

The Journal of Undergraduate Research

Volume 15 *The Journal of Undergraduate Research*

Article 3

2017

Political Success and the Media

Connor J. Haaland
South Dakota State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/jur>

 Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#), [Linguistic Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Social Influence and Political Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haaland, Connor J. (2017) "Political Success and the Media," *The Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 15 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/jur/vol15/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Division of Research and Economic Development at Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact michael.biondo@sdstate.edu.

Political Success and the Media

Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the South Dakota State University Department of Modern Languages and Global Studies, especially Professor Jeremy Rud for his assistance and guidance throughout this work.

Political Success and the Media

Author: Connor Haaland

Faculty Sponsor: Jeremy Rud

Department: Modern Languages and Global Studies

ABSTRACT

How have different media affected the linguistic performativity of the most prominent American politicians throughout history? How have different types of media allowed certain linguistic features to flourish, and others to fail? I address these questions through a diachronic analysis of three different periods of American history as well as an investigation into effective linguistic features that manifest over the radio, through television, and on social media. In addition, I confront the myth that there is a relationship between reading level of speech determined by the Flesch-Kincaid algorithm and success. I find relationships between linguistic features unique to the media through which it is presented and conclude how that affects the overall expertise of the candidate but find no relationship between Flesch-Kincaid reading level and expertise.

Keywords: *media, politics, flesch-kincaid, twitter, television, radio*

INTRODUCTION

Media have evolved, from the teleprompter to Twitter, and so have the speech and mannerisms of the politicians of each respective era. Not only have our politicians evolved as the way we digest news has evolved, but the most successful politicians use this to their advantage. I argue that the success of many politicians can be partially attributed to the way in which they manipulate their linguistic repertoire to gain popularity. From Donald Trump to John F. Kennedy and beyond, I argue that our most popular politicians utilize a linguistic repertoire that flourishes due to its compatibility with the way their constituents consumed news.

I believe that Franklin D. Roosevelt had linguistic features and patterns that were well suited for the radio, such as a desirable accent and his personal plural pronoun usage (Trestler, 2005). In the medium of television, I believe that Americans relied more heavily on visual traits such as gesture and appearance to form an opinion of a candidate. We see this in the viewer-listener disconnect that has been made popular regarding the Nixon-Kennedy debates. This disconnect is the idea that, disproportionately, people who listened to the debate on the radio without visual cues thought Nixon won, while those who watched it favored Kennedy. This viewer-listener disconnect has been tested and proven by empirically-driven research, but lacked an analysis of which specific gestural features may have created that disconnect (Druckman, 2002). Instead of further proving the disconnect, I analyze and propose which specific visual features I believe create this disconnect. Today, 68% of Americans distrust traditional mass media and 81% of the population has a social media profile (Gallup, 2016). These numbers lead me to believe the social media presence of the most prominent politicians affects their overall popularity. Thus, I will analyze the Twitter of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. I will determine which linguistic features I think caused him to have three times more online interest than Clinton and ended up as the most *mentioned* candidate of 2016 (Khan, 2016).

The objective of this research is to analyze how different types of media affect the expertise and performativity of politicians from multiple periods of history. This research will feature a diachronic linguistic analysis between three different periods in time, the main research subjects being Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Richard Nixon, John Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt. By analyzing these five subjects, I will see how Franklin D. Roosevelt effectively utilized the radio, the media of his time, to connect with the masses and make his way to being president. I will analyze how the visual modality of televised debates between Nixon and Kennedy affected voter perception and use this to draw conclusions on their respective levels of success. I will conduct a multimodal analysis of the Nixon-Kennedy debates to confirm or deny the proposition that many scholars claim a multimodal approach is a strong factor in political success (Goldstein & Hall, 2016).

Social media will be the focal point of the analysis between now President Donald Trump and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Additionally, I will analyze how gender played a role for Hillary Clinton in the presidential election cycle of 2016 to further examine the gendered nature of politics. For modern day politicians who perform on multiple different types of media, I create arguments tied specifically to social media. Despite the fact modern politicians perform on all types of media in a myriad of modalities, I focus on social media because fewer than one-third of Americans trust traditional mass media, which I posit reflects itself in what news sources Americans form their opinions from (Gallup, 2016). In other words, I think this distrust translates into social media being incredibly influential and the niche offering for 21st century news.

The question I analyze for every linguistic analysis is “which linguistic features work best on this type of media”. The importance of this fundamental question is demonstrated by research supporting that linguistic features such as length of speech and the use of personal pronouns are often considered charismatic in one modality, but not the other (Rosenberg & Hirschberg, 2008). Thus, we must consider the modality and medium in which information is received before concluding on how to be an effective orator as a politician.

BACKGROUND

The overarching linguistical trait that I will use to compare each respective politician is the Flesch-Kincaid reading level derived from their speech. This is a tool used to indicate how difficult a passage is to understand (Kincaid et al, 1975). The Flesch-Kincaid readability test presents a score as a U.S. grade level, giving higher grade levels to those using longer words and sentences, which tend to be more complex and more difficult to comprehend (Viser, 2015). While the Flesch-Kincaid test is a fine tool to empirically compare the complexity of the speech of candidates, I do not believe it is useful as a standalone method for drawing conclusions on the success of a speech or speaker. Using the Flesch-Kincaid algorithm as a standalone method of evaluation overlooks many other important linguistic features such as pronoun usage, performativity, gender, and appearance. Rather than conclude that the success of a speaker is a function of their Flesch-Kincaid level, as Viser (2015) and Grose & Husser (2008) have, I will conclude on a politician’s success based off a multi-faceted evaluation of my subjects. Beyond the Flesch-Kincaid comparisons, I will delve into gesture, performativity, personal linguistic traits, and how every candidate effectively utilized the popular media of their time to gain a political edge.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In this research, I seek to understand how politicians can successfully utilize different modalities within media. From the linguistic perspective, I will investigate features such as gesture, word choice, difficulty of comprehension, and how certain aspects of speech may perform better through one form of media than another. I will do this by examining different media platforms such as the radio, television, and social media. As an anthropologist, I look to explore the evolution of media and

