Gender role reversal in political debate?

French politicians’ verbal and para-verbal strategies during the socialist primaries

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Focusing on the Aubry – Hollande debate that took place in the context of the 2011 French socialist party primaries, we observe a possible reversal of gender stereotypes and examine word choices as well as more subtle cues such as interruptions, hedges, etc. If the debate could be described as a stereotypical gender role-reversal, we suggest that these cues point to a more complex picture than a gender reversal, and that the pragmatics structuring the dialogue might be interpreted as a pattern of challenger/champion. Moreover contrasting press articles and comment in online forums on the same debate we invoke a ‘peri-performativity concept’ to explain the differences in interpretations of the politicians’ performances, and conclude that perlocutionary dimensions can be reinterpreted by dominant discourses, (de)/(re)-constructing the performativity of speech acts.

Keywords: Martine Aubry, François Hollande, media role, gendered leadership, paraverbal cues, verbal cues, performativity

1. Introduction

Gee (2011) argues that a leader is recognizable by his/ her ability to control others. According to Fairclough’s 1995 critical discourse analysis model, this control entails construction of power and gendered relationships at various levels: at the macro level, this includes beliefs and attitudes regarding gender in a given society; at the meso level, this comprises beliefs and attitudes in the society’s political domain; while at the micro level it involves political interactions. If we take into account that less than 1% of the world’s presidents or prime ministers are women, it would appear that women’s leadership qualities are less valued than men’s at all these levels of governance. This phenomenon can and has been explained as due, at least in part, to social perceptions linked to gender stereotypes that are
promoted by the mass media, which shapes our perceptions, our expectations and our aspirations. In French society, gender stereotypes determine most decision-making roles: competitiveness in character and speech – stereotypically male – is preferred to a cooperative stance and words – stereotypically female (Sineau 2001; Achin 2012; Murray 2014). This political scenario defined by gendered politics has been identified in many countries (Gingras 2015; Gidengil and Everitt 2003; Kahn 1996).

This article investigates the various ways that gender roles and stereotypes structured the decisive French socialist party debate that took place at the end of the primaries in October 2011. This debate positioned Martine Aubry, then Secretary of the socialist party against François Hollande, former Secretary of the same party. In October, just prior to the vote, Aubry was the challenger in the race, although until June she was very well perceived in the media (Baider 2015). Throughout the campaign both candidates exhibited what might be described as a ‘reversal of gendered stereotypes’, given that Hollande was known for his mellow- ness and Aubry for her toughness (Achin et al. 2007; Baider 2014). Hollande won the primaries. The media analysis of the two politicians’ campaigns concluded that the male politician exhibited more authority and was more ‘presidential’. In our analysis of the two candidates’ leadership qualities as projected in this crucial debate, we look first at their discursive choices using both quantitative and qualitative methods; in parallel we consider their para- and nonverbal cues (e.g., body posture, gaze, gestures, and turn taking) to assess whether these more unconscious elements confirm our discursive results. We then evaluate press articles and comments on them (as identified on internet forums) for their response to the same linguistic and non-linguistic behaviours we analyzed. Our findings reveal dramatically different interpretations of the politicians’ performances and their respective leadership qualities, which leads us to argue for the peri-performativity concept (Sedgwick 2003) – i.e., that dominant discourses are able to (de)-construct the potential performativity of speech acts and therefore lead to a general status quo.

2. Is leadership gendered?

2.1 Macro, meso and micro-level of analysis

In a 1994 study, Crenshaw coined the word ‘intersectionality’, which posits that the unity of two minorities constitutes a distinct (minority) entity that will elicit unique forms of disadvantage ‘that cannot be accounted for by race or gender or by adding the one to the other’ (Anthias 2012, 126). Traditionally intersectionality includes class, gender and race as the social variables that must be considered in
research focusing on identities and power relationships. However, it has been argued (Winker and Degele 2011) that these factors are not the only social variables that can be intersectional, and so it is suggested that researchers “keep open the number of socially defined categories available and necessary for analysis on this level of research” (2011, 54). Winker and Degele (2011) also argue for consideration of the various levels where intersectionality occurs: the level of social structures, the level of constructions of identity and the level of symbolic representations:

Starting out from a multi-level approach, we consider social structures, including organizations and institutions (macro and meso level), as well as processes of identity construction (micro level) and cultural symbols (level of representation). (2011, 52)

These three levels are useful for our analysis. Symbolic representations “support, in their role as ideologies and norms of justification, structural power relations and are – at the same time – generated with them” (Winker and Degele 2011, 54). In France gender ideologies are used as justification for the virtual absence of women in positions of power – whether in economic, political or social domains. The social structure in this study refers to the organization of French politics. It identifies “concrete relations of power and analyze [s] their interrelatedness and changes” (Winker and Degele 2011, 54; but see also Verloo 2006). The micro-level relates to the very detailed analysis of linguistic and para-verbal cues that help us understand the strategies selected for specific political moments (here, the televised debate). Only intersectional theory allows this multilevel approach (Anthias 2012; Crenshaw 1994) to understand the ways in which social identities, relations of hierarchy and gender inequalities interconnect to create power relationships.

Recent research on leadership has identified the standards of successful leadership, whether male or female (Huffaker 2010). The most successful leaders are those considered ‘central’ in their respective professional network; they are also regarded as the most credible professionals, and they are assertive. These three characteristics (centrality in network, credibility and assertiveness) tend not to favor women politicians. Indeed, with politics being a primarily male world, it is more difficult for women to be regarded as central; moreover, assertiveness is not a typical female characteristic and (as will be discussed below) when female politicians demonstrate assertiveness it is often seen as a negative quality. For these reasons, female politicians are also rarely afforded credibility.

