Rhetorical Styles in Internet-Mediated Political Discourse Concerning Polish Gender Parity Debate 2009/2010

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1. Introduction

It is almost a truism to say that the development of the media technology has influenced the ways in which politics is being performed and presented nowadays, which is very much in tune with Marshall McLuhan's predictive formula "the medium is the message" (1964: 7). Another fact is that most of us have access to various mass-mediated representations of political activities and decisions that shape our lives: some in the form of reports or opinion articles in local press bulletins, some in current affairs or news programs on national TV, or some in online political blogs. Indeed, the growing research into the processes of the so-called "medialization of politics" has shed light on the main ways political rhetoric has been changing in response to advances in the media. The availability of 24/7 political coverage via a range of media brought us such (widely studied) phenomena as the increasing personalization and conversationalization of political discourse in broadcast news (cf. Fairclough 1995, 2000; Montgomery 2007), confrontation in political interviews (Tannen 1999), dramatization (sensationalization) in documentaries (Nichols 2001), or trivialization in talk shows (Thornborrow 2002). Media analysts and critics have also attempted to trace the mechanisms in which changing technological, journalistic and ideological practices have been shaping political decision-making, including election outcomes, as well as larger social processes in modern free-market democracies (for an overview in Polish see e.g. Goban-Klas 2006).

The purpose of this article is to identify and characterize the predominant rhetorical styles, understood as clusters of linguistic devices used strategically for persuasive purposes, in a sample of Internet-mediated political discourse devoted to the gender parity debate that intensified in Poland at the turn of 2009 and 2010. The public debate was heated by media-magnified attention to the arguments and activities of both proponents and opponents of the citizen-initiated proposal of reform in the Polish election ordinance that would ensure equal numbers of male and female candidates standing for election in the Polish Parliament, as well as other administrative and oversight bodies. The corpus of linguistic material under analysis consists of online materials (e.g. articles, brochures, instructions, open letters, press releases) publicized at the end of 2009 and the beginning of 2010 by the main sponsor of the initiative, Kongres Kobiet (The Congress of Women), at their website www.kongreskobiet.pl (approximately 2080 words) and a matching sample of comparable materials posted by a less formal but still authoritative anti-parity initiative group, which have been made available on their website called, perhaps slightly misleadingly, www.parytety.pl (approximately 1930 words).

Out of many forms of Internet-mediated communication, the material subject to analysis in the present paper can best be classified as *hypertext*, and can be characterized by such properties as (1) the transmission of a "conceptually written" message; (2) the multimodal potential of meaning-making (with typographic, framing, colour and visual elements complementing the message); (3) monologic, rather than dialogic, direction of communication, (4) "one to many" communicative partners, (5) a high degree of intended persistence/accessibility, and (6) as an asynchronous form of interaction (cf. Gruber 2008: 56-58). It has also been noted by media analysts that *hypertextual* information/propaganda campaigns are nowadays a main tool of public communication for low-budget non-governmental organizations, whose activity is often narrowly focused on a specific political or social issue (Dobek-Ostrowska 2007: 239). Such Internet-mediated campaigning, unlike for example television or radio advertising, apart from being less costly, is also targeted at a specific segment of the population or electorate, rather than at mass audiences. That is why the linguistic and textual features of the publicized materials tend to be adjusted to the needs of the projected receivers, which in this case are educated and politically involved Polish women. At the same time, such materials are rhetorically designed in such a way as not to alienate other potential receivers and disseminators (e.g. males). Although this type of targeted online political discourse has not been widely studied yet, it is an emerging medium that merits closer stylistic analysis due to its rhetorical specificity and persuasive potential.

2. Discursive practices and rhetorical styles

Political discourse, as a specific object of research, is currently being studied within a variety of academic disciplines: from qualitatively oriented sociology and political science, through traditional philological and rhetorical studies, to a recently popular interdisciplinary field of critical discourse studies. As mentioned above, media and communication studies have considerably contributed to the development of theoretical and methodological frameworks for the study of political discourse (cf. Curran and Seaton 2003; Stokes 2003). These were often inspired by the works of such philosophers as Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas or Theodor Adorno, who took institutional political communication as the centerpiece of their critical social theories.