determine why certain politicians are more successful while utilizing the most popular medium to receive news during their campaign cycle. I will use various methodologies to analyze each candidate. To explore Franklin D. Roosevelt, I analyze sections of various Fireside Chats consisting of eight minutes of speech, on a variety of topics to determine how pronoun usage may have affected his charisma over the radio. For Nixon and Kennedy, the duo that experienced the first televised debate, I analyze the entire first debate and draw conclusions on how body language, gesture, and appearances influenced the way Americans perceived each respective candidate. For the 21st century politicians that exist in the world of social media, I analyze each candidates’ Twitter to determine how Twitter played a role in the election of 2016. In addition to the analysis within each election group, I will conduct a comparative analysis between each of the candidates by means of a Flesch-Kincaid score. I determined the Flesch-Kincaid score by putting transcribed speech from various topics into a Flesch-Kincaid calculator for each respective candidate. The analyzed speech consisted of topics like economics, foreign policy, and immigration. For the Flesch-Kincaid analysis, the duration of analyzed speech for each candidate was roughly 50 minutes, and was taken from at least three different venues. I believe it is important to have data from multiple venues and topics to lessen any statistical bias from candidates trying to simplify or complicate speech based on the audience or subject.

Flesch-Kincaid Analysis

The Flesch-Kincaid analysis is an algorithm¹ that determines the “readability” as well as the reading level of a piece of writing derived from words per sentence and syllables per word (Kincaid et al, 1975). Every speech I utilized as data was transcribed and put into a Flesch-Kincaid analyzer that would calculate a Flesch-Kincaid score for the document using the Flesch-Kincaid algorithm (Countwordsworth, n.d.)².

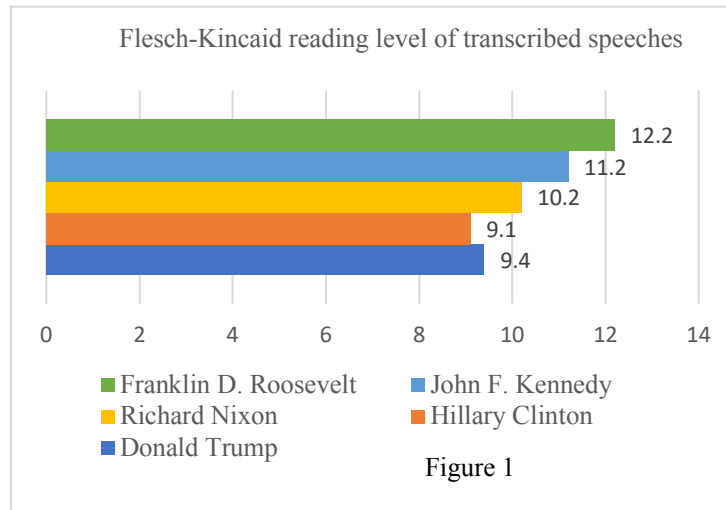


Figure 1

Though designed to analyze written prose, the Flesch-Kincaid level still proves useful for analysis of transcribed speech. However, using only the Flesch-Kincaid score to draw conclusions on speech effectiveness is faulty. Researchers and writers, from journalists at the Boston Globe (Bernhard, 2016) to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University (Eskenazi & Schumacher, 2016), still utilize the Flesch-Kincaid formula to draw conclusions. However, before analyzing transcribed speech, one must

¹ $.39\left(\frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentence}}\right) + 11.8\left(\frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}}\right) - 15.9 = \text{reading level as a number that corresponds to a U.S. grade-level}$

² Transcribed speech can be found in Appendix A

understand the drawbacks of using the Flesch-Kincaid test to determine readability. Dr. Ostermeier, creator of Smart Politics, a data-based reporting and analysis of politics says that “It’s [analyzing transcribed speech using the Flesch-Kincaid scores] not necessarily translatable to what makes a great speech but provides a rough guide to compare the type of language, the sentence structure, the difficulty of the words” (Viser, 2015, 1). Therefore, I argue that one must consider multiple factors to make a conclusion on the expertise of an orator. One must consider factors such as gesture and appropriate use of different modalities; factors that I analyze in later sections of the paper. Throughout each section, I first conduct a Flesch-Kincaid analysis and then compare that with an analysis of the linguistic traits of each respective time period and candidate. This exposes the faults in the relying purely on such an analysis to demonstrate that language difficulty is not the lone variable when determining successful use of mass media.

Media of Franklin D. Roosevelt

Flesch-Kincaid analysis

Richard Dowis states in his book *The Lost Art of Great Speech*, that “The greatest speakers know the power and grace and eloquence of simplicity” (89). While that may hold true in some cases, that does not appear to be the case of Franklin D. Roosevelt. President Franklin D. Roosevelt³ had the highest Flesch-Kincaid level but also the highest average approval rating during his presidency at 83% (American Presidency Project, n.d.). This fact contradicts the idea that there is a relationship between great speakers, eloquence, and simplicity; a fact that Dowis and many other linguists support. To explain the discrepancy between candidates with high Flesch-Kincaid scores and success, I propose that many prosodic features work together to help enable listeners to understand more complex speech. For example, FDR used a high rate of first person plural pronouns (*us, we, our*) to draw in an audience’s attention by creating a feeling of togetherness. Treating the audience as a friend and simply talking to them are two credible methods to gain the trust of one’s audience (Dowis, 2000). Furthermore, FDR also used conjuncts more often in his fireside chats than in his speeches before becoming president. Conjuncts (*therefore, however, thus, etc.*) are one way to increase comprehensibility of speech. The rate of use of these conjuncts, those listed previously being the most commonly used by FDR, increased in rate of use during a speech sample from The Great Depression when compared to his speaking style before The Great Depression during his run for the presidency (Cox, n.d.). The addition of conjuncts may have made his speech more comprehensible and as Dowis states, made him a more effective speaker despite his relatively high Flesch-Kincaid score.

The preceding statements help solidify the notion that any examination using solely a Flesch-Kincaid analysis provides an easy method of seeing what is happening on how complex or simple speech is but is ultimately unrepresentative of the success of a speaker as a standalone variable. In an article titled “For presidential hopefuls, simpler language resonates”, Viser argues that simpler language is the key to success in the world of politics (2016). However, there are flaws to Viser’s work as he fails to examine beyond one variable of the audio modality; reading level of speech. To understand the success of politicians from any era one must take into consideration a multitude of factors. Linguistic features such as gesture, pronoun usage, and appropriate use of a modality must be considered to provide a holistic representation of a candidate’s linguistic repertoire, and to ultimately conclude which of traits lead to higher levels of performativity as a politician.