2.2 Women politicians: The lack of fit and overcoming it

Most research on leadership has concluded that there is a lack of fit between the qualities expected for political leadership and (stereo)typical feminine qualities. In
fact, leadership has never been regarded as a female strength: “Simply put, women leaders are often regarded as out of place in the hierarchy” (Gardiner 2015, 5). If we consider the qualities expected in a leader and those expected in a woman, there is clearly a ‘lack of fit’. For instance, stereotypically feminine traits such as ‘being good listeners’ clash with typically masculine agentic behaviour (Eagly and Karau 2002) – a trait expected of leaders.

There are scholars (West and Zimmerman 1987; Goffman 1977) who find that the very concepts of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are constructed into moments of attribution and iteration: in this way, gendered identity is a continual social process of ‘doing’ masculinity and femininity. In this postmodern view then, gender does not precede, but rather follows from practice; it is instantiated in a person’s everyday behavior and micro-actions (Butler 1995). Logically, if political leadership is associated with a competitive character and speech (stereotypically male), women may well consider it advantageous to downplay typically female behavior such as cooperation (Gidengil and Everitt 2003; Kahn 1996) or exhibiting so-called feminine qualities such as proximity, since both will be interpreted as weak in the ruthless world of politics (Carroll 1994; Herrnson and Lucas 2006; Freedman 1997, 204; Allan and Mas 2007). For this very reason, some female politicians have resorted to adopting a masculine style as a way to earn credibility; and in fact, there are studies indicating that female politicians have more chance to be elected when they appear/act/sound like their male counterparts (see, for example, Kern and Paige 1994), such as by lowering their vocal pitch (such as Thatcher, Clinton) or acting tough (Kahn 1996).

There are however several drawbacks to this approach. Catherine Achin and Marion Paloetti (2002) coined the term ‘salto stigmata’ (a disqualification because of derogatory labels), which reflects the devaluation women leaders experience when they adopt a stereotypically masculine style (Heilman 2001); sometimes they can even lose legitimacy. Therefore in this male-dominated field, female politicians are faced with an incongruity: if they dare attempt to overturn the expected hierarchical relation between the sexes and behave anti-stereotypically, they may well experience resentment (Eagly 2005, 465; Gardiner 2015, 8). Women seem to have internalized the idea that femininity does not correspond well with leadership (Heilman 2001). Gender stereotypes, whether one plays against or along, have therefore a significant impact on the progress and reception of women in politics, and exert a powerful influence on any political success. Negotiating membership within the political arena still involves negotiating gender categories. Therefore female politicians suffer under the well-known double constraint: ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’. 
2.3 Building a relational leadership, constructing a political ethos

Women who aim to succeed in politics and achieve an authentic relational leadership, according to Eagly (2005, 466), will be best served by tempering typical masculine agentic behavior expected from leaders, and exhibiting the softer female-typical behaviors. Eagly further believes (2005, 468–469) that female leaders should neither encourage greater compassion nor impose stricter ethical rules when they are acting from a platform of a male dominated leadership as ultimately this will lead to even greater challenges. They should stick to ‘a narrow band’ of acceptable behavior – behavior that is neither too masculine nor too feminine, behavior that will depend on the specific socio-cultural context. For this reason we consider it important to integrate the concept of ‘intersectionality’ into our study. Using this concept we can explain why ‘different identity characteristics can have a bearing on how leaders are perceived’ (Gardiner 2015, 5) and why many women have successfully achieved strong leadership (Eagly 2005).

When choosing a discourse strategy, leaders (and their staff) will consider broad patterns of collective sense-making as well as the pragmatics of each particular conversational context. Depending on the time and place, different discourses prevail. Politicians not only convey party rhetoric, they also construct their discourse according to their own personal situation and background and the interview setting. A politician’s gender interacts with his/her social class, lifestyle and age, ‘both biological and political’ (Millar 2015, 71). In order to evaluate/analyze leadership, therefore, we must take into account the different contexts in which leadership is exerted.

In that respect, and according to Eagly (2005), leaders who are efficient, respected and obeyed have achieved a ‘relational leadership’ – i.e., they succeeded in being accepted as leaders by their followers (2005, 461). To grant legitimacy to their leadership, successful leaders must speak to their followers’ unique personal and social identification. In brief, their discourse strategies and speech acts must be not only performative but must also elicit the desired perlocutionary outcome. To a degree, these outcomes rely on the followers’ perceptions of / reactions to the strategies deployed by a male or female leader; here both the media and other politicians will influence reactions. Thus a relational dimension – and its success or failure – is strongly dependent on the crucial role of language in the construction of leadership (Clifton 2012). It is important to understand the discursive and para-linguistic choices that politicians make in order to ensure a leadership ethos and how these choices are mediated by the voters and the press.
3. Representations, discourse and strategies in the socialist debate

3.1 Symbolic representations in the political field

The 2000 parity law in France aimed to rejuvenate and feminize the political arena, ensuring also that women represented 50% on electoral lists to guarantee a balance of the sexes in political bodies. Always under-represented in politics when the position carries significant prestige, women are still poorly represented in the political space; for instance, women in France have always been (and still are) poorly represented even in Parliament, scoring even below other Latin countries, a point which according to Achin and Levêque (2012) rules out the ‘culturalist’ explanation.

