In this final chapter, I shall give my response to the driving question of this book, ‘Is language a reason why female leaders continue to be under-represented at senior level?’ This book has shown how a senior woman’s use of language has constructed a leadership style that at times contrasts uncomfortably with the masculinised norms of the business world (Vinnicombe and Singh 2002). A contrast in leadership style can create serious problems for senior women in terms of how their roles, practices and relationships with others are enacted, received and represented. However, a female leader’s language is also strongly shaped by the contexts and communities of practice in which she works. Depending on this context, the gendered nature of leadership language may become a ‘problem’ for senior women, or alternatively be celebrated as a valuable and distinctive ‘asset’.

In order to conclude whether language is indeed a reason why female leaders continue to be under-represented at Boardroom level, I want to give an overview of the multiple insights that have emerged in this book by:

• Reviewing the broader discursive context within which a senior woman’s language is enacted, received and represented.
• Defining the language of female leadership as it is shaped by, and interacts with three corporate contexts: Male-Dominated, Gender-Divided and Gender-Multiple.
• Wrapping up: summarising how effective linguistic practices can help to address the continuing problem of the under-representation of senior women in the business world.
Review of the broader discursive context

Women are at the forefront of Britain’s enterprise culture, running businesses in areas of heavy industry that have traditionally been dominated by men, as well as in social-oriented sectors and high-profile areas such as food, fashion, retailing and the media.

(Dunne 2009)

We are living in a time of competing discourses about female leadership. One particularly prevalent discourse appears to be that of female success: the notion of ordinary business women who achieve extraordinary results. If we read the Business sections of many quality newspapers in the UK, we may get a strong impression of female leadership success. For example, a report on Britain's 100 Most Entrepreneurial Women List (Dunne 2009) celebrates female leadership and entrepreneurship in both new and established areas such as technology, forensic science, engineering and manufacturing, not as a competitive rank order but as a group of ‘firsts among equals’. Also frequently profiled in the UK business press are features about ‘celebrity’ business women such as Barbara Cassani, Deborah Meaden, Anne Mulcahy, Nicola Horlick and Nicole Farhi, who are feted for their exceptional achievements in columns otherwise filled with more mundane stories about men in grey suits.

Stories of female success in the media often invoke a theory of ‘gender difference’ by implying that women have special if not superior qualities contributing to their success, which clearly distinguish them from men. This is touched on by Clare Logie, Head of Women in Business with Bank of Scotland Corporate, when she explains her view of the reasons for women’s success in entrepreneurship:

Women are passionate and driven about adding value as opposed to purely making a lot of money. We found that money is not the key driver for most female entrepreneurs. Indeed some women don’t even like the tag ‘entrepreneur’. They just started doing something because they