The notion of *discursive practice*, which allows adopting a more dynamic approach to political discourse, has been instrumental to functionally oriented linguistic research, including stylistics, which often aims to connect strictly textual analysis with wider, extra-linguistic, socio-cognitive, cultural and institutional contexts of language use. In like manner, in this paper, politics is treated as a *set of practices* shared by a society, or a social group. Most of these practices, though not all (cf. Billig 1995; Wodak 2009), are discursive in nature, as they include specific conventionalized uses of language (e.g. in legal documents, parliamentary debates, political conventions, etc). Cumulatively, such practices (and their products, i.e. texts) belong to one discursive formation, to use Foucault's term, and are commonly referred to as political discourse. Mass-mediated political discourse, which is the subject of the present paper, is collaboratively produced by the interactions between practices belonging to two discursive formations: politics and the media (cf. Fetzer and Lauerbach 2007: 20). Interestingly, some of the practices typical of mass-mediated political discourse tend to reflect community- or culture-specific patterns (cf. Anderson 1984), while others may well be undergoing a process of globalization (as is the case of the spread of EU's technocratic discourse or the 'Americanization' of some media genres).

Within communication studies, semiotics, pragmatics and discourse studies, the notion of discursive practice has been variously labeled and described. Discursive practices have been conceptualized for example in terms of activity types (cf. Levinson 1979), voices, genres and modes (cf. Bakhtin 1986), communicative styles (cf. Selting 1999), or rhetorical styles (Fairclough 1995, 2000). Not surprisingly, some of these notions are still contested and notoriously difficult to operationalize for larger comparative analyses. However, as political discourse tends to be strategic and goal-oriented, which is reflected in the purposeful choice of linguistic options in

political texts, it is the notion of *rhetorical style* that best encapsulates its specificity and thus will be focused upon in this study. It is not to say that a rhetorical style is a precise analytical tool that can be easily applied as *tertium comparationis* in an analysis of political discourse. As Selting observes, "styles [are constructed] as dynamic, flexible and alter(n)able linguistic structures" (1999: 2), which represent "meaningful choices made in order to achieve particular effects or to suggest particular interpretations" (1999: 1).

What is more, as noted for example by Norman Fairclough, "a rhetorical style is not an invariable way of using language, it is rather a mixture of different ways of using language, a distinctive repertoire" (2000: 96). Yet, those "mixtures" of linguistic devices are not at all combined out of random and incidental elements, since many stylistic features (e.g. registers or semantic macrostructures) are constrained by institutional contexts and prescribed by the texts' generic requirements. Also, the linguistic resources selected in political texts that adopt specific rhetorical styles must be strategically chosen in order to achieve specific effects in targeted receivers. To summarize, rhetorical styles will be emergent rather than normative properties of political discourse, will be instantiated in particular political texts, and will be to some extent determined by their institutional/media contexts (e.g. an official website of a political organization), their generic types (e.g. an open letter), and their communicational purposes (e.g. persuasion).

3. Critical analysis of rhetorical styles

The scope and methodology of research in political discourse analysis in varied. For example, according to Chilton and Schaeffner (2002), a political discourse analyst needs to refer to salient pragmatic, semantic and syntactic features of discursive practice, of which a text is a verbal product. Van Dijk (1998) advocates paying attention to local and global semantic structures that encapsulate ideologies, especially to these structures which are involved in self-presentation and other-presentation. Charteris-Black (2004) recognizes the pervasiveness of certain conceptual metaphors and other rhetorical figures that are characteristic of political expression. Likewise, in an analysis of rhetorical styles, the methodological approach will have to be multidimensional rather than focused on a single property, object or level of language. That is why the term *linguistic device* is used in this paper, as it allows including diverse aspects of language use into stylistic analysis: from terms of address and speech acts to recurring lexical and phraseological

patterns, from recurring argumentative schemata to specific syntactic choices as regards for example predication, modality or cohesion.