Indeed, as mentioned in our introduction, the French political sphere is extremely gendered. On the one hand, it is horizontally segregated, with men typically engaged in the economy and women focused on education. On the other hand, it is also vertically stratified, the most prestigious and better-paid positions occupied by men (Bertini 2002; Sineau 2001; Achin and Levêque 2012). Regarding voters, gendered stereotypes also appear to be the basis for judgments against women (within parties): so while women are seen to be closer to voters (the notion of ‘proximité’), men are perceived to be more competent (Coulomb-Gully 2012; Le Bart 2009; Allan and Mas 2007; Bertini 2002). With regard to journalists, press discourse analysis has shown how the media create and perpetuate gendered social representations of politicians (Garcin-Marrou 2009; Moore 1997). For instance, it is common for the press to refer to female leaders by their first name (Sego for Royal vs Sarko for Sarkozy), besides commenting on their appearance, clothes, bodies, and taking more interest in the candidate’s family life and relationships.

Many experts such as Sineau (2001), Bertini (2002), Achin and Levêque (2012) have long denounced this ‘male norm’ and the ‘male political order’ in French politics: political parties and politics in general in France have been described as a male bastion that relegates female politicians to the peripheral political arenas (Sineau 2007). Studies in the field argue that to explain such a gendered field we must focus on the ways that male and female political behavior are evaluated differently. The idea of similar behavior being evaluated differently is central to our paper. An example is the 2007 presidential elections, where we saw how S. Royal played up her femininity while Sarkozy touted his virility. It was actually the first time in French political history that sexual stereotypes were so blatant (Achin and Dorlin 2008; Coulomb-Gully 2009; 2012). While Royal was demeaned for her behavior, Sarkozy was praised for his virile style. Other studies targeting media representations of French politicians (for example Baider 2010) suggest that gendered stereotypes (not always sexual) can explain the focus on incompetence and hysteria for women (Royal), and that stereotypes are often used to judge male
politicians (Hollande vs Sarkozy). More recently campaign managers and staff (spin doctors, etc.) have been noted for their use of stereotyping. Furthermore, politicians themselves rely on social norms of behaviors since they are public persona. For both sexes when people know their behavior is being monitored, they more closely adhere to the norms for appropriate behavior for their gender. People are at their gendered best when people are looking:

First, we contend that there are gender display rules that call for women to smile more than men (at least in Western cultures). These gender display rules are most in evidence when people are aware of being noticed or evaluated.

(Lafrance, Paluck and Hecht 2003, 306)

3.2 The structural powers during the socialist campaign

Several recent studies have focused on the 2011 French socialist primaries: Bechet (2013) analyzed how Aubry and Hollande constructed their ethos; while Baider in two articles (2014, 2015) examined how the press constructed the two politicians. A linguistic-based analysis of the press during the primaries (Baider 2015) found two opposite ‘linguistic’ leadership portraits for the politicians:

- Aubry was constructed in the media as a legitimate presidential candidate and an experienced politician, however her charisma was contested because of her bad temper. Aubry’s ethos was based on three qualities which she strived to demonstrate both at the personal and the professional level: strength, dynamism and transparence. Indeed early in the campaign she built her ethos as the ‘gauche forte’ (the strong left) necessary to fight against a right wing party described as ‘droite dure’ (harsh right).

- Hollande was not represented as a legitimate candidate nor was he perceived as experienced; his lack of charisma was noted. However he was described as talented as a strategist, a point which will be crucial in our analysis. Hollande built his ethos on wanting to be a ‘normal president’, referring, it is believed, to Sarkozy’s presidency which was described as ‘different’ because of Sarkozy’s style of ‘bling bling’.

The female politician had much experience to attest to her leadership potential: she was a successful mayor of a major city (Lille) at the time of the debate, and she had held high-level political appointments, for example, she was second in command in previous governments, and high up in other ministerial positions. She argued during the campaign that such experience should be a basic qualification for the presidency, and also pointed out many times during the campaign

1. https://www.ft.com/content/7b6d7c96-be26-11dc-8bc9-0000779fd2ac
that Hollande was neither as knowledgeable nor as experienced as she herself was. In fact, Hollande had been responsible for only one region (Corrèze) that is neither a major economic nor political area, and had no experience in government. During the debate, the female politician demonstrated several times that some of Hollande’s proposals had already been tested and found to be unworkable (e.g., le contrat de génération, the contract to help the youth find employment).

On a more personal level she claimed that she had earned the people’s trust through her determination and clarity, asserting during the campaign that “ambiguity is the worst thing and I outline my program very clearly”. She was firm and plain-speaking during the debate, and believes that she is strong and clear, two qualities she did not see in her opponent. In a parallel fashion, she also reiterated throughout the socialist campaign that her opponent had fluctuated on many important topics: “I am trusted because I am clear. François Hollande has changed his position on several topics. It is his right, but the French people should know it”, implying that her opponent, cannot be trusted. Aubry is also known for her dynamism and efficiency, a reputation she referred to many times while she also argued that her opponent is more a talker than a doer: “He speaks a lot of gathering people but I spent months to gather people when heading the party”.

Finally, the two candidates were known to intensely dislike each other. These opposite portraits, with a dynamic female politician and a mellow male candidate, as well as the intense animosity between the two are important elements to take into account when analyzing the October debate.

