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2 **Linguistic prescription, ideological structure, and the actuation**
3 **of linguistic changes: Grammatical gender in French**
4 **parliamentary debates**

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11 **ABSTRACT**

12 We present a quantitative study of the linguistic and social factors condition-
13 ing the use of grammatical gender with reference to women, focusing on vari-
14 ation in the debates of the French parliament. Two prime ministers of similar
15 political leanings regulated the use of feminine g-gender through identical
16 policies in 1986 and 1998, with no effect on parliamentary speech in the
17 first instance, and dramatic success in the second. We claim that the latter
18 outcome resulted from changes in gender ideologies between these two
19 dates. The 1990s saw the emergence of a new social type for female politi-
20 cians, which only feminine g-gender can construct. We hypothesize that
21 the 1998 policy was effective because it strengthened existing associations
22 between feminine g-gender and a persona, while the original policy tried
23 to build on ideological structure that was not widespread. We conclude that
24 linguistic prescriptions are only successful if they build on existing ideolo-
25 gies. (Linguistic prescription, gender ideology, grammatical gender, ideolog-
26 ical structure)*
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29 **INTRODUCTION**
30

31 This article investigates the role that social changes and speaker ideologies play in
32 French grammatical gender assignment and the conditions under which language
33 policies can contribute to the actuation and progression of linguistic changes.

34 French possesses a grammatical gender system, which means that French
35 grammar sorts all nouns into classes that determine patterns of agreement with
36 other linguistic expressions (Hockett 1958; Corbett 1991). For example, the noun
37 *lune* ‘moon’ has feminine grammatical gender (henceforth *g-gender*) since, when
38 it appears in a noun phrase such as (1a), it co-occurs with the feminine form of
39 the article *la* and the feminine form of the adjective *belle*. The noun *soleil* ‘sun’,
40 by contrast, has masculine g-gender, as shown by the fact that it must appear
41 with the masculine forms of article and adjective (1b).
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- 44 (1) a. **la belle** lune ‘the beautiful moon’
 45 b. **le beau** soleil ‘the beautiful sun’

46 French animate nouns display a complex relationship between g-gender and inter-
 47 pretation,¹ particularly with respect to the mapping between masculine/feminine
 48 g-gender and male/female social gender (henceforth *s-gender*). With some nouns,
 49 there appears to be no relation between grammatical and social gender. For
 50 example, the noun *personne* ‘person’ has only feminine g-gender and applies nat-
 51 urally to both men and women, as shown in (2).
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- 53 (2) a. la personne qui est partie en premier
 54 ‘the (male or female) person who left first’
 55 b. *le personne qui est parti en premier
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57 Such a pattern is, however, exceptional. With many human nouns, masculine
 58 g-gender aligns with male s-gender, and feminine g-gender aligns with female
 59 s-gender. We find this pattern both when masculine and feminine nouns are distin-
 60 guished by their endings (e.g. *patient/patiente* in (3)), and when a single noun form
 61 appears in both masculine and feminine agreement configurations in (4), which
 62 Corbett (1991) calls the *common gender* pattern.²
 63

64 (3) Different noun form

- 65 a. le patient ‘the male patient’
 66 b. la patiente ‘the female patient’
 67

68 (4) Common gender

- 69 a. un locataire ‘a male tenant’
 70 b. une locataire ‘a female tenant’
 71

72 The main focus of this article is an even larger class of nouns that exemplify yet a
 73 third g-gender/s-gender mapping relation: the *noms de métier et de fonction* ‘pro-
 74 fessional nouns’. As shown in (5) and (6), a noun phrase with masculine grammat-
 75 ical gender, such as *le président* or *le ministre*, can be used to pick out either men or
 76 women; however, a noun phrase with feminine g-gender, such as *la présidente/la*
 77 *ministre*, exclusively picks out women.
 78

79 (5) Different noun form

- 80 a. le président ‘the (male or female) president’
 81 b. la présidente ‘the female president’
 82

83 (6) Common gender

- 84 a. le ministre ‘the (male or female) minister’
 85 b. la ministre ‘the female minister’
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This article provides a quantitative study of the use of these *noms de métier et de fonction*, and we study the evolution of the use of feminine vs. masculine g-gender in expressions referring to women in the transcripts of the *Assemblée nationale* (the French House of Representatives). These transcripts feature a large amount of intra-speaker variation in g-gender, and an example of such variation is found in (7): On January 29, 1997, socialist deputy Jean-Marc Ayrault uses the masculine g-gender to address a female minister in (7a), and on December 19 of that year, he uses the feminine in (7b).

(7) Madame **le/la** ministre ‘Madam Minister’

- a. M. JEAN-MARC AYRAULT: Madame **le** ministre de l’environnement, plus de 6 000 personnes ont défilé, samedi dernier, dans les rues de Nantes, pour protester contre l’autorisation donnée par le Gouvernement à EDF de remblayer la zone humide du Carnet dans l’estuaire de la Loire. (29/01/1997)
- b. M. JEAN-MARC AYRAULT: Monsieur le président, madame **la** ministre, mes chers collègues, tout à l’heure, le président Bayrou me reprochait d’avoir dit que nous étions venus pour voter le projet de loi de finances. (19/12/1997)

The use of grammatical gender in expressions referring to women has been the subject of enormous amounts of prescription and language planning in France and in the *Assemblée nationale* itself (see Houdebine 1987; Houdebine-Gravaud 1998; Burr 2003; Viennot 2014; among others), and these actions can be naturally divided into two main waves of activism at the end of the twentieth century. The first started around 1984, when Yvette Roudy, France’s first women’s rights minister, headed a commission aimed at feminizing the *noms de métier et de fonction*. Two years later, the commission recommends the use of feminine grammatical gender (eg. *la ministre*) and, in some cases, nouns with feminine endings (eg. *la présidente*). Then, on March 11, 1986, the Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius legislated the use of the language recommended by the commission in official documents.

In order to see what effect this policy had on speech in the *Assemblée nationale*, we constituted a corpus of the transcripts of the debates, focusing on the period from 1982–2017.³ From this corpus we automatically extracted all female terms of address, that is, strings of the form *Madame le/la N*. This resulted in a full dataset containing 99,480 tokens. We focused on terms of address because the conditions on the use of the title (*Madame/Monsieur*) make it easy to automatically identify female referents of grammatically masculine expressions. In particular, although it is possible to use masculine g-gender to address a female minister, as shown in (8b), the social gender of the referent must nevertheless be linguistically reflected in the female title *Madame*. In other words, titles in French track s-gender in a way that g-gender does not, and this makes terms of address particularly useful for corpus studies on g-gender alternations.

130 (8) a. To M. STRAUSS-KAHN: **Monsieur** le ministre, vous avez tort.

131 b. To MME. ROYAL: **Madame** le ministre, vous avez tort.

132 ‘Mr./Madam minister, you are wrong.’

133
134 In the general case, it is not so easy to identify female referents from grammatical
135 properties of the noun phrase. As shown in (9), a masculine noun phrase can have
136 either a female or male referent, so the context of each utterance must be examined
137 by hand in order to determine whether the referent is male or female, and it is not
138 feasible to do this with the 723,915 tokens of *ministre* in the corpus or any of the
139 other nouns of interest. We therefore leave extending this investigation to argument
140 noun phrases and pronouns to future work.

142 (9) ABOUT M. STRAUSS-KAHN/MME. ROYAL: Le ministre a tort ‘The minister is wrong.’

143
144 **Figure 1** shows the proportion of the use of feminine vs. masculine grammatical
145 gender in female terms of address (*Madame le/la N*) in the *Assemblée nationale*
146 from 1983 to 2005. Consistent with reports based on qualitative observations
147 (Houdebine 1987; Brick & Wilks 1994), this figure shows that use of the feminine
148 form is extremely limited throughout the 1980s, and that Fabius’ language policy in
149 1986 had little to no effect on the speech of politicians.

150 However, twelve years later, on March 6, 1998, the Socialist Prime Minister
151 Lionel Jospin issued a statement (a *circulaire*) recalling to the government that
152 they are supposed to be using feminine gender and (if appropriate) feminized
153 forms. He acknowledged that the Fabius’ policy was never obeyed/enforced and
154 commissioned a new study from the *Commission générale de terminologie et néo-*
155 *logie*, which was published in June 1999 and ended up making very similar recom-
156 mendations as the one in 1984–1985 (Becquer, Cerquiglini, Cholewka, Coutier,
157 Frécher, & Mathieu 1999). **Figure 1** shows that, after this second wave of activism,
158 the results are very different with use of the feminine form rising dramatically in
159 1997–1998, around the time of Jospin’s statement.