Analysis of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s speech

³ For the rest of this work, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt may be referred to as FDR

The 32nd president of the United States of America, Franklin Roosevelt, came to power at a bleak point in American history. Situated between the Great Depression and World War II, this politician had to have a calming presence amidst a tumultuous America. The popularity of this president is unique, being the only president elected to office four times; a clear show of support from the American people. For this research, I will look in to how Roosevelt managed to keep public opinion ratings of himself high while being president during tumult, rather than compare him to Herbert Hoover, the republican incumbent in 1932. I chose to refrain from a comparative analysis of Hoover and Roosevelt because given the historical context of the time, the record low approval ratings of Hoover and the subsequent overwhelming electoral win by FDR, I do not believe any specific linguistic features were causative factors in the defeat of Herbert Hoover.

Franklin Roosevelt lived in an era that revolved around one form of media: the radio. Upon the election of FDR in 1932, roughly 40% of American households owned a radio. By 1940, ownership more than doubled to 83% with Americans listening to the radio, on average, 4 hours per day (Minnesota Public Radio, 2017). Quite clearly, the radio was the point of entry to the home of the everyday American. Therefore, the popularity of Roosevelt would inextricably rely on his ability to connect with Americans through this type of media.

Roosevelt was the first president to have an opportunity to regularly connect with the American public through mass media. Roosevelt thought the best strategy to connect with the American people was to figuratively sit down and join them in their own homes and thus, the Fireside Chat was born (Trester 2005). By using the first person plural pronouns, *us* and *we*, Roosevelt showed he and the American people fought for the same cause. Research shows that in the English language, first person plural pronouns create a sense of inclusivity, especially in political discourse (Scheibmen 2002). I believe FDR tried to evoke feelings of inclusivity deliberately to gain the favor of his constituency. Given the fact that FDR's presidency coincided with the increase in usage of the radio, it is only natural that FDR would use that type of media as best as he could. FDR became famous for his Fireside Chats and his down-to-earth rhetoric. In this research, I analyze his rhetoric, focusing on the use of first person plurals in his chats.

When analyzing the usage of the pronoun *we*, it is important to note the distinction between various ways of using it. There is the *we* that seeks to increase inclusivity (1) (Sieberman, 2002). In addition to that type of *we*, there is the *we* as a way to avoid speaking about themselves singularly and suggest that others were involved. This usage of *we* helps share negativity amongst a group.

- (1) "We have most certainly suffered losses from Hitler's U-boats in the Atlantic as well as from the Japanese in the Pacific and we shall suffer more of them before the turn of the tide. But, speaking for the United States of America, let me say once and for all to the people of the world: We Americans have been compelled to yield ground, but we will regain it." (Roosevelt 1942)
- (2) "We have increased our budget at a responsible 4 percent" (Bush 2001)

The use of the pronoun *we*, as seen in example (1), seeks to increase inclusivity between the speaker and the listeners. Additionally, this form of *we* signals that the orator and the receiver are on the same side, forming a more egalitarian relationship. Oftentimes, when a person's level of privilege and power rises, their world view becomes increasingly self-focused (Piff, 2013). As president, I believe Roosevelt deliberately avoided this sentiment which reflected itself in his pronoun usage. Roosevelt's utilization of the inclusive *we* helped to show viewers that their world view and his world view were one in the same.

Example (2) demonstrates the form of *we* that seeks to spread criticism. Example (2) demonstrates Bush attempting to spread any potential blame from a negative outcome of the 4% increase to the rest of the Bush administration as well. By using this type of

we, Bush essentially made himself less responsible for whatever effects a 4% budget increase may have had. Furthermore, he adds the adjective “responsible” to assure the American people that this budget was a good idea.

Before my analysis, I expected the first person plural pronouns usage to form a link between the American people and Roosevelt himself more often. In 45% of the cases (n=29) it was found that plural personals were used to reference the American people, but in the other 55% of cases, personal plurals were used to reference the government. However, it was found that the main factor that caused this differentiation was the context. It appears that when FDR spoke of subjects such as changes in policy or acts of war, he used first person plural pronouns to reference the government, as in example (3). When FDR spoke of subjects like the repercussions of war or the results of policy, the first person plural pronouns referenced the American people and made FDR their equal, as in example (4).

- (3) I am not satisfied either with the amount or the extent of the rise, and that it is definitely a part of our policy to increase the rise and to extend it to those products which have as yet felt no benefit. If we cannot do this one way we will do it another. Do it, we will.
- (4) We have established a firm foothold. We are now prepared to meet the inevitable counterattacks of the Germans—with power and with confidence. And we all pray that we will have far more, soon, than a firm foothold.

It makes sense that FDR wanted to ensure that any repercussion the American people would feel from policy or war, FDR would feel also. By doing this, FDR let the American people know that they were all in this together and that politicians and the proletariat existed on the same societal plane.

Media of Kennedy–Nixon

Flesch-Kincaid analysis

The Flesch-Kincaid analysis for the first of the televised Kennedy-Nixon debates showed Nixon speaking at a 10.2 grade level while Kennedy spoke at a 11.2 grade level. The viewer-listener disconnect makes the Flesch-Kincaid analysis for this section especially interesting. The viewer-listener disconnect, with respect to the Nixon-Kennedy debates, is the well documented fact that those who only listened to the debates thought Nixon won, while viewers thought Kennedy won. Due to this section emphasizing the effects of television on linguistic performativity, I will only focus on the Flesch-Kincaid analysis with respect to television.

Nixon spoke at a lower grade level than Kennedy, yet it was generally known that Nixon lost the debate, as we see in Henry Cabot Lodge’s reaction to the debate – “That son of a bitch just lost the election” (Kennedy – Nixon Debates, n.d.). Henry Cabot Lodge was Nixon’s vice-presidential pick, and his reaction in respect to the televised debate proves how much of a factor television was. Henry Cabot Lodge didn’t say that Nixon lost because he spoke too simply, but because of his appearance on television. However, articles on presidential speech and the Flesch-Kincaid analysis say simpler language resonates. Therefore, for other articles and researchers that attempt to make a correlation between simple speech and political success, we must look at things like the Kennedy-Nixon debate. Responses from people like Henry Cabot Lodge let us know how incredibly important media is, and that as linguists we must research and analyze multiple aspects of the linguistic repertoire and different modalities to determine characteristics of a successful speaker.