Also, according to Fairclough (1989, 2000), political discourse analysis, including its mass-mediated inflections, should be critical rather than only descriptive in its nature. However, the word *critical* in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a prominent branch of discourse studies, does not imply condemnation or ridiculing of certain conventions of mass-mediated political discourse, but an interrogation of its "naturalized" semantic categories and linguistic patterns. According to CDA practitioners, recurrent uses of certain discursive practices cause that certain representations become privileged, as they begin to be treated as natural and commonsensical, while in fact they are culturally and ideologically constructed. For example, in a typical mass-mediated representation of industrial disputes in the British press, it is the workers' unions that usually "threaten with strike" and "demand pay-rises" (which connotes a certain degree of aggressiveness), while managers and owners commonly "negotiate compromises" and "agree to some demands" (cf. Curran and Seaton 2003, first ed. 1980). What if the media represented the managers and owners "as demanding that the workers settle for the minimum wage" and "threatening with lay-offs," while the unionists as "negotiating solutions" and "agreeing to return to work under certain conditions"? The stereotypical representation of workers' activities as mainly destructive and hostile and managers' attitudes as conciliatory would not probably be so naturalized.

This process of naturalization of certain representations in discourse is often linked to the notion of hegemony: a representation that is congenial to the interests of the dominant social group becomes universalized as being in the interests of the whole society. Criticism thus consists in the de-naturalization of the linguistic patterns and de-mystification of hidden agendas in mediated texts. Other classical examples of critical studies that expose discursive practices that naturalize social hegemony, apart from James Curran and Jean Seaton's studies of the representation of the working class (2003), include Teun van Dijk's extensive studies of "institutionalized racism" in the presentation of immigration (1993, 1998), or Judith Butler's (1990) observations of discursive performance of gender and "female identity".

4. The rhetoric of Internet-mediated gender parity debate in Poland

The aim of this study is to identify the emergent rhetorical styles – understood here as clusters of linguistic devices used strategically for persuasive purposes – in Internet-mediated political discourse devoted to the issue of Polish gender parity

initiative, basing on a representative sample of textual material (see Introduction for details). As the material consists of two approximately equal samples of texts: one representing the views of the proponents, the other – of the opponents of the gender parity initiative, it seems adequate to assume that the rhetorical style of the first sample will reflect its communicative aim to promote and popularize the issue, while that of the second to criticize and discredit the initiative. It thus seems reasonable to presume that, although both samples will share orientation towards persuasion and will be saturated with rhetorical devices, they will also differ in the choice and frequency of some stylistic features. For the sake of clarity of the subsequent survey, the following identification abbreviations will be used: KK – Kongres Kobiet (the Congress of Women) – to denote gender parity proponents, and AP – Antyparytety (anti-parity) – to denote gender parity opponents.

4.1. Generic frames

Both sides of the debate can be claimed to attempt to frame the reading of the posted materials by the way their texts are entitled and structured by genre. For example, KK's home page announcement "Gender parity project ready for legislation" harks back to the typical frame of a *press release* headline, which leads one to assume that the announcement is more likely to be an objective report on the legislative project rather than a propagating text. Indeed, the style of the whole announcement closely resembles the style adopted in many journalistic reports that tend to focus on facts (i.e. who did what, when, where and how), name and quote sources, and apparently refrain from commentary. And yet, the only voices represented in the article are those of the representatives of KK and all the facts selected for the report are characteristically favorable to the gender parity initiative, e.g.: "The gender parity project has met with interest on the part of both politicians and leaders of the Church. It has an unwavering support of Polish President Lech Kaczyński and the leader of SLD party Grzegorz Napieralski" (para. 6). To reinforce the impression of independence of this 'report,' KK is consistently referred to in the third person, e.g.: "KK predicts…," "KK has initiated…," or "KK tries to convince…". In fact, the generic frame of the press release works here as a rhetorical device to diminish the propagandistic flair of the announcement and to increase the perception of objectivity and honesty of the presentation of the pro-parity arguments.