160 The contrast between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s is striking and raises the
161 following question: What changed from 1986 to 1998 that allowed the feminine
162 form to take over, possibly aided by (the exact same) language policy?

163 Our main claim in this article is that changes in the use of feminine grammatical
164 gender and differences in the effectiveness of Fabius/Jospin’s language policy are
165 (indirectly) the result of changes in *gender ideologies* in France between the mid
166 1980s and mid 1990s. In particular, we argue that the mid 1990s saw the emergence
167 of a new social type or *persona* (Zhang 2005; Podesva 2007; Eckert 2008; among
168 others) for female politicians, which only feminine g-gender can construct. We
169 hypothesize that Jospin’s reinforcement of Fabius’ policy in 1998 was successful
170 because it strengthened an existing association between feminine g-gender and a
171 female political persona; whereas, Fabius’ original policy was unsuccessful
172 because it tried to build on ideological structure that was not shared by a large

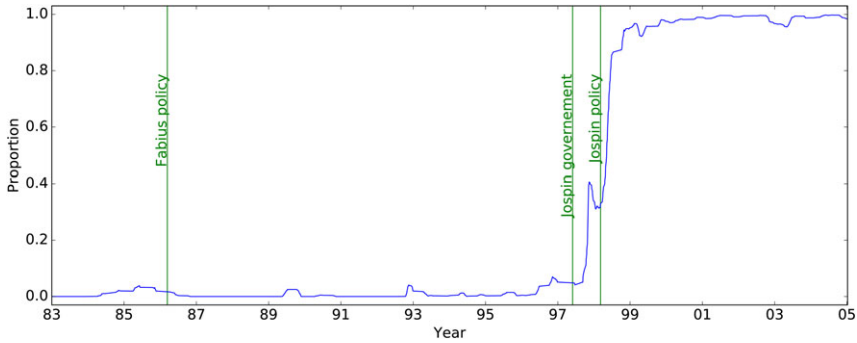


FIGURE 1. Proportion of uses of *Madame la N* vs. *Madame le N* (1983–2005).

portion of the *Assemblée nationale*. Our case study thus suggests that linguistic prescriptions will only be successful if they build on existing ideologies in the speech community and highlights the role that meta-linguistic and other discourses can play in the actuation and spread of linguistic change.

The article is laid out as follows. We first go deeper into the *Assemblée nationale* dataset and investigate which linguistic and social factors condition the rise of the feminine in the late 1990s. We then argue that the linguistic change just documented coincides with an important social change: the emergence of a new stereotypically feminine persona for female politicians. Following research in French political history and social science, we describe the discursive construction of this new persona in the context of the *parité* debate on the equal representation of women and men in elected office. This leads us to argue that the relationship between feminine g-gender and the new persona is mediated by the social meaning of grammatical gender marking in French. Following remarks by McConnell-Ginet (2013), we propose that the *social meaning* of French feminine g-gender marking makes it optimal for constructing the emerging stereotypically feminine persona, and thus we argue that the replacement of the masculine g-gender by feminine g-gender in the *Assemblée nationale* is a consequence of the social meaning of g-gender marking and changes in the way speakers in the *Assemblée nationale* conceptualize their fellow female politicians. Finally, we conclude with a general discussion of the role that social structure and speaker ideologies play in linguistic change.

VARIATION AND CHANGE IN THE ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE

Based on Figure 1, we know that the change happened around 1996–1999; however, to properly understand its dynamics, we need to get a more fine-grained look at the linguistic and social factors that condition the changing use of

216 *Madame le/la N*. In order to restrict our attention to the time period where there is
 217 variation for statistical analysis, we took the proportion of feminine uses on all of
 218 the occurrences thirty days before and thirty days after each session. Tracking the
 219 change through a sixty-one-day window is necessary because each session of the
 220 *Assemblée nationale* features few (if any) occurrences of a female term of
 221 address, so, with such small numbers, looking at the proportion of feminine vs.
 222 masculine g-gender on each day is not enlightening.

223 Using this methodology, Figure 2 shows the rise of feminine g-gender in the
 224 eleventh legislature. Limiting the quantitative study to the eleventh legislature
 225 allows us to study change within a single community of practice, since the member-
 226 ship of the *Assemblée* remains constant throughout this time period. Based on
 227 the observation of the pattern shown in Figure 2, we focus our quantitative study
 228 on the period between September 15, 1997 (after the summer break) to July 7,
 229 1998 (the end of the spring session).

230 Within the period identified in Figure 2, we have 5,056 occurrences of female
 231 terms of address: 2,149 feminine (*Madame la N*) and 2,807 masculine (*Madame*
 232 *le N*), that is, an overall rate of use of the feminine of 43%. We then coded these
 233 occurrences for the linguistic and social factors described below.

234 *Linguistic factors*

235 The main linguistic conditioning factor investigated in this article is the identity of
 236 the function noun. In the introduction, we saw that *ministre* ‘minister’ was one of
 237 the function nouns that participate in the g-gender alternation. The other nouns in
 238 our corpus that alternate are *président(e)*, *secrétaire d’État*, *député(e)*, *garde des*
 239 *sceaux*, and *rapporteur/rapporteuse*.⁴

242 (10) *Président(e)* ‘president’

- 243 a. M. THIERRY MARIANI: **Madame le président**, nous devons en principe dis-
 244 poser de cinq minutes après l’annonce du scrutin. Je n’ai pas eu le temps
 245 de regagner l’hémicycle! (23/10/1996)
 246 b. M. THIERRY MARIANI: **Madame la présidente de la commission**, qu’en sera-
 247 t-il des catégories de délinquants étrangers qui ont de gros problèmes de
 248 santé, etc.? (16/12/1997)

250 (11) *Secrétaire d’État* ‘secretary of state’

- 251 a. M. GILBERT MEYER: **Madame le secrétaire d’État aux petites entreprises**,
 252 au commerce et à l’artisanat, depuis le 1er janvier 1997... (3/03/1998)
 253 b. M. GILBERT MEYER: **Madame la secrétaire d’État aux petites et moyennes**
 254 **entreprises**, au commerce et à l’artisanat, la loi relative au développement et
 255 à la promotion du commerce et de l’artisanat... (7/10/1997)

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Fig. 2 - Colour online, Colour in print

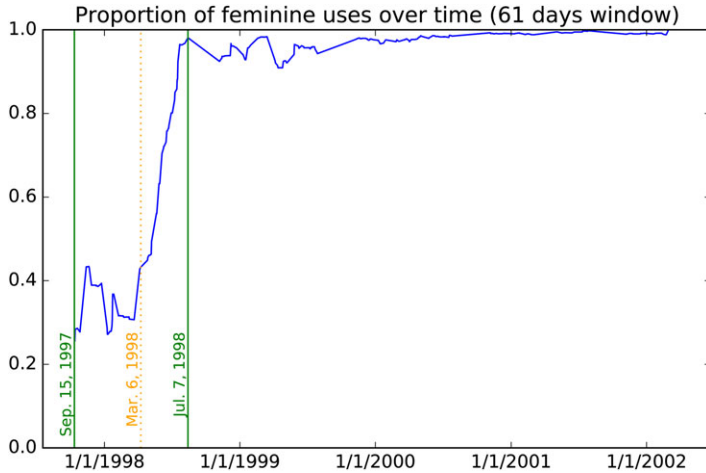


FIGURE 2. Replacement of masculine by feminine g-gender in the eleventh legislature.