Kennedy–Nixon debate analysis

The year of 1960 brought with it an incredibly important case study about how appearance and gesture can influence politics in a substantial way. The very first televised debate occurred in 1960, between former Vice-President Richard Nixon and the young, one-term Senator, John F. Kennedy. The debates, the first of their kind, generated the largest political audience in history at the time of over 70 million viewers, or 60% of the adult population in the U.S. (J.F.K. Presidential Library, n.d.).

The effect The Great Debates of 1960 had on the perceptions of Kennedy and Nixon are undeniable. I argue that there is no such thing as a “neutral” medium of communication or exchange. Different mediums of communication put a demand on different aspects of the linguistic repertoire. The radio put a high demand on a pleasing voice and inclusivity, while completely disregarding gesture due to its absolute dependence on auditory cues. However, television brings in to play many different modalities, especially the visual modality. Appearance was very important, especially at the inaugural television debate. Nixon was pale and appeared ill-shaven since he was recovering from the flu and had spent time in the hospital due to a knee injury. Meanwhile, Kennedy was coming off campaigning in California and his appearance was tan and youthful (Kennedy – Nixon Debates, n.d.). The critiques of Nixon’s appearance of the first debate undoubtedly lead me to believe his appearance affected his performance. The mayor of Chicago exclaimed “My god, they’ve embalmed him before he even died!”, while Nixon’s mother called him after the first debate to see if he was still sick (Kennedy – Nixon Debates, n.d.). In Nixon’s 1968 presidential run, he even went as far as to refuse to participate in a televised debate, further demonstrating the impact the first televised debates had on politics.

I build off research done by Druckman (2002) that empirically proves the viewer-listener disconnect of The Great Debates. I look to determine how gesture manifested itself to create this disconnect, as well as how appearance played a role. I will focus on the appearance of each candidate, investigating key features from the first debate, like posture, engagement, and their clothing choices, respectively. I have chosen this type of analysis because, as proven by Druckman (2002), there was indeed a disconnect, but the specific traits that caused the disconnect were not determined. Beside empirically driven research, the impact the inaugural televised debates had on the election reflect themselves in the reactions of prominent politicians like Bob Dole: “I was listening to it on the radio coming into Lincoln, Kansas, and I thought Nixon was doing a great job, then I saw the TV clips the next morning, and he ... didn't look well. Kennedy was young and articulate and ... wiped him out”. Clearly, appearance matters.

The ill-fitting suit of Nixon



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

Nixon’s ill-fitting suit in Figure 3b was a popular icon of The Great Debates. One description of Nixon and his suit was “[Nixon was a] pale shadow of the aggressive and composed senator from Massachusetts” (Botelho, 2016). This negative portrayal of Nixon after the debate by the media would affect the perceptions of how Americans saw Nixon as well, if they hadn’t already

questioned his ill-fitting suit prior to hearing the media coverage. Research on media coverage affecting voter preference has been undertaken, the results being that negative coverage has an effect, driving down popular opinion of the candidate by lowering voters' assessments of candidates' professionalism (Hayes et al, 2014). In addition to the research that shows negative media coverage drives down popular opinion, I believe the ill-fitting suit to be one of the factors that caused the viewer-listener disconnect. For example, I think a viewer sees a poorly-put-together Nixon and draws a conclusion on his professionalism. The ill-fitting suit may have made Americans question if this is who they wanted representing America on the world stage. Additionally, if a presidential candidate fails at preparing for a debate, how would he perform if he were elected to office? I believe that many Americans may have asked these same questions. The combination of these doubts, the negative media coverage, and a record-breaking number of viewers ultimately created the viewer-listener disconnect proved by Druckman (2002).

Nixon's poor posture



Figure 4a



Figure 4b

Throughout the debate one can notice the stark contrast in body language between the two presidential hopefuls. We have Kennedy in Figure 4a standing up straight, tall, and with an expansive and open body. On the other is Nixon in Figure 4b, who consistently had one knee bent and not standing erect as seen in the picture above. I think Nixon's illness prior to the debate, as well as his injured knee contributed to his poor posture and inability to stand tall like his competitor (Kennedy-Nixon Debates, n.d.). Due to his lack of standing up straight and poor posture, he does not occupy as much gestural space as his opponent. Research from the Kellogg School of Management (2011) has found relationships between opening one's body, occupying as much gestural space as possible, and one's perceived level of power. The same research also argues that body posture is one of the most proximate correlates of the manifestations of power (Huang et al., 2011). Due to research regarding the viewer-listener disconnect as well as my own perceptions, I posit the 77 million Americans who watched this debate picked up on these subliminal power cues from posture while watching the debates. This perception of power would be one of many determining factors in the presidential election of 1960, a race that was won by John F. Kennedy by a mere one-tenth of a percent (Kennedy – Nixon Debates, n.d.).

Kennedy's hyper-engagement and Nixon's lack of



Figure 5a



Figure 5b



Figure 5c

My analysis of The Great Debates revealed some reoccurring themes. Throughout the debate, Nixon often looked down and away (Figure 5c) from Kennedy when he spoke. Oftentimes when Nixon was speaking, Kennedy gave his full-fledged attention (Figure 5a) as well as jotting down notes (Figure 5b); something Nixon was never recorded doing. Despite these differences, I must note that there were times when Nixon looked at Kennedy while he spoke, as well as Kennedy not looking at Nixon while he spoke. However, the rate of incidence for Nixon not looking at Kennedy is higher. I think that Kennedy's notetaking showed the American public he was an attentive, studious, and intelligent man. Even though Kennedy's notetaking scenes compose a miniscule portion of the debate, the action is a semiotic sign of intelligence and attentiveness to detail which would have been noticed by the American viewers. In contrast, Nixon often appeared bored and looking away, as well as never taking any type of notes. In the end, Kennedy portrayed features that were desirable in a president by the American voters; attentive, smart and respectful.

Twitter and the election of 2016

Flesch-Kincaid analysis

The Flesch-Kincaid statistics brought to light some interesting trends. Figure 1 shows the speaker who spoke at the lowest reading level was Hillary Clinton, averaging a grade 9.1 reading level. The speaker who spoke at the highest level was Franklin D. Roosevelt at 12.2. Since Roosevelt, the speakers in this study spoke at a lower level than their predecessors, as seen in Figure 1. Additionally, it surprised me that Donald Trump spoke at a slightly higher level than Hillary Clinton.