4. The micro level: Linguistic and para-verbal choices during the debate

Our analysis comprises two separate studies: first, we examined the transcribed debate (available on-line) and analyzed the discourse strategies; second, we recorded and analyzed the para-verbal language from the entire debate (available on Dailymotion). For our analysis of two politicians’ strategies linguistic strategies (micro-level) during this crucial debate, we separated their interventions and analyzed frequencies in their respective discourse.

2. “François parle beaucoup de rassemblement depuis trois jours. J’ai passé beaucoup de temps à rassembler à la tête du parti.”
4.1 The linguistic choices: Opposite rhetorical strategies

To determine the most frequent words and co-occurrences, we worked with the Antconc concordance. Our results show that the lexical choices describe two different linguistic portraits and two different political positionings.

4.1.1 Core-left vs center-right positioning

The most frequent co-occurrences in Aubry’s vocabulary describe a political and personal positioning confirming her as the ‘gauche forte’ she claims herself to be. The lexical fields abounded with concrete examples of the financial actions she would undertake in the name of social justice (niche fiscales /tax breaks, tax exonerations de charge). Moreover, there were many expressions, such as tâches répétitives/ recurrent and tiring tasks, peuple de gauche/ left-wing people, emplois pénibles/ work involving difficult conditions, pacte éducatif/ educational contract, that are expected from a socialist leader since they reflect concern for the less privileged. In contrast, Hollande’s vocabulary focuses almost exclusively on finances, with the expression fond de stabilité financière/ a reserve for financial stability being the most recurrent; he makes no suggestion of any program or desire for social justice. He also uses a more polished vocabulary than his opponent’s, for instance, he refers to citoyens/ citizens while Aubry speaks of peuple /people. Aubry’s linguistic choices describe a resolutely left-leaning politician whereas Hollande’s choices position himself more as a financier and a center-right intellectual.

The adjectives used by each politician also reveal a different ethos: Hollande stays in the abstract and the intellect, while Aubry sticks to reality and concrete examples. The adjective grand is one example. In Hollande’s data the adjective is used in clichés such as grande cause /great cause, grande question /important question, whereas in Aubry’s data it is used to describe reality and experience (grande ville/ important city). Her speech is more accessible to the listener due to her use of short sentences and simple vocabulary; Hollande, on the other hand, used lengthy sentences and explanations. Aubry’s linguistic choices give a discourse anchored in reality, and might indicate proximity to the audience as her political strategy; this choice could also be interpreted as a typical strategy of female politicians (cf. Le Bart 2009 for French politics) while distance is typical of male politicians.

These different lexical choices might suggest a political divide (core-left vs center-right) as well as a typical gender divide (proximity vs distance).

4.1.2 Qualifying one’s speech

If adverbs tell us about the speaker (subjectivity), they have also been described as qualifying a more feminine way of speaking (Lakoff 1977, for instance). The politicians’ adverbs reveal different styles of rhetoric and confirm their opposite
personalities: transparency and dynamism for Aubry, cautiousness and decorum for Hollande. Aubry uses more adverbs than Hollande, as would be expected according to female stereotypes:

Des cadeaux inefficaces économiquement et injustes socialement. These are gifts which are economically unproductive and socially unfair.

Her use of adverbs such as simplement /simply, in plain words, clairement /clearly reinforces her sincerity and the transparency of her politics:

It is simple, when I speak of a strong left, strength is, we have to admit, a good thing, it is like solidity. It also means that we have to say things clearly (…) I clearly trace my road

These adverbs that Aubry uses to describe herself are in sharp contrast to the nouns she uses when alluding to Hollande’s behavior – vagueness, fuzziness, blur-riness – since he is known for being evasive and lacking transparency:

I believe that today, it is not the debate we have with each other that constitutes a problem, it is the vagueness of it, and I think that this bluriness may be a problem for the voters. Fuzziness is the worst of things, I clearly trace my road.3

Hollande uses very few adverbs, and these appear to function more as instruments of rhetoric rather than being indicative of his subjectivity. If we look at the word ensemble/ together, we can see how the two politicians use the word differently. This word is used very often by both, since it is important to be able to gather different groups within the party. However, looking at the context in which the word is used we can observe for Hollande that:

– The occurrences are clustered in a specific part of the debate;
– Half of the occurrences are associated with an abstract and vague pronoun (on);
– Three-quarters of the occurrences are part of rhetorical questions.4

3. Simplement, quand je parle de gauche forte, la force c’est quand même une bonne chose, c’est comme la solidité. Ça veut dire aussi, qu’il faut dire les choses clairement et moi je crois qu’aujourd’hui, ce n’est pas le débat qui est gênant entre nous, c’est le flou et je crois que c’est ça qui peut gêner les électeurs.

4. De ce point de vue, nous avons fixé l’objectif ensemble.

Qu’est-ce qui fera que notre société, notre vivre ensemble pourra se poursuivre ? Donc quand il y a eu 1000 places de droit, un espace de circulation et on vit ensemble. Et c’est ensemble que nous allons dire qu’est-ce qu’on veut faire ensemble ? La vraie discussion avec Madame Merkel est celle-là : « qu’est-ce que nous faisons ensemble ? » Qu’est-ce que nous faisons ensemble sur la politique budgétaire ? Qu’est-ce qu’on fait ensemble ? La solidarité. On est capable d’avoir un espace.
This contextual usage confirms the abstract quality of his discourse: the concept of ‘togetherness’ is indeed fuzzy in such data. In contrast, Aubry’s abstracts show that:

- The occurrences are dispersed during the debate;
- They are used in concrete examples;
- The meaning of togetherness is echoed in the meaning of other lexical items (underlined in the examples in the endnote).5

Aubry’s use of the term ‘togetherness’ reflects an idea that is latent throughout the entire debate and is pervasive in her argumentation. She appears to mean what she says and to be coherent during her interactions. Hollande uses the term at a certain moment in the debate and uses it more as a rhetorical tool than as an important concept in his politics.