(12) Député (e) ‘deputy’

- a. M. JEAN-CLAUDE GAYSSOT: **Madame le député**, si j’ai bien compris, mon prédécesseur vous avait fait des promesses d’engagement au printemps dernier. (24/10/1997)
- b. M. JEAN-CLAUDE GAYSSOT: **Madame la députée**, comme vous le savez, le schéma directeur national des liaisons ferroviaires à grande vitesse, approuvé par décret en 1992, a prévu, pour la desserte de l’ouest de la France, la réalisation du TGV Bretagne... (24/10/1997)

(13) Garde des sceaux ‘justice minister’

- a. M. GÉRARD GOUZES: **Madame le garde des sceaux**, alors que nous débattons du budget de la justice pour 1998, tout le monde commente le retard accumulé année après année... (21/10/1997)
- b. M. GÉRARD GOUZES: **Madame la garde des sceaux**, combien de temps nous faudra-t-il encore pour définir de manière simple, de manière transparente, de manière cohérente, la place de chacun des acteurs de l’acte judiciaire dans notre vieux pays?... (02/06/1998)

(14) Rapporteur/rapporteuse ‘reporter’

- a. M. PIERRE MAZEAUD: **Madame le rapporteur**, terminez, je vous en prie!... (29/10/1997)
- b. M. YVES COCHET: Vous gênez M. Cacheux, **madame la rapporteuse**. (02/06/1998)

The distribution of feminine g-gender by function noun is displayed in Table 1, and shows that the proportion of feminines is not uniform across nouns (see also

TABLE 1. *Distribution of grammatical gender by function noun.*

NOUN	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Député (e)	147	51	198	0.74
Président(e)	138	59	197	0.70
Secrétaire d'État	170	154	324	0.52
Ministre	1576	2028	3604	0.44
Garde des sceaux	118	483	601	0.20
Rapporteur/euse	1	31	32	0.03

Fujimura 2005 for similar observations in a press corpus): the highest rates of *la* are found with *député(e)* and *président(e)*, and the lowest rate is found with *garde des sceaux*. Since there is only a single use of *rapporteuse* in (14b), we excluded this noun from the statistical analysis.

We note that the observed function noun hierarchy corresponds to the hierarchy of governmental power and prestige, so it is possible that associations between the masculine form and institutional power play a role in creating the distribution in Table 1. However, this is not the only possible interpretation. Linguistic properties of the nouns, and in particular whether they have formally distinct masculine and feminine forms, might also play a role. Finally, speaker status may also have an effect. Note that speakers in the parliamentary debates are either deputies or ministers, and that these two groups mostly address each other. Hence most occurrences of *ministre* are uttered by a *député(e)*, and vice versa. Thus it may be the case that the observed lexical differences are in part due to deputies and ministers having different usage preferences.⁵ Be that as it may, the number of distinct function nouns in the corpus does not allow us to go beyond speculation as to the causes of lexical differences. We therefore leave further exploration of the source of lexical effects in g-gender alternations to future research involving a more lexically diverse corpus.

Social factors

Given that we are studying the speech of politicians, it is natural to wonder whether speakers belonging to different political parties will show different patterns of use. Indeed, as shown in Table 2, there is a large difference in the use of the feminine between the more left wing parties—including the Socialists (PS), the Communists (PCF) and the Greens (*Les Verts*)—who use the feminine around 64% of the time, and the right wing parties—*Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) and *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR)—who use the feminine in only 30% of the cases.

In order to ensure that we have enough data for the statistical analysis, we focus only on the larger political parties, presented in boldface in Table 2.

TABLE 2. *Distribution of grammatical gender by speaker political party.*

SPECTRUM	PARTY	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Left	PCF	272	180	452	0.60
	PS	955	528	1483	0.64
	Les Verts	73	20	93	0.78
	PRS	56	49	105	0.53
	Total	1356	777	2133	0.64
Right	UDF	357	843	1200	0.33
	RPR	436	1187	1623	0.27
	Total	793	2030	2823	0.28

We also investigated whether the political party of the addressee made a difference to whether they are referred to using the masculine or the feminine. The results are shown in Table 3. The corpus that we are using has a particular structure to it: while individuals across the political spectrum ask questions and make points during the debates, the individuals that are addressed are overwhelmingly members of the cabinet, which at the time was held by the left and headed by the Socialist party. Thus, 88% of the terms of address are directed to a socialist woman, so there is actually very little variation in this factor in our corpus. We therefore do not include it in the statistical analysis, and note that almost the same statistical results are found if we restrict the dataset to only socialist addressees.

Since we are studying the use and interpretation of grammatical gender, it is also natural to wonder whether there is some relation between the social gender of the speakers and their use of the feminine in our corpus. In the eleventh legislature, ten out of thirty-five members of the cabinet (*le gouvernement*) are female (29%), and sixty-three out of 577 deputies of the *Assemblée nationale* are female (10.9%).⁶ Furthermore, in our subcorpus, forty-nine out of 393 speakers are women (12.5%).

As shown in Table 4, female politicians use slightly more feminine forms than male politicians in our corpus. However, since the proportion of female politicians is higher on the left, multivariate statistical analysis is required to disentangle the influence of speaker gender and political affiliation.

INTERPRETING THE TRANSCRIPTS

Before we see the statistical results, we briefly outline the conditions under which the transcripts of the debates were produced. Before a reorganization that occurred in 2008, the *compte rendu intégral* ‘full transcript’ was the official, edited record of what was said in the *Assemblée nationale*.⁷ It was produced by professional stenographers who recorded the speech in real time and with the help of audio recordings.

TABLE 3. *Distribution of grammatical gender by addressee political party.*

SPECTRUM	PARTY	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Left	PCF	118	94	212	0.56
	PS	1753	2607	4360	0.4
	Les Verts	255	86	341	0.75
	Total	2126	2787	4913	0.43
Right	UDF	12	12	24	0.5
	RPR	11	6	17	0.65
	Total	33	18	51	0.62

TABLE 4. *Distribution of grammatical gender by speaker social gender (Four major political parties).*

SPEAKER GENDER	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Female	425	365	790	0.54
Male	1595	2342	3937	0.40

Thus, the question of the reliability of the transcription process arises. Since 2005, videos of the debates are archived in addition to the transcripts. However, none of the unofficial recordings made by the transcribers in the 1990s were archived. Fortunately, the television station FR3 recorded a sizeable subset of our dataset, the *Questions au Gouvernement* ‘questions to the cabinet’, and it was possible to consult this subset at the *Institut National de l’Audiovisuel*. We checked all the occurrences of *Madame le/la N* in forty-eight recordings of the *Questions au Gouvernement* spread out across the time period that we are studying. We found that the rate of reliability was 85% (266/314), with divergences between the video and the text being limited to the very beginning of the time period (where feminine occurrences in the video were transcribed as masculine in the transcripts) and the very end of the period (where masculine occurrences in the video were transcribed as feminine).⁸ Given this test, we are generally confident in the reliability of our data, even though it may be possible that the actual change was slightly less abrupt than the transcripts would suggest.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The patterns just described suggest that g-gender variation in the eleventh legislature may be subject to both linguistic and social conditioning factors; however, in order to properly assess their importance, we built generalized linear mixed effects models in R using the lme4 package (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, & Walker 2015), with SPEAKER IDENTITY (393 speakers) as a random effect and the following fixed effects: SESSION DATE (before/after March 6, 1998), speaker POLITICAL PARTY (PCF, PS, UDF, RPR), speaker SOCIAL GENDER (F, M), speaker AGE (based on birth date

before/after 1941) and FUNCTION NOUN (*président(e), député(e), ministre, secrétaire d'État, garde des sceaux*).

The results of the statistical analysis are shown in Table 5. We find a significant effect of date, which is unsurprising given that change is very clearly in progress in 1997–1998. We also find a significant lexical effect of the function noun, with *président(e)* and *ministre* not being significantly different from *député(e)*, but *garde des Sceaux* and *secrétaire d'État* appearing in the masculine significantly more. As discussed above, it is not clear what to make of this pattern, so we leave open whether or not it is generated by meaning/ideological considerations (as we argue the other patterns are) or whether more grammatical factors are at play.

With respect to the social factors, we found that speaker age was significant, with speakers born in the 1920s and 1930s (those of Yvette Roudy's generation) using more masculine than younger speakers. Political party was also significant, with the Socialists behaving like the Communists, and the two right wing parties (*UDF* and *RPR*) differing significantly; however, we found no effect of speaker social gender. This suggests that women's slightly higher rate of use of the feminine shown in Table 3 is actually the result of left wing parties having more female members than right wing parties, rather than female politicians marking aspects of their gender class through language.

The fact that political party emerged as significant in the statistical analysis also shows that grammatical gender bears SOCIAL MEANING, at least in our dataset. In other words, from these results, we know that there must be at least some extra little bit of information that is communicated through the use of the feminine vs. the masculine that makes speakers on the leftmost part of the political spectrum more likely to use it. A natural first hypothesis might be that, in the late 1990s, politicians in the *Assemblée nationale* are using grammatical gender in female terms of address to MARK their political affiliation: *la* would mark membership in a left wing party and *le* would mark membership in a right wing party. However, we argue that this simple hypothesis cannot account for the linguistic behaviour of the women of the most right wing party: RPR. As shown in Table 6, there are five RPR women who speak in our corpus. Four of them (Nicole Catala, Michèle Alliot-Marie, Françoise de Panafieu, and Marie-Jo Zimmermann) behave like their male colleagues, strongly favouring the masculine; however, one (Roselyne Bachelot) has a rate of 81% and is one of the highest users of the feminine in the corpus.