Figure 2	Trump Flesch-Kincaid Score	Clinton Flesch-Kincaid Score
Debate #1	6.04	8.42
Economics	10.38	9.55

Immigration/ Minorities	10.66	9.67
Jobs (Trump) / Foreign Policy (Clinton)	10.09	7.14

One of the more interesting pieces of data I discovered were the debate scores between Clinton and Trump. As noted in Figure 2, Clinton had significantly less variance than Trump, especially when considering the data from the first debate. Trump consistently spoke at a 10th grade reading level while Clinton tended to score in the 8th and 9th grade range. The low debate score can be explained by the fact that for both Clinton and Trump, all other speeches were prepared beforehand. Additionally, one could argue that Donald Trump’s lack of preparation relative to Hillary Clinton for the first debate influenced his unusually low score. (Healey, Chozick & Haberman, 2016). This score is significant because Gallup polls had 61% of people determining Clinton as the winner of the first debate in comparison to 27% for Trump, despite a higher Flesch-Kincaid score. Viser (2015) says that simpler language resonates, but fails to consider any other linguistic factors. Clinton’s 34% advantage in the first debate is the greatest margin of victory since the 1960s, and further proves that Flesch-Kincaid scores do not correlate with Viser’s (2015) statement that “simpler language resonates” (Flores, 2016). When analyzing successful politicians, we must consider every aspect that makes them successful.

Twitter analysis

The election cycle of 2016 showed America, and the world, the influence social media can have on politics. By late 2015, 1.59 billion people had Facebook with 1.4 billion logging in every month. In addition, Twitter had just over 300 million users. Despite Twitter having roughly a fifth of the users of Facebook, more people use Twitter for observing news outlets, following a political party, and consider it the more important news source of the two (Pew Research, 2016). In addition to the boom of social media, fewer than one-third of Americans trust traditional mass media (Gallup, 2016). Taking into consideration the all-time low trust that Americans have with traditional media, as well as the way Twitter can work as a news source, I believe Twitter is the niche offering for news in the 21st century. Thus, I analyze Twitter in this section. The intent of this analysis is not to prove a causation relationship between “winning” social media and winning elections, but to demonstrate how appropriate use of it in the 21st century has evolved into an essential political tool.

Hillary Clinton

Politics represents an example of an inherently gendered profession. Dr. Michele L. Swers, a renowned scholar on female and politics, notes that women are expected to possess the masculinized trait of leadership while simultaneously holding the feminine

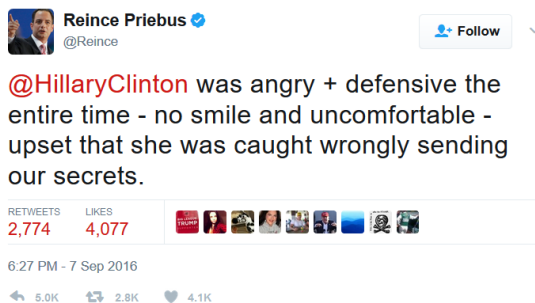


Figure 6a

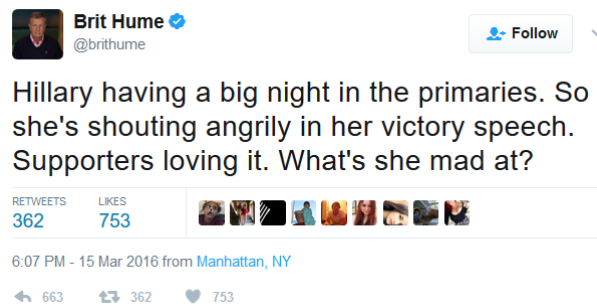


Figure 6b

personality traits that people assume they have (Kostreci, 2016). During her career, Clinton has experienced what social psychologists call the *backlash effect*. An extensive body of research has shown that women who seek leadership positions often encounter resistance from both men and women if they violate gender norms by acting in stereotypically masculine ways, like being competitive, assertive, and self-promotional (Bush, 2016).

Many ridiculed Clinton throughout her campaign for coming off as cold and uncharismatic as portrayed in a tweet by Reince Priebus and Brit Hume (Figure 6a, b). However, Clinton was in an interview talking about ISIS during Priebus’ tweet (Figure 6a). This explains the tough demeanor expected out of a politician that simultaneously defies the prescriptive gender role of women.

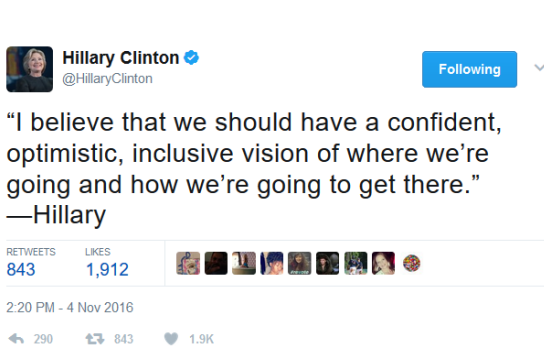


Figure 7a



Figure 7b



Figure 7c

That Hillary Clinton received ridicule for being angry and not showing a smile over an intense topic like international terrorism demonstrates well the *backlash effect* and the gendered nature of politics. In Figure 6b, Brit Hume is referring to a speech Clinton made after winning several state primaries. I argue that, in this example, we see Clinton deviating once again from the social script backed by research that expects women to appear nice, friendly, and nurturing. In this speech, I believe Hillary Clinton was excited and enthusiastic, as expected after a large primary victory. However due to being a female exhibiting inherently masculinized traits, she experienced the *backlash effect* (Figure 6b). Had Clinton been a male who was excited, unfriendly, or cold, I do not believe she would have received ridicule from Mr. Priebus nor Brit Hume. Thus, I conclude that when a woman like Clinton deviates from the social script that dictates behavior in the gendered world of politics, the *backlash effect* occurs.

Over social media, Clinton lacks personality when compared to Trump. Often, we see tweets like Figure 7a. These tweets do not show the brashness that we see in many of Trump’s tweets, such as Figure 7b. To further the point that Hillary was not as successful on social media as Trump, let us consider Figure 7c. This is the most popular tweet ever by Hillary Clinton. It is a direct challenge to Donald Trump, and creates a conflict that is absent in most of her tweets.

