences for positive (466) compared to neutral (72) and negative valence (2).

TABLE 5 illustrates the observed frequencies for the valence of *You* in men and women, showing high frequencies of the negative in comparison to the neutral and positive valence for both men and women. Before computing the chi-square test, the very low frequencies of positive valence were merged with those of neutral. The chi-square test on the valence of *You* was not significant ($Chi-square(1; N = 315) = 0.16; p > .05$), indicating that there was no gender difference in the use of negative, positive, or neutral valence of *You*.

TABLE 5. Frequencies Distribution of the Valence of “You” by Men and Women.

Parliamentarians	Negative valence	Neutral valence	Positive valence	Total
Men	176	15	1	192
Women	107	16	0	123
Total	283	31	1	315

Note. χ^2 ns

Descriptive analysis of verbal forms

To compare the use of verbal forms in relation to gender, we applied the χ -test to the occurrences of verbal forms in men¹ and women,² which was not significant ($\chi = 1.56; p > .05$), showing therefore no gender difference.

¹ Occurrences 34.381, equal to a proportion (34.381/278.880 general males occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 12.34%.

² Occurrences 16.674, equal to a proportion (16.674/153.791 general females occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 10.84%.

Analysis of conditional verbal mode

The χ -test applied to the use of conditional verbal mode in men¹ and women² was statistically not significant: $\chi = 0.60$; $p > .05$, showing no gender difference.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theoretical framework of social representations, which assumes the need for intelligible trends related to roles and social norms, and using a methodology that combined quantitative and qualitative analyses, our study analysed the linguistic behaviours performed by Italian men and women parliamentarians in a comparative perspective.

Our findings supported an interpretation that goes beyond the essentialist and binary logic that has dominated the field of studies on language and gender for a long time. Rather, our results confirmed the trends of international and national literature, showing reduced variability in the use of linguistic devices monitored in the speeches of men/women parliamentarians. At the same time, they showed a situation where, in men and women speakers, stereotypical and counter-stereotypical language choices sometimes coexist in relation to the role requirements.

It is not, however, confirmed that there is a tendency for men to talk more than women, highlighted by applied research in different professional and social contexts (cf. Aries 1987; Božić Lenard 2016; Carli 2006; Crosby, Jose & Wong McCarthy 1981; Tannen 1990), including the parliamentary context (Bäck, Debus & Müller 2014; Sensales, Areni & Giuliano 2017). However, in this last case, the results are not always consistent, as there are studies that show findings confirming our data (Power & Berardone 1998).

Our study also showed no gender difference concerning the general use of pronominal forms, and trends only partially present in previous Italian surveys (Formato 2014; Sensales & Areni 2015; Sensales, Areni & Giuliano 2017). This finding can be interpreted as a possible consequence of a fluid and constantly evolving society which also affects specific parliamentary contexts. In particular, for the first plural person, the results confirmed previous research, involving the most widely used pronominal form of both men and women MPs (Formato 2014; Sensales & Areni 2015; Sensales, Areni & Giuliano 2017). This finding is in contrast with the results of a study by Basile (2010), based on interviews given by men and women politicians to the Italian press. Gender differences were found, with men more agentive and with a higher use of *We* than women. These differences pose an issue about the relationship between two spheres (see Vliegenthart & Roggeband 2007) – the institutional parliamentary, more elitarian, in which androcentric stereotypes can be overcome, and the mediatic one, more popular, in which gender stereotypes are rooted. In these two spheres, the parliamentarians seem to be operating in contrasting linguistic ways, modulating their speeches differently, contributing to

¹ Occurrences 1.249, equal to a proportion (1.249/34.381 verbal male occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 3.63%.

² Occurrences 544, equal to a proportion (544/16.674 verbal women occurrences), transformed in a percentage equal to 3.26%.

building distinct representations of themselves and underlining the salience of the context in which they operate. Moreover, in this perspective, the subsequent evolution of Italian cultural-political society – with women more present in the Italian parliament than in the past – is likely to justify the changes of trend detected in another survey by Sensales and Areni (2017), about press representations of men and women ministers of the Renzi government in 2014. In this case, the phrases quoted in the headlines showed that gender differences in the use of the pronoun *We* by politicians had disappeared. This might reflect more sensitivity by the journalists towards women, represented as agentic as men, in parallel with their increased presence in the parliament. Thus, political press communication seems to have followed changes in Italian society, rather than anticipating them.