There were commentators who in their analysis of the candidates’ word choices, argued that Hollande’s style was more presidential than his opponent. Our analysis, in contrast, would describe his style as typical of political parlance and hers as emblematic of a core left pragmatist. However ‘word for word’ analysis does not account for the possible impact of the speech act, the tone of voice, the behavior, the gaze, the gestures – all of which are important to the successful conveying of a message.

4.2 The para-verbal and non-verbal cues

Our second set of data comprises physical evidence as recorded in video samples (gestures, gaze, smile, interruptions, tone of voice). Hollande’s style is best described as cautious: he does not immediately answer questions, possibly to avoid a trap or to look for an answer. In fact, his style has been analyzed as a typical strategy, one that allows him time to structure his answers, focus on his words; at times it is just simple hesitation (Béchet et al., 2013). In contrast, Aubry’s style is to answer immediately and spontaneously. The visual cues, e.g., gaze, body movement, also point to a markedly different style for the two politicians.

Qu’est-ce qu’on fait ensemble pour l’énergie, pour l’industrie, pour notre protection (…)?
Nous avons un grand engagement ensemble, à la fois relever notre économie.

5. Nous avons voté tous ensemble, à l’unanimité, un projet que nous avons préparé tous ensemble avec nos experts, qui est un projet de réforme en revanche nous l’avions dit en 2008 tous ensemble né à Athènes une charte commune où nous demandons ensemble, par exemple, la création de cette agence qui restent des nations mais qui décident ensemble de gérer un certain nombre de problèmes nous n’avions plus envie de faire de la politique ensemble nous n’avions plus envie de nous tourner ensemble vers les Français j’ai rassemblé, voilà ce que nous allons construire ensemble, voilà nos différences. et nous combattrons ensemble les violences faites aux femmes, nous consoliderons.
4.2.1 Smiling

Human smiling would appear to be an uncomplicated facial expression, one whose meaning is straightforward. In actual fact, smiling is one of the most complex facial displays. Smiles can take a variety of forms (Ekman and Friesen 1982), and they occur in a wide variety of situations (Juven and Colletta 2002, 177). As novelist Herman Melville (1852/1949) maintained, “a smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities” (1949, 98), and research has classified a smile as an affect display (Ekman and Friesen 1982). This ambiguity may be at the heart of the difficulty in understanding why women tend to smile more than men, or alternatively, why men tend to smile less than women (LaFrance, Paluck and Hecht 2003). Indeed “Activation of gender norms produces larger sex differences in smiling” (LaFrance, Paluck and Hecht 2003, 323) and among scholars, there is near unanimous agreement that stereotypically women smile more than men (Briton and Hall 1995; Hall and Halberstadt 1986; LaFrance and Hecht 1999). Further, LaFrance observed that when there is tension in the air, women more often than men try to diffuse it with a smile: “Women do what we call ‘emotion work’ and one of the best ways to do this is to smile to soothe hurt feelings, to restore harmony”.6 Apart from presenting a welcoming and friendly picture, in contrast to the serious image that politicians must more often present, French politicians have been shown to smile in political debates to attack the opponent (ridicule or disapproval), to mitigate criticism or to show consensus (Sandré 2011,14–15).

In the first few seconds of the debate, Aubry and Hollande greet the public. Both are smiling, exhibiting what Ekman and Friesen called ‘emblems’, a conventional signal of a pseudo affect: “Affect displays can be emblems […], the smile in many cultures is such an emblem” (1969, 77). However the quick smile of the female politician and the broad smiling face of the male politician (who is fidgeting) are in stark contrast. One could interpret this difference as the challenger (Aubry) being on the defensive and therefore stiffer and less at ease than the champion (Hollande), although our above analysis based on linguistic choices signaled the opposite – Aubry on the attack and Hollande more on the defensive. One can also evaluate these different styles in greetings as a gender reversal, given research on smiling (cf. LaFrance and Hecht’s research 1999 for instance).

This gender reversal is also true when we take into account the frequency of smiling. Throughout the debate it is noticeable that Hollande smiles more frequently than Aubry when talking: Aubry smiles seven times while talking, whereas Hollande smiles 12 times while talking. Furthermore, Aubry smiles when Hollande speaks; this would seem to indicate a desire to soften her previous criticisms or to appreciate his sense of humor (0:03:08), and, in some instances, to cooperate with

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her opponent. Indeed Aubry is noted laughing (1:10:40) in response to her opponent’s discourse, and here to express her agreement. While laughing, she even completes his sentence and helps him to conclude his sentence, when Hollande tackles the topic of Air France, Airbus and American Airlines.

In contrast, Hollande uses smiling to attack his adversary or to protect himself. Indeed, on several occasions he tries to diffuse his apparent unease with a smile, for example, when Aubry challenged him on some numbers he put forward (0:15:28). Hollande’s smile often signals irony or sarcasm, in an effort to either undermine his opponent or to show his contempt. For instance, when Aubry says that she hopes to win (0:15:36), Hollande repeats Aubry’s word ‘parfait’ sarcastically, as he smiles dismissively in the direction of the moderator. This was perhaps a tactic intended to anger Aubry, who is known for her short temper, but that strategy was unsuccessful. Moreover, even though Aubry maintains a quite serious and firm expression, her eyebrows posed to accentuate her masculine features, her smiles appear more spontaneous. Often she is supportive of Hollande; she even laughs at the end of the debate – a fact noted by journalists. Hollande’s smiling appears less spontaneous, less sincere and seems to be most often used as a weapon.