As Michelle Cornfield, an associate professor at Georgetown says, “conflict sells” (Graham, 2016). However, when considering a concept like conflict on social media, it brings back into question prescribed gender roles. If Clinton had been more confrontational on Twitter, would she have been more successful, or would she have deviated too far from the societal script for women and received backlash? In the defeat of Hillary Clinton, I believe multiple factors had a role. If Hillary had shown brasher and more confrontational tweets, like Trump, they would not have functioned the same as his due to her gender. Dr. Maryanne Cooper of the Claymore Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University argues that decades of social science research demonstrate the negative correlation between likeability and success for women. Psychological research even shows that women and men can be considered to have the same level of competence, yet receive different likeability scores that is negative toward women (Martin, 2006). I conclude that in politics as well as social media, this can have negative repercussions for women like Hillary Clinton. While all presidential candidates, like Clinton, have their shortcomings, I believe that gender played a role in her defeat both at the booths and over Twitter.

Donald Trump

As a political outsider turned 45th President of the United States of America, in 2016 Donald Trump challenged the notion that all media is good media. From raucous claims like Mexicans being rapist and criminals, to asking the audience “Who would vote for that face?” regarding female candidate Carly Fiorina, and not to mention #Trump as the 8th most popular hashtag in 2016, Trump has relished the lime light (Kottasova, 2016).

I believe the rise of platforms like Twitter, where one can follow a candidate and see exactly what that person is saying, is partially attributable to an increase in the distrust of traditional mass media. This public need for a direct line of communication between politician and voter led to the Fireside Chats of the 21st century, the Twitter of Donald Trump. By using Twitter, Trump spoke directly to his followers rather than traditional mass media relaying his words. Inarguably, Trump won social media in this election cycle. In 2016, Trump’s online interest was 3x higher than Clinton’s, according to a Google Trends analysis, while also having 4 million more Twitter followers. This led to him being the most googled and mentioned candidate in 2016 (Khan, 2016). This modern-day Fireside Chat demonstrates Trump’s transparency and off the cuff speaking style, two traits that I have found resonate with voters no matter the medium in which it is received.

Many of Trump’s speaking habits are well suited for social media. Trump has made a habit out of creating denigrating nicknames for his political opponents like Lyin’ Ted, Little Marco, Sweaty Jeb and Crooked Hillary (Figure 8a, b). Creating nicknames carries out two functions for Trump; entertainment and denigration (Hall et al., 2010). The denigration aspect of this naming

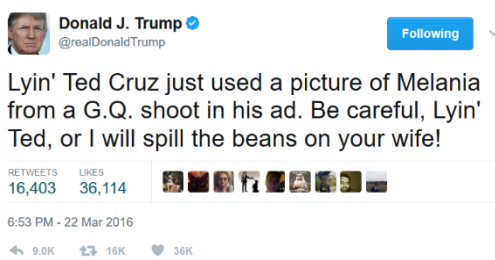


Figure 8a

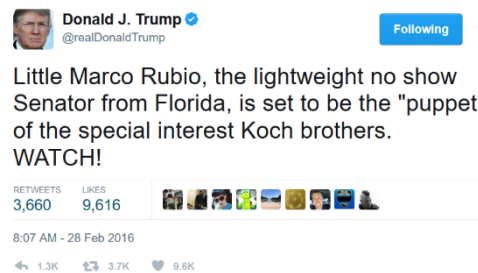


Figure 8b

system refers to the nicknames metonymic reduction of the individual. The entertainment aspect of it refers to Trump taking the role of the Rabelaisian clown, a simple man completely unaffiliated with the elite, yet mocks them to belittle their power (Hall et al., 2010). This type of naming system is easier and more suited for Twitter, where space is limited to 280 characters. Through metonymic reduction, Trump demonstrates his blunt and transparent personality, and his disaffiliation with the elite. This works

much better over social media than it does through traditional news channels. It is more difficult to succinctly describe to a news network why Ted Cruz is a liar, why Hillary is crooked, or why Marco is so little, than it is to send out a simple tweet. By turning people of power like governors and senators into nothing more than liars, sweaty men and little people, the giver of the nickname shifts the power complex into their favor. Furthermore, if Trump's metonymic reduction was covered by traditional broadcast media, only one-third would have trusted the news network relaying the feelings of Donald Trump about his competition. Like the Fireside Chats of FDR, Trump brought the American public into his life through the transparency of social media.

Another common feature of Trump's speech that functions well on social media is his *summary* at the end of many of his spoken sentences as well as tweets. As we saw previously in Figure 8b, and here in Figure 9a, we have a claim of the tweet followed at the end by an utterance that functions as a punchline for his message. This short utterance at the end of many of Trump's tweets, as well as his speech, is what I define as a *summary*. Donald Trump will spend minutes talking about NATO or NAFTA, criticize and ridicule it, and then concretely conclude "Bad deal, very bad deal". This *summary* in both his tweets and speeches serves the vital function of telling the consumer the meaning of the utterance, or what emotion is conveyed without having to pay attention to the entirety of the utterance. In a world where readers spend mere seconds looking at each tweet and attention spans have shrunk to eight seconds as determined by a media survey done by Microsoft, consumers of Trump's media can quickly get the ending and heart of the message (Egan, 2016). For example, in figure 9a the reader can see "total scam" at the end, know it's tweeted by Donald Trump, and then based off those two factors decide to go back and interact with the entire message. In the



Figure 9a

following example in a debate between Secretary Clinton and Donald Trump, the same type of phenomenon is utilized by Trump in his speech. We see a 51-word critique describing the poor effects of NAFTA, only to be succinctly summarized once again in 10 words at the end of the utterance.

- (5) "Your husband signed NAFTA, which was one of the worse things that ever happened to the manufacturing industry. You can go to New England, you can go to Ohio, Pennsylvania, you go anywhere you want Secretary Clinton and you will see devastation where manufacturing is down thirty, forty, even fifty percent. NAFTA is the worst trade deal maybe ever signed anywhere"

I believe this concise summary at the end of many of Donald Trump's utterances increase both his rate of engagement on social media and comprehensibility of his spoken word, as well as demonstrate clearly the main idea Donald Trump is trying to get across. This ease of being able to translate spoken word onto a social media platform ultimately gives Trump an edge. Trump's plain yet brash rhetoric and *summarization* works well on social media, the most important and increasingly popular medium of news consumption of this decade.