We now would like to know: What distinguishes Bachelot from her female right wing colleagues? We propose that the answer to this question lies in a study of changing gender ideologies in late twentieth-century France.

PARITÉ AND CHANGING FRENCH GENDER IDEOLOGIES

The extreme user of the feminine described above, Roselyne Bachelot, was a long time member of the *Assemblée nationale* (1988–2012) and, during this time, she

TABLE 5. *Fixed effects of the generalized linear mixed model. Dependent variable: probability of masculine grammatical gender. Levels of independent variables in the intercept: Speaker gender—F; Party—PCF; Noun—député(e).*

	Estimate	Std. error	z value	Pr(> z)
(Intercept)	-1.3842	0.5076	-2.727	0.00639***
Session date	-2.5056	0.1360	-18.426	<2e-16***
Garde des sceaux	2.6095	0.3397	7.682	1.57e-14***
Ministre	0.4408	0.2990	1.474	0.14039
Président(e)	0.4632	0.3748	1.236	0.21652
Secrétaire d'État	0.9413	0.3448	2.729	0.00634**
PS	0.4097	0.3583	1.144	0.25282
RPR	2.3899	0.3915	6.104	1.03e-09***
UDF	2.1741	0.3887	5.594	2.22e-08***
Speaker gender (M)	0.4163	0.2903	1.434	0.15158
Speaker birth date	-0.4447	0.2075	-2.144	0.03206*

TABLE 6. *Grammatical gender use by the women of the Rassemblement pour la République.*

SPEAKER	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Roselyne Bachelot	105	24	129	0.81
Nicole Catala	4	111	115	0.03
Michèle Alliot-Marie	2	8	10	0.2
Françoise de Panafieu	0	1	1	0
Marie-Jo Zimmermann	0	1	1	0

held a number of important right wing party and governmental functions, including three ministerial portfolios (ecology, health, and solidarity) during the Chirac and Sarkozy presidencies. So it is extremely unlikely that she would be using feminine grammatical gender to indicate some disaffiliation with her political party. This being said, Bachelot does differ from many of her RPR colleagues in that she is one of the most prominent supporters of the *parité* political movement. Indeed, at the time of the change studied in this article (1995–1998) she was head of the *Observatoire sur la parité entre les hommes et les femmes* ‘Center for *parité* between men and women’, and she supervised the report *La parité dans la vie publique* ‘*Parité* in public life’, a study of the situation of women in politics, published in December 1996.

The parité movement

Used in this context, the French word *parité* refers to both a philosophical position (Gaspard, Servan-Schreiber, & Le Gall 1992) and a political movement aimed at ensuring that men and women have equal access to electoral mandates and

517 elected office. It was a very successful political movement in the late 1990s, and its
 518 success continues in the twenty-first century. Its earliest legislative successes date to
 519 around the time of the linguistic change described above. For example, on June 19,
 520 1997 (at the very beginning of the change) Prime Minister Jospin announces his
 521 intention to amend the constitution and pass a law making *parité* a goal for the gov-
 522 ernment. As shown above, most of the members of the *Assemblée nationale* shift
 523 from using *Madame le N* to *Madame la N* directly after: from Fall 1997 to
 524 Summer 1998. Then, on June 17, 1998, the first draft of the bill to amend the con-
 525 stitution to include the statement *La loi favorise l'égal accès des femmes et hommes*
 526 *aux mandats et fonctions* 'The law promotes equal access to mandates and functions
 527 by women and men' is formulated, and on July 8, 1999, Jospin's constitutional
 528 amendment passes. The first *parité* law passes on June 6, 2000, and, during the
 529 years 2000–2014, many other pro-*parité* laws are passed aimed at enforcing
 530 equal representation in both government and educational institutions. Since the
 531 rise of the *parité* sociopolitical movement coincides with the rise of the use of fem-
 532 inine g-gender in the *Assemblée nationale*, we conclude that it is highly likely some
 533 aspect of support for *parité* played a role in the actuation of the change.

534 A second argument that the rise of the feminine is related to the *parité* movement
 535 comes from the way in which support for this movement propagated through the
 536 *Assemblée nationale*. As documented in (Bereni 2007:ch. 6), prior to 1995, pro-
 537 *parité* positions were almost exclusively held publicly by politicians on the
 538 radical left: the Greens, the Communists and the *Mouvement des citoyens* party
 539 (Bereni 2007:343). However, in 1996–1997, support grew within the Socialist
 540 party, largely as part of a democratic renewal project headed by Lionel Jospin.
 541 By contrast, with the exception of Bachelot, who Bereni (2007:374) calls the
 542 *avocate esseulée de la parité au RPR* 'RPR's solitary *parité* advocate', right
 543 wing deputies were largely hostile to the proposal of a constitutional amendment
 544 in favour of gender-balanced electoral representation in this period. However, the
 545 year 1997–1998 saw a major increase in support for *parité* across the body of the
 546 *Assemblée nationale*. An important turning point for the right was on March 23,
 547 1998, when right wing President Jacques Chirac publicly announced his support
 548 for Jospin's proposed constitutional amendment, and then, finally, when the time
 549 came to pass the constitutional amendment in the summer of 1999, it passed
 550 with the support of 94% of the *Assemblée*, including the vast majority of right
 551 wing deputies.

553 *The emergence of the feminine politician persona*

554 The *parité* movement was both accompanied and invigorated by enormous atten-
 555 tion from the press. Media debates about electoral quotas began in 1993 with
 556 Servan-Schreiber & Gaspard (1993) and Viennot (1993), and were at their most
 557 intense in the winters of 1996 and 1999 (Ramsay 2003; Julliard 2012). As observed
 558 by Freedman (1997), Garréta (2001), Scott (2005), and others, documented in great
 559

560 detail by Julliard (2012), and studied from a quantitative perspective by Guaresi
 561 (2018), this coverage was characterized by the appearance of new discourses sur-
 562 rounding the nature, behaviour, and social position of female politicians. Following
 563 the aforementioned authors, we argue that these discourses were instrumental in
 564 constructing a new *persona* (identity or social type) for women in politics.

565 Although most advocates of *parité* legislation consider themselves feminist, not
 566 all feminists supported the *parité* movement. In fact, as discussed in Sintomer
 567 (2007), radical deconstructionists and (in his words) ‘republican universalists’
 568 were anti-*parité*. The most influential *paritaristes* ‘pro-*parité* activists’ came
 569 from three main ideological camps: essentialist differentialist feminists, republican
 570 paritarists, and pragmatic egalitarians (Sintomer 2007:151). The differentialist fem-
 571 inists were extremely influential in both politics and the press, in part because one
 572 their main figures was the philosopher Sylvie Agacinski-Jospin, wife of the Prime
 573 Minister (Scott 2005; Bereni 2007; Julliard 2012). Based on psychoanalytic prin-
 574 ciples, Agacinski (1998, 1999) and the well-known philosopher Julia Kristeva
 575 (1999) argued that men and women constitute two fundamentally different kinds
 576 of citizens; therefore, electoral quotas are legitimate to ensure that these two
 577 basic parts of French society are democratically represented.

578 For example, arguing against *l’effacement des sexes* ‘the erasure of the sexes’,
 579 Agacinski (1999:4) says,

580 L’effacement «français» procède en noyant les deux sexes dans un humanisme abstrait d’où surnage
 581 le modèle unique d’un être humain sexuellement neutre. L’effacement «américain» procède en
 582 noyant les femmes dans un particularisme généralisé où se retrouvent des minorités de toutes
 583 sortes (ethniques, religieuses, culturelles, etc.), et les deux sexes finissent par être considérés
 584 comme de pures «constructions», quand ils ne sont pas la conséquence de modèles culturels hétéro-
 585 sexuels («heterosexual matrix»), comme chez Judith Butler.

586 Le nouveau féminisme français récite à la fois ces deux types de neutralisation des sexes en affirmant
 587 la dualité sexuelle comme la seule différence universelle au sein de l’humanité. C’est pourquoi il a pu
 concevoir l’idéal de la parité en politique.

588 “French’ erasure proceeds through drowning both sexes in an abstract humanism over which floats
 589 the unique model of a sexually neutral human being. ‘American’ erasure proceeds through drowning
 590 women in a generalized particularism where are found minorities of all sorts (ethnic, religious, cul-
 591 tural, etc.), and the two sexes finish by being considered ‘constructions’, when they are not the con-
 592 sequence of heterosexual cultural models (‘heterosexual matrix’), as with Judith Butler.