As a whole, our deputies illustrated the cohesive, contrastive, and agentic role of the *We* form (Bazzanella 2014), which is the most used in parliamentary context, as expected. The use of the conditional verbal form appeared to be similar in men and women, confirming the trend reported by Sensales and Areni (2015) and Sensales, Areni, and Giuliano (2017).

The choice of pronouns showed more marked gender differences for agency in the use of the first person singular, more often used by men. This result was unexpected, if we consider that the *I* form in experimental research has proven to be mostly used by low social status people (Kacewicz, Pennebaker, Davis, Jeon & Graesser 2013). A possible explanation can be found in other studies, such as those by Bijeikiné and Utká (2006), where the *I* form was seen as a marker of personal responsibility, self-reference, self-confidence, and of personal involvement (Wilson 1990), used by men MPs. The pronoun *I* had also been considered as a marker of subjectivity in a study of political interviews (Zand-Moghadam & Bikineh 2015), and evaluated as agentic. Based on these interpretations, our result can be read in relation to a democracy in transition, increasingly centered on a leader, and specifically on an individual identity that strongly stresses its subjectivity (cf. Calise 2016; Campus 2016) rather than on the party, which represents a collective identity.

Concerning the dynamics of ingroup/outgroup differentiation, women appeared more conflictive, using *You* slightly more than men. In this regard, the trend noted in previous surveys with particular reference to the Bindi/Veltroni dyad (Sensales & Areni 2015; Sensales, Areni & Giuliano 2017) was confirmed. Women showed greater take-over of that conflictive dimension typical of parliamentary speech, but not of feminine gender, which generally considers this characterisation as alienating (Francescato & Mebane 2011; Martín Rojo 2009). It might be that women, as a minority group, adapt to the expectations of the context and avoid being noticed as “different” from men. (Power & Berardone 1998). This result points to the asymmetric process of women adopting men characteristics with the aim of conforming to the contextual norm, as recently highlighted by Wood and Eagly (2010, 2012).

In the present study, moreover, the increased use by women of the “specific we”, along with lesser use of the “superordinate we”, seems to show lower tendency toward an agentic rhetorical strategy, increasing the political consent and broadening the hegemonic basis (Serino & Pugliese 2006). This trend can be explained in relation to the peripheral role played by women in parliament, illustrated by

Formato (2014). This role, in turn, is linked to the need to reach a “critical mass” of women MPs that can affect power relations, all still dominated by men, despite some growth of women in parliament (Childs & Krook 2008, 2009). Therefore, the results for the categorical amplitude of *We* go in the direction of a stereotypical differentiation, with men oriented to greater use of the “superordinate”, more agentic *We* than women, in accordance also with their core role. Finally, the detection of the valence of *We/You* confirmed what was found in the literature about the tendency for a “positive we” vs. a “negative you” (Hall-Lew 2008; Milesi 2011; van Dijk 2000, 2010).

Future explorations could address the impact of speech styles on listeners and the effectiveness of style in political language. In both cases, studies could focus on gender expectations regarding speech mode and style to see what happens when expectations are respected or disregarded. In addition, future investigation should explore data from a comparative perspective, linked to both gender and political orientation, to determine any specificity related to ideological and cultural elements (Francescato, Mebane, Sorace, Giacomantonio & Lauriola 2008; Hayes 2011; Neiman, Gonzalez, Wilkinson, Smith & Hibbing 2016; Schreiber 2010; Winter 2010). In this vein, it could be very stimulating to analyse different speech styles within each gender, emphasising any similar or different patterns related to ideological-cultural belonging. In this last case, particular attention should be devoted to possible differences in the use of nouns by conservatives vs. liberals. A first explorative analysis did not show that the rightist MPs use nouns more than the leftist ones, as was found by Cichocka, Bilewicz, Jost, Marrouch, and Witkowska (2016), in reference to grammatical preferences of conservative ideologies. A possible explanation for this first result could be due the transcriptional processes that can eliminate differences in spoken speeches. The detection of other linguistic markers could allow us to demonstrate possible stylistic differences related to political context, such as the use of verbs oriented to the past or to the future, with respect to the orientation of conservative or liberal MPs.

Finally, an extension of the analysis in relation to parliamentary speeches in the present legislature could allow an assessment of the possible evolution of the processes highlighted here, in light of the changed parliamentary framework that has seen women move from nearly 20% in 2010 to over 30% in 2013 (IPU 2013).

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