CONCLUSION

After an analysis of each of three historical settings, we are unable to draw conclusions on the success as a politician based off of the Flesh-Kincaid test. FDR, despite having the highest Flesch-Kincaid score of the subjects, had the highest overall favorability rate the of the group at 83% (American Presidency Project, n.d.). In respect to Nixon and Kennedy, we once again see a deviation from the notion that simpler language resonates. JFK's score of 11.2 is a full grade higher than Nixon's score of 10.2, yet JFK was the winner of the debate to those who saw it. Lastly, while Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton spoke at nearly the same level on average, the first debate of the 2016 presidential election cycle could prove an interesting source of future research since Clinton was reported to have won the debate by 34%, yet spoke at an 8.4 level to Trump's simpler 6.0. This data supports my argument that multiple factors, which are dependent on media, affect the performativity of a politician.

In respect to the effects of Twitter, it is reported that 73% of Americans received news via a mobile device in 2016 (Mitchell et al., 2016). That statistic, when paired with the fact that only one-third of Americans trust news coming from traditional mass media leads me to believe the most effective politicians of this decade, and the decades to come, will utilize social media most effectively (Gallup, 2016). Donald Trump's brash and confrontational speech is uncannily effective over Twitter, thus increasing his engagement and brought Americans into his life through the transparency of social media, the same way FDR brought American's into the White House through Fireside Chats.

FDR was known for his easy-to-follow speech that placed American's on the same level as their president. This feeling is important to convey because often Americans feel a disconnect between themselves and Washington bureaucrats (Peoples & Swanson 2016). With Roosevelt, we see an attempt to bridge that disconnect through the use of his plural personal pronouns that create a sense of inclusivity, especially in political discourse (Scheibmen 2002). Roosevelt's focus on the audio modality was deliberate as seen in the anecdote about the early days of his presidency. Members of the Treasury Department prepared a scholarly analysis regarding FDR's decision to close the nation's banks in 1933. Roosevelt promptly discarded this scholarly analysis and spoke about this subject in a way that was described as a "report to the people". Roosevelt claimed he wanted to talk to the farmers in the fields, the cashiers behind the counters and the workmen outside his window rather than read a scholarly paper to his people. The radio is a media form that depends on feelings rather than looks and Roosevelt knew it (Diamond 1977). Given that the radio is a form of media that depends on only one modality, speech, Roosevelt knew he had to use it wisely. This simple realization is crucial in understanding the importance for Roosevelt to play to the emotions of his constituency through the radio waves. Roosevelt brought America into the White House through his straight-forward speaking style and inclusive rhetoric, bridging the disconnect between the public and the bureaucrats, and increasing his political success.

In the 1960s, the television took over as The Great Debates between Nixon and Kennedy became the first presidential debate aired on television, and, due to their effect on the race, would be the last one until 1976 (Webley 2010). In the visual modality, an analysis of gesture proves vital, especially when considering the new mediatized political forum of television in 1960. We see the ill-fitting suit of Nixon, his inability to stand up straight consistently, and his wandering gaze as signs of unideal traits for a presidential candidate. The political world acknowledged the effects television had on politics afterward. Going into the polls on election day, more than half of all voters said The Great Debates influenced their vote with 6% saying their vote was a result of the debate alone (Allen 2010). The television, the new and popular media of the 1960s, ushered in a new political era. In a presidential race that was decided by less than a tenth of a percent, every vote counted, and failure to perform well in the visual modality for Nixon meant losing the presidency.

In each of the three settings, we see some common traits in each of the most successful candidates. Donald Trump, John F. Kennedy, and Franklin Roosevelt all effectively utilized the media of their time. While each subject had their personal advantages and disadvantages as a politician, my research shows that the most successful politicians utilize media in a way that is unique to them. From increasing inclusivity through personal plural pronoun usage over the radio, appearing presidential on television, and using Twitter to attract attention and gain an upper hand, the success of future politician will inevitably be tied to effective use of a linguistic repertoire unique to the media platform on which they are performing. In the future, I hypothesize the most successful politicians will likely employ a combination of the linguistic features that I found created political success in my research. This research has demonstrated the effects the media has on a politician's success, how media can be used effectively, and that a successful politician will inevitably use it to their advantage.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this work are related to the size of the corpus. The data I analyze is from a small corpus relative to the existing corpus of data that is available. There are hundreds of hours of speech recordings, thousands of tweets, and more footage I could have analyzed, but due to time and content limitations I was unable. An analysis of greater depth into any of the election cycles I analyzed would provide firmer conclusions for that respective media and time. A linguistic analysis of additional politicians could also bring to light more linguistic traits and help reaffirm conclusions that I drew within my own work with respect to the link between political success and effective use of the media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the South Dakota State University Department of Modern Languages and Global Studies, and specifically Professor Jeremy Rud for his guidance and encouragement throughout the creation of this work. I want to underscore, though, that this work is entirely mine, especially its flaws and shortcomings.

APPENDIX

Donald Trump:

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qvp1EaMdCXc>
 - a. 0:45 – 33:00
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK2bLUa8e_g
 - a. 23:00 – 28:00
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkjGcP54OX4>
 - a. 8 :00 – 44 :00
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEHPrYUcoi0&t=1891s>
 - a. 43 :15 – 54 :00

Hillary Clinton :

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEHPrYUcoi0&t=1891s>
 - a. 43 :15 – 54 :00
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVYuIRA90i4>
 - a. 0 :30 – 46 :30
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoB-gOZY5OM&t=632s>
 - a. 0 :30 – 14 :00
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_wkSGLVpcE
 - a. 15 :00 – 25 :00

Richard Nixon :

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdVHFESjTsE&t=1700s>
 - a. 10 :00 – 28 :45
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyq5bz_MWvA
 - a. 9 :05 – 36 :15

John F. Kennedy :

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdVHFESjTsE&t=1700s>
 - a. 17 :00 – 29 :40

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyq5bz_MWvA
 - a. 7 :00 – 35 :00

Franklin D. Roosevelt

1. Fireside Chat #2 - <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14636>
 - a. Analysis of entire chat
2. Fireside Chat #15 - <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15959>
 - a. Analysis of entire chat