593 The new French feminism refuses both of these erasures at the same time through affirming sexual
 594 duality as the only universal difference at the heart of humanity. This is why it was able to conceive of
 595 the ideal of political parité.’

596 This line of argumentation, defended by very powerful public intellectuals, con-
 597 structs ‘the female politician’ as a distinct type of politician from ‘the male politi-
 598 cian’. Since, before the public debates on *parité*, female politicians had been
 599 viewed as subtypes of male politicians, Agacinski argues (1999:6) that ‘L’idéal
 600 ne fut donc plus de devenir des hommes comme les autres, mais d’affirmer la dif-
 601 férence dans l’égalité’ (‘The ideal was no longer to become men like everyone else,
 602 but to affirm difference in equality’).

603 Although the republican paritarists and pragmatic egalitarians were less essen-
 604 tialist than the differentialists, these activists also constructed male and female pol-
 605 iticians as qualitatively distinct. In particular, one of their principal arguments in
 606 favor of electoral quotas was that including more women in government would
 607 have a positive effect on France, since (by nature or by material circumstance)
 608 female politicians have different properties and view the world differently than
 609 do male politicians (Freedman 1997; Scott 2005; Sintomer 2007; Achin 2007; Jul-
 610 liard 2012; among others). The theme that female politicians are distinct from male
 611 politicians because they are more concrete-thinking, more sensitive, and more
 612 honest runs through *parité* debate in the press from 1996–1999. For example,
 613 one of the most important documents in this debate was the *Manifeste des dix*—a
 614 pro-*parité* ‘manifesto’ published in *L’express* on June 6, 1996 by ten current and
 615 former female ministers (Barzach, Bredin, Cresson, Gisserot, Lalumière, Neiertz,
 616 Pelletier, Roudy, Tasca, and Veil). This manifesto was very important because it
 617 presented the first united front between high profile left wing politicians (such as
 618 Yvette Roudy) and right wing politicians (such as Simone Veil).⁹ Again, this
 619 text, given below, proposes that women’s (stereotypically) feminine qualities con-
 620 stitute an argument for increasing their representation in the *Assemblée nationale*
 621 (Scott 2005).

622 Noyau de notre culture républicaine, pas toujours démocratique, le jacobinisme a d’abord et surtout
 623 été une affaire d’hommes. ... Centralisateur et hiérarchique, donneur de leçons et arrogant autant
 624 qu’éducateur, rhétorique et rationaliste jusqu’à l’abstraction chimérique, le jacobinisme est en
 625 quelque sorte un concentré de qualités viriles ... La relation aux autres tels qu’ils sont, la sensibilité,
 626 le concret, le souci du quotidien étaient ainsi rejetés du champ politique. Et les femmes avec.

627 ‘Center of our republican culture, not always democratic, Jacobinism was first and foremost a male
 628 business. ... Centralizing and hierarchical, as pedantic and arrogant as educational, rhetorical and
 629 rationalistic up to the point of chimerical abstraction, Jacobinism is in some way a concentration
 630 of virile qualities ... Relating to others as they are, sensitivity, concreteness, caring for everyday
 things were thus rejected from the political realm. And women with them.’

631 At the same time that male and female politicians were being differentiated in the
 632 press, the female politician persona, as distinct from the male politician, was also
 633 being constructed in literature from the mid to late 1990s. Although there were
 634 certain early works describing the life of female politicians, such as Huguette Bou-
 635 chardeau’s 1988 book *Choses dites de profil*, the number of new biographical and
 636 autobiographical studies documenting female politicians’ personal experiences ex-
 637 ploded after 1995, constituting a whole new literary genre in the late 1990s (Freed-
 638 man 1998; Ramsay 2003). A sample of works detailing what it was like to be a
 639 female politician at the time of the *parité* debates is given in (15).

- 641 (15) 1995: Yvette Roudy, *Mais de quoi ont-ils peur? Un vent de misogynie*
 642 *souffle sur la politique*
 643 1996 Ségolène Royal, *La vérité d’une femme*
 644 1997: Frédérique Bredin, *Députée: journal de bord*
 645 Elisabeth Guigou, *Être femme en politique*

646 Gisèle Halimi, *La nouvelle cause des femmes*

647 1998: Corinne Lepage, *On ne peut rien faire, Madame le ministre...*

648 1999: Roselyne Bachelot & Gisèle Fraisse, *Deux femmes au royaume des*
649 *hommes*

650 According to Ramsay's (2003) study of these works, 'many of the texts in the
651 emerging new body of studies by and on political women... share aspects of Bou-
652 chardeau's exploration of subjective understandings (or fictions) of political life
653 from the particular perspective of women. They focus on values, emotions or iden-
654 tity'. Ramsay therefore proposes that 'these texts work to constitute and legitimate a
655 rethinking and a "rewriting" of traditional political history and help construct the
656 unique yet multiple identity of the political women' (Ramsay 2003:xiv).

657 A final argument in favour of the development of a new stereotypically feminine
658 persona in the late 1990s comes from the shape of feminist reactions AGAINST the
659 *parité* movement. In the same way that pro-*parité* feminists argued that male and
660 female politicians' differences would positively impact France, many anti-*parité*
661 feminists criticized the claim that men and women differ in properties like *pragma-*
662 *tism, sensitivity, and honesty*. For example, the philosopher Elisabeth Badinter
663 (Badinter 1996, 1999, 2003) objects that 'le Manifeste de la parité entérine les car-
664 actéristiques féminines les plus éculées' ('The *parité* manifesto endorses the most
665 tired female stereotypes'; Badinter 1996:4), and she denies that female and male
666 politicians differ qualitatively in their properties, saying (1996:4),
667

668 En vérité, les avocates de la parité ne tentent pas seulement de nous faire croire qu[e les femmes] sont
669 essentiellement différentes des hommes, mais aussi qu'elles sont meilleures qu'eux. Avec elles, la
670 politique si décriée deviendrait enfin plus humaine, plus chaleureuse et plus efficace. Pardon
671 d'être sceptique, mais, à côtoyer les femmes de pouvoir, je les trouve très semblables à leurs col-
672 lègues masculins: mêmes qualités, mêmes défauts.

672 'In reality, the *parité* advocates not only want to make us believe that [women] are essentially differ-
673 ent than men, but also that they are better than them. With them, much criticized politics would finally
674 become more humane, warmer and more efficient. Excuse me for being skeptical, but, from spending
675 time with powerful women, I find them very similar to their male colleagues: same qualities, same
676 faults.'

677 Thus, in this time period, we see two opposing visions of the nature of female pol-
678 iticians: one in which they are characterized by 'feminine' qualities, advocated for
679 by the paritaristes, and one in which, for better or for worse, they display the same
680 properties as their male colleagues.¹⁰ In what follows, we refer to the stereotypically
681 female persona as the *differentialist persona* and we refer to the less feminine
682 persona as the *nondifferentialist persona*.

683 *Linguistic manifestations of persona construction*

684 In the previous section, we argued that, in the late 1990s, there were two principal
685 personae available for female politicians: a new stereotypically feminine one and an
686 older *nondifferentialist* persona that is more similar to male political personae. Here
687
688

689 we suggest that speakers in the *Assemblée nationale* in 1997–1998 use grammatical
 690 gender in their construction of these different personae. Our quantitative data is
 691 limited by who happens to talk publicly in the *Assemblée nationale*, and for how
 692 long; therefore, sadly, data for individual speakers is often quite sparse. Neverthe-
 693 less, we believe that the patterns described below suggest a link between feminine
 694 g-gender use and feminine persona construction, and (for women) masculine g-
 695 gender use and masculine persona construction.

696 Returning to one of the highest users of the feminine in our corpus, Roselyne
 697 Bachelot (81%), we can observe that not only is she a principal advocate of
 698 *parité*, but she also cultivates an extreme feminine style. In a study of the gender
 699 presentation of Bachelot and her fellow powerful female right wing colleague,
 700 Michèle Alliot-Marie (Bard 2012:10) remarks on how Bachelot’s manner of dress-
 701 ing is designed to distinguish her from her male colleagues.

702
 703 Roselyne Bachelot théorise le recours à la couleur vive d’une manière féministe. Elle privilégie le
 704 rose, une couleur archiféminine. Manière pour elle d’arborer la féminité comme un drapeau, dans
 705 un monde d’hommes, de jouer d’une différence devenue très visible.