To conclude this section, while this affect display signals a gender reversal of stereotypes, if we consider the functions of smiling we see a complex power relationship, with Hollande being ‘aggressively’ on the defensive and Aubry being ‘supportively’ on the attack.

4.2.2 Body posture and gaze

Body posture is another feature that can reveal the power relationship. We note how this seems to be a positive factor for the female candidate, e.g., when Aubry places both hands firmly on the table, and at one stage in the debate states calmly (0:10:07):

I said what I was. When I mentioned that I was for a strong left, nobody asked me whether I was strong or not. I do not need to explain myself nor argue in order to say that I am not a soft/weak left.7

While very direct gestures are indicative of Aubry’s physical stance, both candidates aim for a traditional leadership posture: calm and authoritative. Both also strive to demonstrate their competence on the various important political issues. Although the two candidates have documents with them, Aubry also carries a pen, which she uses during the debate; she also quotes facts and figures more than her

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7. J’ai dit ce que j’étais. Quand j’ai dit que je défendais une gauche forte personne ne m’a posé la question de savoir si j’étais forte ou pas. Je n’ai pas besoin de m’expliquer ou d’argumenter pour dire que je ne suis pas une gauche molle.
adversary. Her posture seems to complete the picture of an experienced and serious manager, her already-established forte. In contrast, despite having documents, Hollande does not use them during the debate; nor does he use a pen.

Both candidates use hand, finger, and arm gestures extensively to complete or punctuate their respective discourses. One may notice that Aubry often clenches her fist, especially when it comes to expressions such as “determination of the strong left”, which could translate as an iconic gesture for ‘determination’ or may express repressed anger; Hollande more often gestures with an open palm, which could be interpreted as being open to dialogue.

However Aubry’s very erect posture conveys authority and control, consistent with her choice of words. Even when addressing her interlocutor, she stands tall, accentuating the calm and non-emotional side of her leadership style. Although Hollande’s style is also non-emotional, he is physically more agitated, turning regularly towards his when speaking, many times to the point of ignoring his opponent. In this way, he appears less firm and calm than Aubry – in contrast to the non-emotional persona he aims to project at other times. The eye movements and gaze denote the same difference and the same lack of coherence. Frequent and furtive eye movements describe Hollande’s expressiveness, whereas Aubry’s direct and unwavering gaze is in line with her gestures and tone of voice.

Given the above para-verbal cues one might conclude that the female politician is more in control of the debate, in a typical ‘authority-like’ ethos, consistent with the stereotype of male leadership. However when analyzing the turn-taking and interruptions, a different picture emerges.

4.3 Turns, interruptions, formulaic answers

Debaters who interrupt (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1990, 165–166) are mocking the principle of right of response. In her analysis of French political debates, Sandré (2009) identified three possible reasons for interrupting the opponent: to attack, to support, or to manage the interaction (asking for details or explanations, for example). A televised political debate is more tolerant of this type of ‘dysfunctional’ interaction; yet clear infringement of a debater’s right of response will not occur without consequences; specifically the public image of the offender will likely suffer (Trognon and Larrue 1994, 63).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Interruptions</th>
<th>Hollande -&gt; Aubry</th>
<th>Aubry -&gt; Hollande</th>
<th>Journalist -&gt; Aubry</th>
<th>Journalist -&gt; Hollande</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aubry</td>
<td>9623 (+7%)</td>
<td>1713 (+3%)</td>
<td>8 times</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>48 times</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollande</td>
<td>9008</td>
<td>1653</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14 times</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>28 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While our data reveal that Aubry speaks more quickly than Hollande (and managed to speak 7% more), they also indicate (Table 1) that she is interrupted more often than he. Hollande interrupts her almost twice as much as she interrupts him, which is consistent with the gender stereotype of men interrupting more often than women (West and Zimmerman 1987; Smith-Lovin and Robinson 1992). Moreover, the (male) journalist, David Pujadas, interrupts Aubry more often than Hollande, which is also consistent with earlier findings related to the Royal / Sarkozy debate in 2007 where the female politician was interrupted three times more often than the male politician (Sandré 2011, 72). Aubry interrupts Hollande as well 50% of the time, but she does so to be cooperative or to manage the interactions; Hollande never interrupts Aubry to be cooperative and only 20% of the time does he interrupt to manage the interaction, and even then, his tone is especially aggressive. As an example, when Aubry mentions the golden rule (règle d’or), Hollande avoids the question. Aubry persists and forces him to answer, and this is the first time there is an important interruption: as Hollande speaks about ‘the golden rule’, Aubry interrupts to provide the issue’s historical context. Hollande immediately interrupts her (0:15:40), almost shouting, ‘No, never! Never! You will never find any written statement on the golden rule on my part’. A few moments later (0:56:27), Aubry interrupts Hollande in order to complete his answer – an interruption that is not contentious, but cooperative (she agrees with her adversary’s point).

We also counted the number of direct attacks for each protagonist. Aubry made more direct attacks – not an expected finding with regard to gender stereotype, but expected between a champion and a challenger: the challenger has nothing to lose in attacking and can only win if successful in undermining the opponent. Hollande does not appear undermined, but often pauses or smiles to gain time, to use a diversionary tactic or avoid answering all together (Béchet et al. 2013).