REFERENCES

- Austin, E.G. "Talking down to America." *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 27 Jan. 2012. Web. 03 May 2017.
- Bernhard, Meg. "The reading grade level of top convention speeches, ranked. - The Boston Globe." *BostonGlobe.com*. N.p., 29 July 2016. Web. 03 May 2017.
- Botelho, G. (2016, March 14). The day politics and TV changed forever. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/29/politics/jfk-nixon-debate/index.html>
- Bush, D. The hidden sexism that could sway the election. (n.d.). Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/features/hidden-sexism/>
- Cox, A. (n.d.). *Linguistic Qualities of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Public Addresses: A Primary Source Based Study* [Scholarly project].
- Debate. (n.d.). Retrieved May 03, 2017, from https://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/wyuvgyRSYk6Spsfi_SF1g.aspx
- Diamond, E. (1977, March 20). President Carter On the Airwaves Echoes of F.D.R. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1977/03/20/archives/president-carter-on-the-airwaves-echoes-of-fdr-carter-on-the-air.html>
- Dowis, R. (2000). *The lost art of the great speech: how to write, how to deliver it*. New York: AMACOM.
- Druckman, J. (2003). The Power of Television Images: The First Kennedy-Nixon Debate Revisited. *The Journal of Politics*, 65(2), 559-571. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1111/1468-2508.t01-1-00015>
- Egan, T. (2016, January 22). Opinion | The Eight-Second Attention Span. Retrieved May 07, 2017, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/22/opinion/the-eight-second-attention-span.html>
- Eskanazi, Maxine, and Elliott Schumacher. "A Readability Analysis of Campaign Speeches from the 2016 US Presidential Campaign." *Language Technologies Institute* (2016): n. pag. Web.
- Flores, R. (2016, September 30). Gallup: Clinton beats Trump in first debate by a large margin. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/poll-hillary-clinton-beats-donald-trump-in-first-debate-by-a-large-margin/>
- Gallup, I. (2016, September 14). Americans' Trust in Mass Media Sinks to New Low. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/195542/americans-trust-mass-media-sinks-new-low.aspx>
- Gottfried, J., Barthel, M., Shearer, E., & Mitchell, A. (2016, February 04). The 2016 Presidential Campaign – a News Event That's Hard to Miss. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.journalism.org/2016/02/04/the-2016-presidential-campaign-a-news-event-thats-hard-to-miss/>
- Graham, J. (2016, August 12). Trump vs. Clinton: how the rivals rank on Twitter, Facebook, more. Retrieved May 04, 2017, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/08/04/trump-clinton-social-media-twitter-facobook-youtube-snapchat/87974630/>
- Hall, K., Goldstein, D. M., & Ingram, M. B. (2016). The hands of Donald Trump: Entertainment, gesture, spectacle. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6(2), 71-100. doi:10.14318/hau6.2.009
- Harrington, R. (2016, September 20). 'Well you don't talk about ISIS with a big grin on your face': Hillary Clinton riffs on Republicans telling her to smile more. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.businessinsider.com/hillary-clinton-smile-jimmy-fallon-2016-9>
- Hayes, D., Lawless, J. L. and Baitinger, G. (2014), Who Cares What They Wear? Media, Gender, and the Influence of Candidate Appearance. *Social Science Quarterly*, 95: 1194–1212. doi:10.1111/ssqu.12113
- Healy, Patrick, Amy Chozick, and Maggie Haberman. "Debate Prep? Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump Differ on That, Too." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 23 Sept. 2016. Web. 03 May 2017.

- History.com Staff. (2010). The Kennedy-Nixon Debates. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/kennedy-nixon-debates>
- Kennedy-Nixon debates. (n.d.). Retrieved May 07, 2017, from https://www.maryferrell.org/pages/Kennedy-Nixon_Debates.html
- Khan, C. L. (2016, November 15). Trump won thanks to social media. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/technology/306175-trump-won-thanks-to-social-media>
- Kincaid, Peter J. , Robert P. Fishburne, Richard L. Rogers, and Brad S. Chissom. "Derivation of New Readability Formulas (Automated Readability Index, Fod Count, and Flesch Reading Ease Formula) for Navy Enlisted Personnel." *Naval Technical Training Command* (n.d.): n. pag. Web.
- Kostreci, K. (2016, October 18). Gender Bias Affects Woman Candidate in the 2016 Race. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.voanews.com/a/gender-bias-affects-woman-candidate-in-2016-race/3555785.html>
- Li Huang, Adam D. Galinsky, Deborah H Gruenfeld, Lucia E. Guillory,(2010) Powerful Postures versus Powerful Roles
- Ostermeier, Eric, S. "Keeping It Simple: Obama Records 2nd Lowest Flesch-Kincaid SOTU Grade Level Score Since FDR." *Smart Politics*. N.p., 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 03 May 2017.
- Peoples, Steve & Swanson, Emily, Associated Press. (2016, May 30). AP poll: Voters feel disconnected, helpless in 2016. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/ap-poll-voters-feel-disconnected-helpless-in-2016/>
- Piff, P. K. (2014). Wealth and the Inflated Self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 40(1), 34-43. doi:10.1177/0146167213501699
- Rocca, Joseph. "Words." *Online Word Counting Tool | Count Wordsworth*. N.p., n.d. Web. 03 May 2017.
- Rosenberg, A., & Hirschberg, J. (2009). Charisma perception from text and speech. *Speech Communication*, 51(7), 640-655. doi:10.1016/j.specom.2008.11.001
- Schieberman, J. (2002). Inclusive and Exclusive Patterning of the English First Person Plural: Evidence from Conversation. *Language, Culture and Mind*.
- Smith, S. (2014, November 10). Radio: The Internet of the 1930s . Retrieved May 04, 2017, from <http://www.americanradioworks.org/segments/radio-the-internet-of-the-1930s/>
- Stand tall, get ahead. (n.d.). Retrieved May 03, 2017, from http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/news_articles/2011/powerful-posture.aspx
- Trester, A. M. (2005). Do You Speak Presidential? Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/speak/seatosea/standardamerican/presidential/>
- Viser, Matt. "For presidential hopefuls, simpler language resonates - The Boston Globe." *BostonGlobe.com*. The Boston Globe, 20 Oct. 2015. Web. 03 May 2017.
- Webley, K. (2010, September 23). How the Nixon-Kennedy Debate Changed the World. Retrieved May 03, 2017, from <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2021078,00.html>