706 ‘Roselyne Bachelot theorizes the use of bright colours in a feminist manner. She privileges pink, an
 707 ultra feminine colour. A way for her to fly femininity like a flag, in a world of men, to take advantage
 708 of a difference that had become very visible.’

709 Bachelot very publicly espouses the ‘feminine’ properties of pragmatism, sensitiv-
 710 ity, honesty, and so on, which she argues women will bring to politics. For example,
 711 in a 1986 interview,¹¹ she says,

712 Je crois que la femme a un message de femme à apporter. Moi j’avoue que quand je vois quelque
 713 chose qui me fait pleurer, j’ose pleurer. Je suis quelqu’un de sensible; je ne veux pas devenir un
 714 homme manqué dans la politique. C’est ça que je veux apporter au monde politique.

715
 716 ‘I think that women have a woman’s message to bring. Me, I admit that when I see something that
 717 makes me cry, I dare to cry. I am a sensitive person; I don’t want to be a failed man [tomboy] in poli-
 718 tics. That’s what I want to bring to the political world.’

719 Alliot-Marie, on the other hand, very clearly constructs the less feminine political
 720 persona (Ramsay 2003; Bard 2012). According to (Bard 2012:10), ‘Michèle Alliot-
 721 Marie incarne un type de féminité autoritaire, raide, évocatrice du masculin’
 722 (‘Michèle Alliot-Marie incarnates a type of femininity that is authoritarian, firm,
 723 evoking masculinity’). She holds a similar anti-*parité* feminist position to Badinter,
 724 and is likewise skeptical about qualitative differences between men and women,
 725 saying in a recent interview with *Le Lab* about electoral quotas: ‘Ce que je dis
 726 est que les femmes ont les mêmes capacités que les hommes, qu’elles ont la
 727 même intelligence’.¹² Additionally, she does not have a particularly feminine
 728 way of dressing, and once remarked to a colleague who wanted her to change her
 729 hair and glasses: ‘Je ne suis pas potiche’ (‘I am not a bimbo’; Bard 2012:11). Un-
 730 fortunately for us, she does not talk very much in 1997–1998; however, it is sug-
 731 gestive that she uses feminine g-gender only 20% of the time (2/10 occurrences).

A similar comparison has also been drawn among left wing politicians, Ségolène Royal and Martine Aubry, who appear to show the same basic pattern as Bachelot and Alliot-Marie, respectively. For example, Montini (2017) reports that:

Marine Aubry est présentée comme sérieuse, austère, si ce n'est pas autoritaire et froide. ... Miroir inversé de Ségolène Royal, enfermée dans un excès de «féminité» (coquette, dans l'extrême émotion, imprévisible, voire folle etc.), Martine Aubry se trouve ramenée à une manque de «féminité».

'Martine Aubry is presented as serious, austere if not authoritarian and cold. ... Mirror image of Ségolène Royal, covered in an excess of 'femininity' (coquette, extremely emotional, unpredictable, even crazy, etc.). Martine Aubry finds herself brought back to a lack of 'femininity'.'

Ramsay (2003:197) also reports that 'descriptive epithets from the period of [Aubry's] entry into government generally attribute masculine qualities to this political woman called a 'superwoman' and seen to possess 'authority', 'moral intransigence', 'frankness', 'acerbic humour' and 'the determination of a bulldozer'. Furthermore, unlike Royal who was one of *parité*'s earliest advocates within the Socialist party, Aubry was one of the last Socialist women to publicly support the constitutional amendment (Bereni 2007).

Accordingly, although there is a correlation between political affiliation and the likelihood of adopting one or the other persona, we expect the use of g-gender to also depend on the persona adopted by the speaker. This is indeed what we find when we examine the usage of Bachelot, Alliot-Marie, Royal, and Aubry, summarized in Table 7. We find significant differences between Royal and Aubry's use of the feminine (indeed, Royal never uses the masculine in our corpus) just as between Bachelot and Alliot-Marie's use (Fisher's exact test, p -value < 0.05).

Since, as mentioned above, the vast majority of addressees are socialists, unfortunately we do not have enough data to assess whether there are differences in how speakers address Alliot-Marie and Bachelot: Alliot-Marie is addressed twice and Bachelot once (all in the feminine) in the whole corpus. However, since they are both socialist ministers, both Royal and Aubry are frequently addressed and, here again, we see a significant difference (Fisher's exact test, p -value < 0.05) between the two: Aubry is addressed with 37% feminine (867/2340), while Royal is addressed with 58% feminine (56/96). Thus, the different persona construction of these two socialist ministers may be influencing how others refer to them in addition to how they themselves speak.

GRAMMATICAL GENDER AND SOCIAL MEANING

In the previous section, we argued that, in 1997–1998, there was a link between use of *Madame la N* and the construction of the differentialist feminine persona and the use of *Madame le N* and the construction of the nondifferentialist persona. However, we have not yet said anything about why this particular pairing of linguistic form and abstract identity should arise. Here we argue that identity construction

TABLE 7. *Grammatical gender use by Bachelot, Alliot-Marie, Royal, and Aubry.*

PERSONA	SPEAKER	F	M	TOTAL	PROP. F
Differentialist	Roselyne Bachelot (RPR)	105	24	129	0.81
	Ségolène Royal (PS)	9	0	9	1
Nondifferentialist	Michèle Alliot-Marie (RPR)	2	8	10	0.20
	Martine Aubry (PS)	22	5	27	0.81

with g-gender is mediated by the *social meanings* of feminine and masculine g-gender.

The question of meaning in relation to grammatical gender marking has long been a controversial one. The view of the influential Académie française (1984, 2014) is that there is no meaning associated with masculine or feminine marking. Nevertheless, the dominant view emerging in the fields of linguistics and psychology, which we adopt in this article, is that grammatical gender assignment is *multi-factorial*: it takes into account a variety of linguistic, cognitive, and meaning-related factors (Tucker, Lambert, & Rigault 1977; Corbett 1991; Dahl 2000; McConnell-Ginet 2013; Culbertson, Gagliardi, & Smith 2017; Bonami & Boyé 2019; and many others). With respect to linguistic factors, the phonological form of certain nominal endings may induce a strong preference for masculine or feminine g-gender (Tucker et al. 1977; Holmes & Segui 2004, 2006; Matthews 2010). Furthermore, we know that cognitive factors like frequency may induce a strong preference for masculine or feminine g-gender (see also Dye, Milin, Futrell, & Ramscar 2017). Perhaps this is why the highly frequent noun *personne* ‘person’ is categorically feminine (**le personne*). However, in addition, as observed in many works in linguistics (for example, Michard 1996, 1999; Houdebine-Gravaud 1998; Michel 2016; among others) and psychology of language (discussed below), there is a nonarbitrary relation between a noun’s grammatical gender and its meaning.

Nevertheless, specifying the semantic interpretation of grammatical gender marking presents a puzzle. On the one hand (pace Académie française), there is clearly some link between grammatical gender and social gender interpretation. It is a robust generalization from psycholinguistic studies that, at least when minimal context is provided, masculine g-gender most often triggers reference to socially male individuals. This has been shown through a variety of association tasks (Chatard, Guimont, & Martinot 2005; Brauer & Landry 2008; Gygax, Gabriel, Lévy, Pool, Grivel, & Pedrazzini 2012), possible continuation tasks (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Oakhill, & Garnham 2008; Sato, Gyax, & Gabriel 2013), eye tracking experiments (Irmén & Schumann 2011), and can also be seen in the interpretation of neologisms (Bonami & Boyé 2019).¹³ For example, Gyax and colleagues (2008) gave francophone participants a possible continuation task asking them whether a sentence with a male or female denoting noun

818 phrase was a *possible continuation* of a sentence containing a ‘generic masculine’
 819 plural, as shown in (16). In the experiment, Gygax and colleagues (2008) varied the
 820 gender-stereotypicality of the noun phrase from stereotypically female, such as *as-*
 821 *assistants sociaux* in (16a), to stereotypically male, such as *professeurs* ‘professors’.

- 823 (16) Is the second sentence a sensible possible continuation of the first one?
 824
 825 a. **Les assistants sociaux** marchaient dans la gare.
 826 ‘The social workers were walking through the station.’
 827 b. Du beau temps étant prévu **plusieurs femmes** n’avaient pas de veste.
 828 ‘Since sunny weather was forecast, several of the women weren’t wearing a
 829 coat.’
 830

831 Gygax and colleagues found that participants were significantly more likely to
 832 agree that sentences with male referents were possible continuations for sentences
 833 with ‘generic masculines’ than sentences with female referents. Furthermore, when
 834 participants did agree that sentences with female referents were possible continua-
 835 tions, they took significantly longer to do so than when they judged sentences with
 836 male referents. This result contrasted with a parallel result they found for English in
 837 which social gender stereotypes was the main determinant of possible continua-
 838 tions, and there was no significant difference in reaction times. In other words,
 839 upon reading a masculine-marked noun phrase, French speakers are highly likely
 840 to interpret it as referring to men.