Another generic frame used by KK is that of an *instruction brochure* or *manual*, as is the case with the text entitled "Why do we need gender parity and how to defend it?". Apart from explaining the idea behind KK's gender parity initiative, this text educates prospective agitators how to respond to common criticisms. The text is built

around a "they say… vs. we say…" dialogic interchange (printed in different fonts and separated by empty verses), which classical rhetoric recognizes as a stage in argumentative exposition called *refutatio*: the refutation of prospective opponents' counter-arguments. The refutations tend to be concise and logically constructed, but not devoid of evaluations, e.g.: "**They tell you**: *Why do women need power, they are better than men any way?* This sentimental formula is a sign of hypocrisy, which uses an insincere compliment to mask contempt for and neglect of women" (para. 9).

In yet another generic frame, KK's text "What's it like in other countries?", despite its relatively informally phrased title, stylistically approximates the conventions of an *academic report.* Here, pieces of specific information, such as precise dates, figures, numbers and statistical data pertaining to female representation in politics in some carefully selected European countries are included to illustrate the advantages of gender parity. With its attention to detail, relatively formal register and instances of legal jargon (e.g.: "municipal elections", "public sector", "quota regulations"), the text appears to be simply describing the current political *status quo* in Europe, rather than to be promoting a political initiative. Indeed, the application of stylistic features characteristic of scientific discourse in promotional materials has been an effective and commonly used rhetorical strategy.

By contrast to KK, AP's texts explicitly indicate which generic frames they conform to stylistically and rhetorically. For example, AP's main page features the text entitled "Anti-parity decalogue", which, not surprisingly, is a list of ten elaborated points – injunctions against the gender parity initiative. This generic frame, which clearly alludes to the *Ten Biblical Commandments*, carries the overtones of moral authority typical of religious discourse and appropriates its style to the political context, e.g.: "Say NO when someone, in the name of egalitarianism, tries to make the gender difference the main principle of the social system" (para. 7). The characteristic features of preaching style, such as eloquent parables, rhetoric-saturated phraseology and emphatic syntax, reinforce the potential impression of validity, imminence and righteousness of AP's arguments against the gender parity initiative.

In the *open letter* entitled "We do not want gender parity", AP publicizes the views of a group of female academics, journalists and entrepreneurs who are strongly against the parity legislation (*NB* names, titles and professions/positions of the underwriters of the letter have been excluded from the corpus). The letter's authors rally against the gender parity initiative by resorting to constitutional, historical and cultural arguments, statistical data, as well as personal opinions and sheer speculations to show how this project will most likely worsen the situation of Polish

women rather than improve it, e.g.: "Instead of spending budget money on yet another institution researching and assessing the situation of women, let us pressure the government for more real pro-family solutions" (para. 17). They also criticize KK for claiming to speak on behalf of all Polish women, e.g.: "We suggest that the Congress of Women should take into consideration the opinions of women who think differently and that it should not try to cure or re-educate them (that is, us)" (para. 22). On the whole, this text's genre-derived persuasive effect is predicated on the authoritativeness of the undersigned elite women and their apparent thoughtful consideration of pros and (most of all) cons the project.

In conclusion, it can be observed that the two samples employ a range of generic frames, from KK's press release, instruction brochure and academic report to AP's "decalogue" and open letter. As shown above, these generic frames will, in turn, determine the salient properties of rhetorical styles emerging across the studied texts: from KK's rhetoric of apparent objectivity, scientific evidentiality or educational instructiveness (which is in fact agitation), to AP's morality and religion-based discursive strategizing and authority-based persuasion. In summary, it seems adequate to point out, however, that the rhetorical style emerging in KK corpus seems to be shaped primarily on linguistic devices of *logos* and *ethos*, while the rhetorical style of AP texts relies mainly on *pathos*.