The two politicians use different type of attacks: Aubry remains professional, while Hollande resorts to more personal attacks. Hollande’s behavior may represent despair or sheer arrogance. For instance, he tried to blame Aubry for the unsuccessful 2008 Socialist convention; he also accused her of being pessimistic when she brought up the failure of what he believed was a creative solution (the youth contract). And while Hollande questioned her mathematical ability, it was actually he who erroneously counted the number of civil servants. When we also consider Hollande’s sarcastic smiles (noted above), he seems overtly contemptuous of his opponent. Yet this confirms the well-known animosity between the two politicians.

In contrast, although she acts tough and appears brutally honest, Aubry showed a will to cooperate lacking in Hollande. The questions below reveal how the journalist was testing the metal of both politicians:
Are you ready to support your opponent if you lose?\textsuperscript{8}

Aubry gave a brief and immediate answer: \textit{yes}, showing cooperation and spontaneity. In contrast, Hollande paused, trying to gain time and avoid the question through diversion. Forced to reply though, he offered the formulaic: ‘it is obvious and necessary,’\textsuperscript{9} which does not indicate a will to cooperate but a forced cooperation. The journalist returned to the same topic with a more precise question, this time asking whether in the case of their victory, they would make their opponent Prime Minister:

\textbf{Who will be your prime minister? Your opponent?}\textsuperscript{10}

Aubry answered that she would choose someone younger than herself, so that the person could take over when her term is finished; in this way she leaves it open, it could be Hollande. Hollande is similarly vague, however he pauses, tries not to answer and once again uses formulaic language: ‘this choice is a political moment’.

The two answers can be interpreted however one wishes, but the responses seem to validate Aubry’s typification of Hollande as evasive. She once again appears more determined and more assertive than her opponent, who can do no more than use very neutral and formulaic language to avoid any possible repercussions. Aubry’s frankness and Hollande’s strategist qualities clearly are indicative of different personalities rather than a gender reversal.

To summarize this section: there is a complex power relationship between the two candidates wherein, with regard to their linguistic and para -verbal cues, the champion does not seem to have the upper hand. It is difficult however, to assert that this power relationship is about gender alone, or about gender at all, since we frequently observed what we call a ‘gender reversal’ in relation to body posture, gaze, and linguistic cues, while we also noted how patterns of interruption pointed to typical male / female interactions. The interactions clearly reveal a clash of personalities as well as a deep political rift between two Socialists with a different vision (she is core left he is center right). This is a rift that may signal the imminent break-up of the Socialist party, a rift which happened in 2017 during the presidential elections, five years later.

We also observed that journalists tended to interrupt the female candidate more often; indeed journalists and commentators play a distinctive role in constructing gender roles and in the positioning of champion versus challenger.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Vous êtes prêt à faire une campagne l’un pour l’autre ?
\item \textsuperscript{9} C’est une évidence et une exigence
\item \textsuperscript{10} Qui sera votre premier ministre? Votre adversaire?
\end{itemize}
5. Peri-performativity, media and followers

5.1 The perlocutionary force and the media

If we focus on two stereotypical female attributes – emotionality and secondary/subordinate position, – we can observe the moderator gendering the debate. With regard to the first, there was only one question referring to emotions and it was addressed solely to the female politician:

Journalist: *Vous êtes déçue*?/ Are you disappointed?
MA: *La politique c’est parfois dur* /Politics is sometimes harsh.

This is not a random instance, given that we also observed journalists treating female politicians similarly in other debates. Moreover even though a male politician might be asked an ‘emotional’ question (to balance the game), it would not have the same repercussions. In fact, it would benefit him, it that it would enable him to show a sensitive aspect of his personality and therefore to build a relationship of proximity with the audience, moving away from the distance associated with masculinity (Le Bard 2009). The female politician has nothing to gain from this type of question; just the opposite, for two reasons. First, they are associated with and therefore perceived as more emotional, even when they are not. Second, more often they are playing on a proximity relationship with the audience (as we have seen with Aubry’s linguistic choices) since it conforms to stereotypical gender behavior.

As mentioned above, the journalist interrupts Aubry more often than Hollande. Moreover, *when* the journalist interrupts her is important: he stops Aubry as she is explaining how Hollande’s argument is wrong, which attests to her professionalism and his lack of knowledge of the dossiers. There were a number of journalist interruptions (0:19:40; 0:55:55; 1:15:11; 1:15:14) related to the management of the debate or the interaction (Sandré 2009, 7), when he made remarks, such as ‘We have understood the philosophy of your answer’. Here the moderator is trying to shorten Aubry’s answer without explicitly telling her that her answer is too long and that she is ahead in her speech time. Furthermore, the *way* that David Pujadas interrupts is also important to mention, as he interjects even though she is in the middle of an explanation, hence overlapping her speech, with the phrase: ‘*Oui nous avons compris*’ /Yes, we got it (0:31:02). This casual and actually quite dismissive way of stopping Aubry radically changes the performativity of her speech act: no longer is she explaining/proving a fundamental flaw in Hollande’s reasoning,

11. Marine Le Pen for instance was asked whether she suffered during the difficult time she had with her father.
she is a pain in the neck, nit-picking unimportant details. Indeed, this is exactly how her performance was viewed by some journalists: “Her professorial tone work against her? [These questions] could make her seem stupid and finicky. She acted like an examiner!” Journalists in Le Monde (center left newspaper) also interpreted her use of documents and a pen as behaving like a teacher, while forum participants interpreted it as professionalism. In the same vein, the fact that Aubry spoke slightly more than Hollande (7% more) was interpreted as Hollande letting her speak and not as her managing to take control of the floor. Such judgment is mirrored by one critic’s summary of the debate: Will the voters expect a presidential style like De Gaulle or a combative militant? This question reduces Aubry to an activist while comparing Hollande to a great French politician.