841 On the other hand, it is clear that social gender is not part of the literal semantic
 842 meaning of grammatical gender marking. This can be seen from the very phenom-
 843 enon that we are studying: although many speakers disprefer it or object to this
 844 usage, it is not contradictory to utter *Madame le ministre*.¹⁴

845 The solution to this puzzle that we adopt in this article follows remarks made by
 846 (McConnell-Ginet 2013). We propose that, although g-gender is not denotationally
 847 meaningful, its social meaning is related to social gender. More specifically, we
 848 propose that masculine/feminine g-gender marking is associated with (or, in the
 849 words of Silverstein (1976) and Ochs (1992)—*indexes*) sets of properties, which,
 850 following Eckert (2008), we call *indexical fields*. The domains into which we inter-
 851 pret g-gender marked expressions are enriched with *ideological structure*: speaker/
 852 listeners’ pre-existing beliefs concerning how different properties and categories
 853 are likely to pattern together in their communities.¹⁵

854 In line with McConnell-Ginet, we propose that feminine gender marking
 855 indexes properties/stances ideologically associated with women, and masculine
 856 gender marking indexes properties/stances ideologically associated with men, as
 857 in (17). Here ‘[feminine]’ (respectively ‘[masculine]’) denotes the indexical field
 858 associated with feminine (respectively masculine) grammatical gender. Further-
 859 more, there is an ideological relation between the properties in the indexical field
 860 of feminine/masculine and being a woman/man respectively, given in (18).

- 861 (17) Indexical fields associated with French grammatical gender on human nouns:¹⁶
 862 [feminine] = $\{f_j \dots f_n\}$, that is, properties/stances ideologically associated with
 863 women
 864 [masculine] = $\{m'_j \dots m'_n\}$, that is, properties/stances ideologically associated
 865 with men
 866 (18) Ideological structure: $f_j \Rightarrow$ female, $\dots f_n \Rightarrow$ female, $m'_j \Rightarrow$ male, $\dots m'_n \Rightarrow$ male

867 When a gender-marked noun phrase is used in context, a subset of the properties in
 868 the field indexed by the noun phrase's grammatical gender will be attributed to its
 869 referent; however, which subset ends up being attributed will change depending on
 870 the utterance context.¹⁷ Thus, listeners hearing a masculine-marked expression in
 871 minimal context will attribute a subset of the properties in the indexical field to
 872 the referent. Since, by virtue of their ideological structure, they will believe those
 873 properties to be more likely to hold of men than of women, they will be likely to
 874 assign male reference to the noun phrase, creating the male-biased interpretations
 875 found in psycholinguistic experiments such as those reported by Gygax and col-
 876 leagues (2008). In other words, under this view, the social gender inference
 877 found in uses of masculine nouns arises as a context-sensitive *implicature* (Grice
 878 1975).

879 Of course, now we would like to know exactly which properties appear in the
 880 indexical field of masculine/feminine g-gender, and this is not an easy question.
 881 In synchronic research, fine-grained differences in interpretation between socially
 882 meaningful expressions can be diagnosed through experiments (Campbell-Kibler
 883 2007; Levon 2014; Podesva, Reynolds, Callier, & Baptiste 2015; among others).
 884 However, the study presented in this article is a diachronic one. Although it is un-
 885 likely that g-gender's indexical fields have radically changed in the past twenty
 886 years, there is no guarantee that they are currently identical to those of the mid
 887 1990s. Of course, the discourses described above do give us some idea of the prop-
 888 erties that many French speakers took to hold of male and female politicians at this
 889 time, so we might hypothesize that properties such as *pragmatic*, *sensitive*, and
 890 *honest* should be included in [feminine] in the 1990s, while *abstract*, *tough*, and
 891 *dishonest* should be included in [masculine]. However, due to the historical
 892 nature of this study, this hypothesis cannot really be verified or falsified.
 893

894
 895 FROM SOCIAL CHANGE TO LANGUAGE
 896 CHANGE
 897

898 Another area where we assume that ideological structure influences meaning is in
 899 the interpretation of the nouns themselves. Following work in cognitive science
 900 (Rosch 1975; Kamp & Partee 1995; Hampton 1998; 2007; Gärdenfors 2000,
 901 2014; Douven, Decock, Dietz, & Égré 2014; among many others), we assume
 902 that speakers associate *prototypes* with the concepts denoted by these nouns,
 903 which play an important role in determining their interpretation. The prototypes

of a concept are its most characteristic instances, and whether or not something is categorized as falling under a concept depends on how similar it is to the concept's prototypes. In the context of grammatical gender and professional nouns, we propose that the prototypes of concepts denoted by nouns like *ministre*, *garde des sceaux*, *députée* and so on are the personae that speakers associate with these social roles. Since the prototypes define the extension of the concept, if the set of prototypes associated with *ministre* changes over time, then the shape of this concept will also change.

Given this system, we argue that the rise of feminine grammatical gender in the *Assemblée nationale* in the late 1990s is predictable from the rise of the feminine political persona described earlier and the indexical fields proposed in (17) under certain basic assumptions concerning how social changes are related to linguistic changes.

First, social changes and discourse about them construct and change speaker/listener ideologies (Butler 1993, 1997; Foucault 1976; Livia & Hall 1997; among many others). More specifically, we propose that before the mid 1990s, all of the prototypes associated with *ministre* had the stereotypically male properties in (19a). However, through a complex discursive process associated with the *parité* movement, *ministre* gained a new prototype in the late 1990s: the differentialist female politician, which has stereotypically feminine properties (19b).

- (19) a. *ministre* $\Rightarrow m'_1, \dots, m'_n$ (stereotypically masculine properties) *ministre* in 1986
 b. *ministre* $\Rightarrow m'_1, \dots, m'_n$ (stereotypically masculine properties) *ministre* in 1997
 $\Rightarrow f_1, \dots, f_n$ (stereotypically feminine properties)

Second, speaker/listener ideologies constrain what truth-conditional and social meanings can be assigned to linguistic expressions (Silverstein 1979, 2003; Irvine & Gal 2000; among many others). In particular, because of the ideological structure in (18a), individuals who are ministers and who do not have stereotypically masculine properties (i.e. who are very dissimilar from the *ministre* prototypes) in 1986 lie at the periphery of the *ministre* concept. However, in 1998, ministers with stereotypically feminine properties are now central, typical examples of the concept.

Finally, an expression's truth-conditional and/or social meaning is what primarily drives its use. The indexical fields [feminine] and [masculine] will influence whether a speaker will say *le ministre* or *la ministre* when describing a female minister. As described above, when a speaker uses *le ministre*, they attribute a subset of [masculine] to their referent.¹⁸ Likewise, when they use *la ministre*, they must attribute a subset of [feminine] to their referent. In 1986, all of the prototypical ministers have only stereotypically masculine properties, so only the masculine can be naturally used: there are no prototypes that have the properties included in [feminine]. In 1998, by contrast, *ministre* has (at least) two prototypes: one with stereotypically masculine properties and one with stereotypically feminine properties.

947 There is no conflict in using either masculine or feminine, and so we predict that use
 948 of the feminine should increase in this time period. More specifically, we predict
 949 that speakers should use *la* more often when describing individuals who are
 950 closer to the differentialist female persona and *le* more often when describing indi-
 951 viduals who are closer to the nondifferentialist persona. We suggest that this predic-
 952 tion is borne out since, as discussed above, Ségolène Royal, who is closer to the
 953 differentialist persona than Martine Aubry, was addressed more frequently with
 954 the feminine.

955 The difference in the ideological structure between 1986 and 1998 has conse-
 956 quences for how we understand the directives underlying Fabius and Jospin's lan-
 957 guage policies: with Jospin's, the directive boils down to changing from describing
 958 female politicians as being closer to the nondifferentialist masculine persona and to
 959 describing them as being closer to the differentialist feminine persona. Although
 960 speakers may agree or disagree with whether this is a good thing to do, it is an
 961 option that existed in the linguistic system before Jospin prescribed it. Fabius'
 962 policy, by contrast, required that speakers first build or ACCOMMODATE the ideolog-
 963 ical structure that supports the use of the feminine with *ministre*, and then switch to
 964 using the feminine to describe female politicians. We hypothesize that accommo-
 965 dating new ideological structure is difficult, so this is why Fabius' policy was dis-
 966 advantaged compared to Jospin's.