4.2. Addressing the reader

All texts, and particularly persuasive ones, bear linguistic markers that project the image of the intended/model reader. The way a text constructs its target audience can be traced at all levels of textual composition, from minute lexical choices to the overall stylistic conventions of the text. This, according to Michael Halliday (1985), is how particular texts naturally instantiate the ever-present interpersonal metafunction inherent in verbal communication, but also how their authors can increase the persuasive potential of their texts by aligning their means of expression with the needs and expectations of the prospective recipients (which is an important aspect of political rhetoric). In the research material used in the present study, two texts could be classified as primarily *subject-oriented* (i.e. KK's "Gender parity project ready for legislation" and "What's it like in other countries?"), as their aim is to present the issue of gender parity as a pertinent political project, one text (AP's "We do not want gender parity") can be claimed to be primarily *sender-oriented*, since it is devoted to the views of a group of elite female professionals who represent an anti-parity position, and two texts (KK's "Why do we need gender parity and how to defend it?" and AP's "Anti-parity decalogue") can be categorized as specifically

reader-oriented, and thus will be of special interests to us as far as linguistic devices of addressing the reader are concerned.

In the last two abovementioned texts, the intended reader is primarily constructed linguistically as a woman. This is evident in the use of feminine nouns and pronouns (e.g.: "A statistical Pole has 1.3 children. Even if **she** chooses to devote a few years to being a **mother** – and that's **her** decision – **she** still has a few decades left for other activities". KK, para. 11, emphasis mine), as well as inflectional verbal endings indicative of feminine gender of the (often deleted) subject, in accordance with the requirements of the grammatical system of the Polish language (e.g.: "There will always be someone who could say that without parity you **would not reach** [Polish: nie osiągnęłabyś] your position" (AP, para. 6, emphasis mine). However, what is even more striking in these two texts is the fact that the (female) reader is very often addressed directly, either by the use of "you" included in the line of argumentation (e.g.: "**They tell you**: *Gender parity is an artificial measure, which will not function well.* This is not true: quotas have been functioning in politics for a long time". KK, para. 7; "**You** can object when someone forces **you** to forget about the cultural heritage of **your** nation in the name of modernity". AP, para. 8, emphasis mine), or by the frequent resort to the unmitigated imperatives, as the way of argumentative exposition, e.g.: "Say NO to the idea that only women can represent women" (AP, para. 5); "Do NOT allow for easy imitation of other countries' solutions" (AP, para. 8); "Consider other possibilities" (AP, para. 9); "Do NOT let others tell you that you are breaking female solidarity" (AP, para. 10, all emphases in original). It can be claimed that such forms of address increase the degree of personalization in the communicative encounter. This helps position each prospective reader as an active and politically involved person, who is made personally responsible for promoting/defeating the parity initiative. In the long run, such recurring direct appeal to the readers' individual motivations and actions may result in entrenching their feelings of affiliation with a particular political position.

What is interesting, reader-oriented argumentation in both the texts that propagate and the ones that aim to disqualify the parity initiative is enhanced by similarly frequent references to the same values and ideals. These values are often expressed via abstract nouns that encapsulate positive qualities and are strongly postulated to be prioritized in Polish political and social life, such as "justice," "competence," "equality," or "solidarity". Notwithstanding this apparent stylistic similarity, it becomes evident, particularly in such a comparative analysis as ours, that KK and AP implicitly conceptualize these qualities in different ways. For example, while the former understand "social justice" as equal political representation of both sexes, the

latter see it as anyone's unrestricted opportunity to engage in politics, no matter which sex they are. Moreover, it can be noted that some values invoked in AP texts, particularly in its "decalogue," border on the semantic field of moral rather than political emancipation. Nevertheless, the reader, when confronted with such ambiguous "glittering generalities" (words denoting culturally cherished ideals), is likely to react positively to the value-laden argumentation, without considering if he/she accepts the particular definition favored by the propagandists. All in all, who would not agree that "equality" or "justice" are worth fighting for?

