

Assessment 2: Analysis of a Text

Viv Groskop's article "In praise of loud women – the joy and power of being noisy and female" (2018) which discusses how the trait of being loud is perceived in women is interesting to look at from a sociolinguistic point of view to see how it challenges societal norms by touching the themes of gender along with power and institution with both its language choices and content. It not only questions these norms but also provides examples of others doing the same and discusses these processes. This essay is a further analysis of Groskop's writing, which takes a closer look at the article and the topics touched on in it.

Published for The Guardian newspaper, this piece is a written article. It follows a set template that articles usually follow, which typically comprises a headline, a by-line, the main body, and the conclusion (Kawa-Jump, 2002). The headline used here is catchy and to the point, giving the reader a rough idea of what the text is about. Words such as "joy" and "power" give the headline a more positively charged meaning and set the tone for the article. The word "power" along with the fact that this is a feminist article hints on its contents being about women's empowerment. As an addition, there is a subheading that goes even further into the topic. It is then followed with a by-line which provides information about the author, in this case, their name. These three parts are a good indicator of this being an article. As for the main body of the text, the writer expresses their own opinions and experiences relating to a particular issue – they share their childhood and adulthood experiences such as being told to "shut up" and current observations relating to women being loud and give their own opinions on it. This type of newspaper article is classified as an opinion piece (Tapia, 2020).

In addition, the text is written in a semi-formal register often observed in newspapers (Paltridge, 2012). The language used is Standard English but as it is common with many articles to use colloquial sayings and rhetorical questions to empathise points and engage the reader (BBC, no date) those are used as well. Examples of this are the usage of the saying “pain in the arse” and the question “So, what are we supposed to do with the idea of loud women in our postfeminist age?”. This helps create a connection between the reader and the author which determines the tenor – the relationship between the participants of this discourse (Simpson, Mayr, 2010). The vocabulary choices made by the author do not complicate the text, it is easily understandable and not infused with lengthy words, so it is easy to digest.

Moving on to the themes this article touches upon, gender is a reoccurring topic. To start, the focal point of the article is to raise attention to the fact that loudness is a characteristic deemed unwelcome in women, and to describe a woman as “loud” has negative connotations. This closely relates to feminist linguist observations of androcentrism - equating male with what is normal and female as a deviation from that norm (Simpson, Mayr, 2010). Groskop continues by saying that the expression “loud man” does not exist, which further strengthens this point. On top of that, the fact that being loud is something women “are” and not “do” while a man “may occasionally speak loudly” suggests that the word “loud” in this case is not used to simply describe one’s tone of speaking, but rather them being outspoken and confident. Consequently, the expression “loud woman” being negative is a way of trying to shut women up.

Johanna Wolfe, a teaching professor of English in Carnegie Mellon’s Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences, claims that: “When a woman complains or stands up for herself, she’s more likely to be negatively viewed than her male peers” (Maderer, 2020). Despite this,

many women choose to be loud to be taken seriously (Silva, 2015), hence the title “the joy and power of being noisy and female”. This challenges the stereotype of women’s subordinate language and role in society discussed by Simpson and Mayr (2010) and Paltridge (2012), closely relating to the themes of power and institution.

As mentioned, women choosing to be loud is a mechanism that challenges the current societal power dynamics. The idea of what women should be – quiet, docile, among other things, is taken for granted so any deviation from this norm is considered shameful. In the 1990 book “Speaking Freely” Julia Penelope, an American linguist, argues that as the dominant group men have produced language, thought, and reality which ties in why a loud woman is not considered acceptable. The same book encouraged women to “reinvent language in a sense” to challenge the power dynamics. Loudness is a way of doing that because it challenges norms of what a woman should be that patriarchal institutions create.

Moving on, Michelle Obama’s way of public speaking, which Groskop describes as “the new kind of loud” is also a way to challenge the dominant societal groups. The “calculated volume” the article mentions is a way of getting a point across while trying to avoid the label of being “loud”. However, this is where women political leaders face a dilemma. Fairclough (1989, p. 182) details that it can be summed up as “damned if they behave like men, and damned if they don’t” meaning it is unwelcome for a woman to act like a man in a position of power as it is considered unfeminine but as many of these positions are occupied by men, it is also unacceptable to not act like they do. For this reason, approaches such as Obama’s or the People’s Vote march speakers’ the text mentions are an attempt at walking a tightrope – speaking their mind but not

facing harsh critic. The article addresses this with the phrase “a happy medium” when describing modern feminism.

Overall, the writer has complied with the conventions and standards of writing an opinion piece. Opinion pieces are written in a way to create thought and discussion among readers (Tapia, 2020) – criteria this article meets well. The topic at hand which closely relates to feminism and themes examined in previous paragraphs – gender, power, and institution, is widely discussed, so the author giving further insight into this topic is bound to create further conversation into this matter. The text is successful in addressing themes of gender and power by giving explicit real-life examples which would closely resonate with feminist discourse communities.

In conclusion, while this article is the author sharing experience with being labelled as loud on the surface, it raises issues such as women mocked for possessing the same qualities as men, the struggle to be taken seriously, and the pressure to abide by societal standards while still maintaining identity. Analysing a text carefully and examining word choices can often lead to conclusions like this. On top of that, different gender identities are bound to resonate with this text differently. For some it will validate their experience, for others - it will challenge their power.

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