967 We further suggest that ideological accommodation plays a role in explaining the
 968 patterns of speaker variation. We saw above that both male and female speakers in-
 969 terested in constructing and promoting the differentialist female persona were
 970 higher users of the feminine than those who were not so invested. Since use of fem-
 971 inine g-gender marking is only consistent with ideologies that have a persona with
 972 properties in [feminine], we suggest that speakers such as Bachelot and politicians
 973 on the left are using the feminine both to signal the fact that they possess such ideo-
 974 logical structure and as a way of trying to force their interlocutor to accommodate
 975 this structure if they do not already have it. Thus, grammatical gender and ideolog-
 976 ical accommodation is being used as a tool to further the ongoing social changes
 977 that the speakers are participating in (see also Abbou 2011a,b) for more information
 978 on activist uses of French grammatical gender marking).

980 CONCLUSION

981
 982 In this article, we presented a new study of variation and change in French grammat-
 983 ical gender in the *Assemblée nationale*. We argued that the actuation of the change
 984 from masculine grammatical gender to feminine grammatical gender in references
 985 to women was linked to broader social changes associated with gender ideologies in
 986 France in the late 1990s, namely, the development of the feminine political persona.
 987 We proposed that the social conditioning that we observed based on political party
 988 is the result of a combination of the indexical meaning of grammatical gender and
 989 the rate at which speakers across the political spectrum modify their ideologies to

990 include this persona. Our article therefore presents new quantitative evidence con-
 991 cerning the sociolinguistic consequences of the *parité* political movement and,
 992 more generally, it contributes to the study of language and gender in late twenti-
 993 eth-century France.

994 This article also makes a contribution to what Weinreich, Labov, & Herzog
 995 (1968:102) call the ‘actuation problem’ for historical linguistics, and, more specif-
 996 ically, to our understanding of the role that linguistic prescription and language pol-
 997 icies can play in the actuation of linguistic changes. Previous work on language
 998 planning has stressed the importance of having members of the community at the
 999 top of the social order support the proposed change (Ehrlich & King 1992;
 1000 Pauwels 1998, 1999; among others); however, our study shows that this condition,
 1001 although possibly necessary, is not sufficient: Fabius and Jospin had the same prest-
 1002 igious governmental position and similar levels of political power; however,
 1003 Jospin’s linguistic prescription succeeded where Fabius’ failed. We argued that dif-
 1004 ferences in the social context between 1986 and 1998 created a qualitative differ-
 1005 ence between what Fabius proposed speakers do and what Jospin proposed:
 1006 Jospin ordered speakers to switch from one well-formed linguistic option in their
 1007 language to another; whereas, Fabius ordered speakers to both switch which
 1008 form they use and accommodate a new ideological structure. Our study therefore
 1009 suggests that language policies will only be successful if they are consistent with
 1010 ideologies in the speech community; thus, nonlinguistic discursive work also has
 1011 a role to play in building the ideological structure that is a precondition for substan-
 1012 tive policy-induced language change.

NOTES

1013
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 1016
 1017 *This research was conducted at the Laboratoire de linguistique formelle (UMR7110 – Université
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1030 ¹The background framework relating language and meaning that we assume in this article is broadly
 1031 the one commonly assumed in formal semantics and analytic philosophy, that is, linguistic expressions
 1032 are assigned semantic interpretations that are used in context by speakers to create pragmatic meaning
 (see Tarski 1944; Montague 1970; and others).

1033 ²Confusingly, the adjective *epicene* is used by Corbett (1991) and most English-speaking authors to
 1034 qualify nouns patterning like *personne* (one single grammatical gender irrespective of social gender),

1033 while the French grammatical tradition mostly uses it for nouns patterning like *locataire* (one single form
1034 found with both grammatical genders). In the interest of clarity we avoid this adjective altogether.

1035 ³The transcripts are available for all sessions since 1958 at <http://archives.assemblee-nationale.fr>.

1036 ⁴For space reasons, we do not provide translations for the examples in this section, since their content
1037 is not important. What is important for our argument is the intra-speaker variation in gender marking of
1038 the noun phrases.

1039 ⁵As Fujimura (2005) shows in the context of a study of the use of g-gender in the written press, semantic
1040 properties of the context of occurrence also matter: when referring to a woman, the use of the mascu-
1041 line is more likely in a nonreferential (e.g. *Elle occupe la fonction de président* ‘she serves as
1042 president’) than in a referential (e.g. *Je vois le président* ‘I see the president’) contexts. This factor
1043 cannot be relevant in the context of the present study, however, since the occurrences under examination
1044 are all terms of address.

1045 ⁶Data on the composition of the eleventh legislature is available at [http://archives.assemblee-natio-
1046 nale.fr/](http://archives.assemblee-nationale.fr/).

1047 ⁷Information collected in an interview with Catherine Joly, Director of the office of transcripts at *As-
1048 semblée nationale*, June 6, 2018. The *compte-rendu intégral* was complemented by a *compte-rendu an-
1049 alytique* ‘analytic transcript’ summarizing the main elements of the debates. Since 2008 a unique
1050 transcript is produced, using a modern computer-based pipeline.

1051 ⁸According to Catherine Joly (p.c.) who was a transcriber at the time, this is the result of a conscious
1052 change of practice of the transcribers. Before the 1997–1998 debates, occurrences of a feminine *Madame
1053 la N* were treated as disfluencies and corrected to the masculine by the transcribers, except where the
1054 context made it clear that the use of feminine g-gender was intentional and significant. Some time in
1055 1998, the *secrétaire général de l’Assemblée* gave explicit instructions to the *Service du compte-rendu*
1056 to flip its policy, and correct instead occurrences of a masculine *Madame le N* to the feminine. Our
1057 study shows that neither convention was strictly enforced, and that, in the 1997–1998 period of
1058 heated debate over these issues, transcribers were faithful to actual speech. Note that, unfortunately,
1059 there is no written record of instructions given by the *secrétaire général*.

1060 ⁹Although, as described in the previous section, it would take another year for the right wing members
1061 of the *Assemblée nationale* to largely come around to the idea of electoral quotas.

1062 ¹⁰Of course, some political figures in the 1990s also articulate a third vision: one in which there are
1063 simply no (or few) female politicians, that is, the antifeminist position (see Scott 2005).

1064 ¹¹Video archives of the 1986 elections by the *Institut National de l’Audiovisuel* are available at [http://
1065 www.ina.fr/video/VDD10008113](http://www.ina.fr/video/VDD10008113).

1066 ¹²‘pol’, political interview show of the French Huffington Post, February 9, 2017; available at [https://
1067 www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Sm8rhnc9s&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Sm8rhnc9s&t=1s).

1068 ¹³See Gygax, Sarrasin, Lévy, Sato, & Gabriel (2013) for a review of the psycholinguistic literature on
1069 the interpretation of French g-gender.

1070 ¹⁴Furthermore, the use of the masculine in our corpus cannot simply be due to metaphor or ‘speaker
1071 reference’ (Donnellan 1966), since the title (*Madame*) itself does not vary: unless they are genuinely
1072 being used metaphorically, *Monsieur le ministre* must pick out a man and *Madame le ministre* must
1073 pick out a woman.

1074 ¹⁵There are many ways in which ideological structure could be formalized, for example, in terms of
1075 *conceptual spaces* (Gärdenfors 2000, 2014; Burnett & Bonami 2019), *Topoi* (Anscombe & Ducrot
1983; Anscombe 1995), or other semantic and/or argumentative frameworks.

1076 ¹⁶In this article, we limit our analysis to the social meaning of grammatical gender marking on human
1077 denoting nouns, remaining agnostic with respect to whether the analysis in (17) should also be extended
1078 to nonhuman denoting nouns. Some psycholinguistic studies, such as those of Boroditsky, Schmidt, &
1079 Phillips (2003), suggest that g-gender marking on inanimates may also be associated with sets of such
1080 properties; however, we leave application of this analysis to nonhuman nouns to future research.

1081 ¹⁷For a formal model of how this context-sensitive indexical meaning works, see Burnett (2017).

¹⁸Note that in Eckert's original indexical fields proposal, the properties in the field are attributed to the speaker, not necessarily to the referent of the expression containing the socially meaningful variant. We also propose (below) that using a g-gender marked expression ends up attributing a particular ideological view to the speaker, but this involves a certain amount of reasoning.

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