As regards other stylistic choices that are used to engage the reader both cognitively and emotionally, it is worth mentioning that in all studied texts the choice of register, and particularly lexis, is typical of fairly cultivated argumentation. Despite being emotional and evaluative at times, the texts do not stretch the boundaries of political correctness and are not in any way vulgar or extremist. Arguably, this strategy is aimed at not alienating the undecided readers who might happen to be visiting the websites, as well as not offending the general male audience with overt accusations of complicity in sexist discrimination women in Poland have been experiencing for years. All these stylistic choices, together with a penchant for positively valued, yet ambiguous lexical items, repetitive argumentative schemata, and clearly laid-out (e.g. dialogic) exposition are designed to appeal to a potentially wide readership and to position the receivers as prospective (and active) sympathizers of whichever political stance. Consequently, in terms of the linguistic devices used for addressing the reader, both samples' emergent rhetorical styles display a high degree of similarity.

4.3. Rhetorical figures

As is the case with many texts instantiating mass-mediated political discourse, the material in the present study exemplifies a high degree of saturation with various rhetorical figures, of which only the most pervasive will be presented below.

First of all, there are numerous examples of *repetition* of various lexical and syntactic elements. The constant recurrence of such keywords as "parity," "discrimination," or "equality" helps focus readers' attention in these mostly lengthy texts and allows for the so-called step-by-step argumentation, which has been proved to be most effective in the case of undecided or uninterested voters (cf. Tokarz 2007: 88), since in the Internet-mediated communication the aim is to reach various recipients and not to "preach to the converted". Also, as illustrated above, repetition is evident at the level of text composition (cf. KK's refutation of counter-arguments, AP's "Decalogue"), as well as at the level of individual sentences, e.g.: KK: "The

more women in politics, the less rivalry, ambition and quarrel" (para. 8), AP: "You are entitled to object; you are entitled to clear promotion criteria..." (para. 2). In such cases, the ensuing syntactic parallelisms intensify the persuasive effect: they neatly encapsulate the key arguments and they are likely to be better remembered.

Another classic rhetorical device is that of *antithesis* – also a common propagandistic trick to simplify the issue and represent the debate in terms of "black" and "white" alternatives only. For example, in AP's "decalogue" the gender parity initiative is portrayed as a triumph of "quantity" over "quality," "parity" over "competence," "collectivity" over "individuality," and "ideology" over "reality" (para. 1-3). Meanwhile, KK's argumentation in "Why do we need gender parity and how to defend it?" is often based by juxtaposing the disadvantages of the male-dominated political government with the one in which women would take a more active role, thanks to gender parity (e.g.: "[Were there more women in the Parliament] money would not go to Euro 2012, but to social programs". para. 3; "The current system discriminates women by denying equality. Quotas, by contrast, are an effective tool of introducing equality". para. 4; "Women always used to be the objects of political decision-making, now they should be the subjects." para. 12).

Lists and enumerations tend to reinforce the persuasive effect by creating the impression of the existence of magnitude of examples that testify to the validity of the argument. KK's article "What's it like in other countries?" employs this device to list the countries that have already introduced some legal form of facilitating the access of women to politics. Lists also appear in individual paragraphs and sentences, e.g.: AP: "One's career must not depend on one's sex, age, looks, connections, family relations or affluence. What counts is only skills, education, experience and talent". (para. 2). Indeed, the fact that AP's "decalogue" reads so elaborated is mainly due to the authors' penchant for frequent listings.

To colour their argumentation the authors do not shy away from asking rhetorical questions, e.g.: AP in "We don't want parity!" questions the initiative in the following way: "Is parity based on the assumption that there are equal numbers of men and women everywhere? Parity means that in some places women will have to be included and is some other places they will have to be excluded without concern for their competence, experience and legacy. What for?" (para. 5). Eloquence tends to be added to argumentative exposition by applying word puns, proverbs, punch lines, slogans and exclamatory clauses, all of which can be located in the research material. Such devices imbue the argumentation with wit and humor and ensure both emotional and cognitive engagement of the reader. In their rhetorical styles both KK and AP texts display a high density of rhetorical figures, still it is AP that relies on

them more heavily, as its texts are mainly oriented towards discrediting the opponents by arising doubt and anxiety around the gender parity initiative. KK, after all, must also inform the readers about the details of the initiative and present the main reasons why it should be embraced.

5. Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to describe the stylistic features of Internet-mediated political discourse, basing on two samples of hypertextual materials authored by organizations promoting (Kongres Kobiet – the Congres of Women) and criticizing (Antyparytety – Antiparity) the Polish gender parity initiative of 2009/2010. Firstly, the notion of rhetorical style has been introduced in the context of political discourse analysis. Accordingly, rhetorical styles are understood here broadly as emergent properties of texts characterized by clusters of linguistic devices used strategically for persuasive purposes. Next, the methodological framework for the ensuing stylistic analysis has been delineated and the "critical" angle of the present study has been elucidated. In the course of analysis of the two samples of texts representing antagonistic positions in the gender parity debate, it has been demonstrated that there are more similarities than differences between their rhetorical styles. By focusing on the interrogation of such categories as generic frames, strategies of addressing the reader and pervasive rhetorical figures, it has been shown that both styles exemplify a high degree of saturation with persuasion-oriented linguistic devices. This makes both analyzed styles to some extent manipulative, since they tend to efface rational argumentation for the sake of appeals to emotions and employ some classic propagandistic tricks (e.g. glittering generalities, stereotyping, simplification or testimonial). Yet, it seems that the opponents of the gender parity initiative (AP) rely on such devices more heavily, as their texts are mainly oriented towards discrediting the project by arising readers' doubt and anxiety. The proponents (KK), after all, must also inform the readers about the details of their initiative and present sound reasons why it should be embraced. That is why the rhetorical style emerging in AP corpus seems to be shaped primarily by linguistic devices of *pathos*, while the rhetorical style of KK's texts relies on *logos* and *ethos*.

In the larger perspective, it is worth observing that the growing indispensability of the Internet makes online communication, particularly hypertextual campaigning, an ever more relevant field of study. Investigating the forms, genres and styles emerging in Internet-mediated propaganda allows us to examine how political communicators accommodate the new media for their ideological and persuasive

needs. Thus, identifying, describing and critiquing the rhetorical styles that emerge in Internet-mediated communication seems as a pertinent task for linguists as well as discourse and media analysts interested in fostering critical media and computer literacy.

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The aim of this study is to describe the stylistic features of Internet-mediated political discourse, basing on two samples of hypertextual materials authored by organizations promoting (Kongres Kobiet – the Congres of Women, abbr. KK) and criticizing (Antyparytety – Antiparity, abbr. AP) the Polish gender parity initiative of 2009/2010. Firstly, the notion of rhetorical style is introduced in the context of political discourse analysis. Accordingly, rhetorical styles are understood here broadly as emergent properties of texts characterized by clusters of linguistic devices used strategically for persuasive purposes. Next, the methodological framework for the ensuing stylistic analysis is delineated and the "critical" angle of the present study is elucidated. In the course of analysis of two samples of texts (KK – approx. 2080 words; AP – approx 1930 words) representing antagonistic positions in the gender parity debate, it is demonstrated that there are more similarities than differences between their rhetorical styles. By focusing on the interrogation of such categories as generic frames, strategies of addressing the reader and pervasive rhetorical figures, it has been shown that both styles exemplify a high degree of saturation with persuasion-oriented linguistic devices. This makes both analyzed styles to some extent manipulative, since they tend to efface rational argumentation for the sake of appeals to emotions and employ some classic propagandistic tricks (e.g. glittering generalities, stereotyping, simplification or testimonials). Yet, it seems that the opponents of the gender parity initiative (AP) rely on such devices more heavily, as their texts are mainly oriented towards discrediting the project by arising readers' doubt and anxiety. The proponents (KK), after all, must also inform the readers about the details of their initiative and present sound reasons why it should be embraced. That is why the rhetorical

style emerging in AP corpus seems to be shaped primarily by linguistic devices of *pathos*, while the rhetorical style of KK's texts relies on *logos* and *ethos*.

Keywords: *rhetorical style, political discourse, critical discourse analysis, gender parity, Internet-mediated communication.*