5.2 The perlocutionary force and the forum participants

Indeed, forum participants on the same newspaper disagreed with the journalists and deemed her speech act as revealing of Hollande’s obvious limitations. They not did not deem it a failure on Aubry’s part:

His vacuity was obvious and revealed especially with the topic of “redoublement”; this was technical, but either he does not understand, or he is trying to mislead us. In any case, he was in trouble, serious trouble.12

Moreover, forum participants sanctioned the same speech acts in a more diverse fashion than the media apparently did, sometimes agreeing with journalists’ statements, but more often contradicting them. Hollande was described as timid and unwilling to take risks, whereas Aubry was judged more daring.13 The male politician was also accused of being all talk and no action, a smooth talker one should not trust: “I fear Hollande will one day become our left wing Chirac, do you remember? This Correze person who appeared out of nowhere, a smooth talker … who tricked everyone for 12 years.” They actually accused the newspaper of being unfair.

An overwhelming 70% of forum participants on the online Le Parisien and even on the Le Monde site favored Aubry describing her as clear, making sense and courageous,14 even though Le Monde chose to quote reactions favorable to

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Hollande. Forum participants spoke out forcefully against the negative comments made by journalists. Although Aubry’s straightforward style was quite mild in the debate, she was judged as ‘aggressive’ by *Le Monde*. In response, forum participants mentioned more than once Hollande’s hostility, e.g.: ‘When will people stop confusing frankness and hostility!?’ Forum participants also commented on Hollande’s contempt for his adversary, noting the linguistic and para-linguistic cues we pointed out earlier:

Hollande’s manner in this debate has been really critical, full of contempt, arrogant, acting like a teacher (just like a prof to his student), and his hatred of – or at least his enmity towards – the candidate is quite clear.\footnote{Dans ce débat Hollande est cassant, méprisant, arrogant, donneur de leçon (un prof vis à vis de son étudiante) et sa haine ou du moins son inimitié vis-à-vis de la candidate est assez claire.}

He was also described him as being two-faced: ‘he is aggressive, but trying to appear a nice guy at the same time’.\footnote{Hollande est très agressif en paraissant très gentil.} Indeed, forum reactions remind us that beyond word use, it is important to look at how one uses them, which is fundamental in influencing the audience.

The journalists called Hollande’s style ‘presidential’, and on this basis concluded that he was more suited to the highest position and its decorum. However, forum participants interpreted the same stance (of Hollande) as stonewalling, parlance or *langue de bois* / political speak. In fact, we observed an almost opposite reading of the same speech acts in the newspaper and on the forums.

These widely differing analyses of journalists and followers reminds us of what Sedgwick (2003, 67–91) called peri-performativity, i.e., society’s contribution to the success or failure of a speech act, the success of failure of being constructed, interpreted as feminine / masculine at the right time, in the right place. We argue that our analysis of the discursive strategies examined in this paper clearly reveals peri-performativity as exemplified by journalists, by political advisers and by forum participants, all of whom embody the sites of (re)interpretation of the series of speech acts which constitute a debate. If leadership is indeed relational, this relational dimension is also multi-layered: it is not enough to have the followers on your side, journalists and commentators will also reframe the debate and decide of its meaning.
6. Conclusions

Leadership studies have recognized the linguistic turn and its impact on social theory, since “leadership actors shape and are shaped by their communication with others” (Fairhurst and Connaughton 2014: 14; Hosking 2006 *inter alia*). In this paper we considered the social phenomenon called leadership as being, in part, a linguistic phenomenon. The two politicians we examined aimed to construct a legitimate authority, but in an apparent reverse gendered way. However, more subtle cues such as interruptions, smiles, and intonation revealed the female politician as more spontaneous and adopting a supportive role, whereas her male opponent was aggressive and more controlled, a stereotypically male strategy. We concluded that it was difficult to assert that the power relationship witnessed during the debate was about gender only or about gender at all, since the different cues we studied could point at a typical male / female interaction or at two opposite personalities going for the same prize. We also noted that the followers and media professionals had a different take on the same linguistic and paralinguistic data. It is obvious, therefore, that performativities (which is what political debates are) are not interpreted consistently; interpretation differs according to the place and the time they are exhibited, who exhibits them, who interprets them and for which political gain. Observing the media interpreting Aubry’s and Hollande’s respective performance, we seem to witness their repetitive construction of a typical double bind: societies with their norms and expectations create an impasse in which women are damned if they do (a masculine style is not natural) and they are damned if they don’t (a feminine style is inappropriate in politics). Indeed, our analysis describes Aubry’s strategy as adopting the narrow-band ethos, neither too masculine, neither too feminine, as advocated by the most recent research in leadership (Gardiner 2015; Eagly 2005). However even if women politicians try to be different and *perform* against hegemonic conventions, they will still be *interpreted* by those same conventions and ideologies. What was reassuring was to witness the possibility of counteracting readings – evidenced in other interpretations of the same speech acts on social media: this cyber democracy opens possibilities for female politicians to be recognized for their own value and also reassures audience members who had another take on the debate that what they thought, felt and judged was shared by many others.

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