

Lexical Analysis of the First Presidential Debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry (30th September 2004, Coral Gables, Florida) – Giuseppe Milazzo, Giovanna Maiola

The transcription used is the one published by the Commission on Presidential Debates (Commission on Presidential Debates: www.debates.org)

The lexical analysis programme used is Alceste 4.0 (IMAGE - Informatique Mathématique Gestion (<http://www.smess.egss.ulg.ac.be/lejeune/logiciels/alceste.html>))

The analysis of lexical correspondences statistically summarises the language used by the two candidates during the first presidential debate on issues related to foreign policy and national security.

Mr. Lehrer's interventions have been excluded from the analysis.

The words characterising Mr. Bush and Mr. Kerry's speeches mainly refer to concepts related to **emergency** and **warfare**.

The same word **war**, for instance, has been pronounced 61 times within the 90 minutes debate, the word **peace** 12 times and it was often used to define the objectives of foreign policy and/or war itself. According to the rethoric used during the debate, peace and war are not opposed as contrasting concepts; rather, both terms are used in a complementary manner: peace is the final goal of both candidates whose views differ as for the strategies to reach it.

Also, the vocabulary typical of **military language** is largely present. And, in an extreme synthesis, this is precisely the prevailing connotation of the language used by the two contestants: foreign policy and national security are told through images and symbols related to an ongoing battle.

The two candidates differ as for contents and forms of communication, Mr. Bush looks like defining himself as commander in chief while Mr. Kerry as an analyst of international policy.

The most considerable semantic classes, as for number of meaningful sentences, are exactly those clearly differentiation the languages of the two leaders. Mr. Bush is associated with Class 1, Mr. Kerry with Class 2.

Mr. Bush resort to a simple vocabulary evoking the war on terror, the need not to weaver in front of the enemy, a well identified enemy, the same who attacked the US on 11th September, the same fought in Afghanistan; an enemy who is resolute and resistant, an enemy to combat against and to win over in Iraq. As a matter of fact, it is precisely Iraq the battlefield for the two contestants.

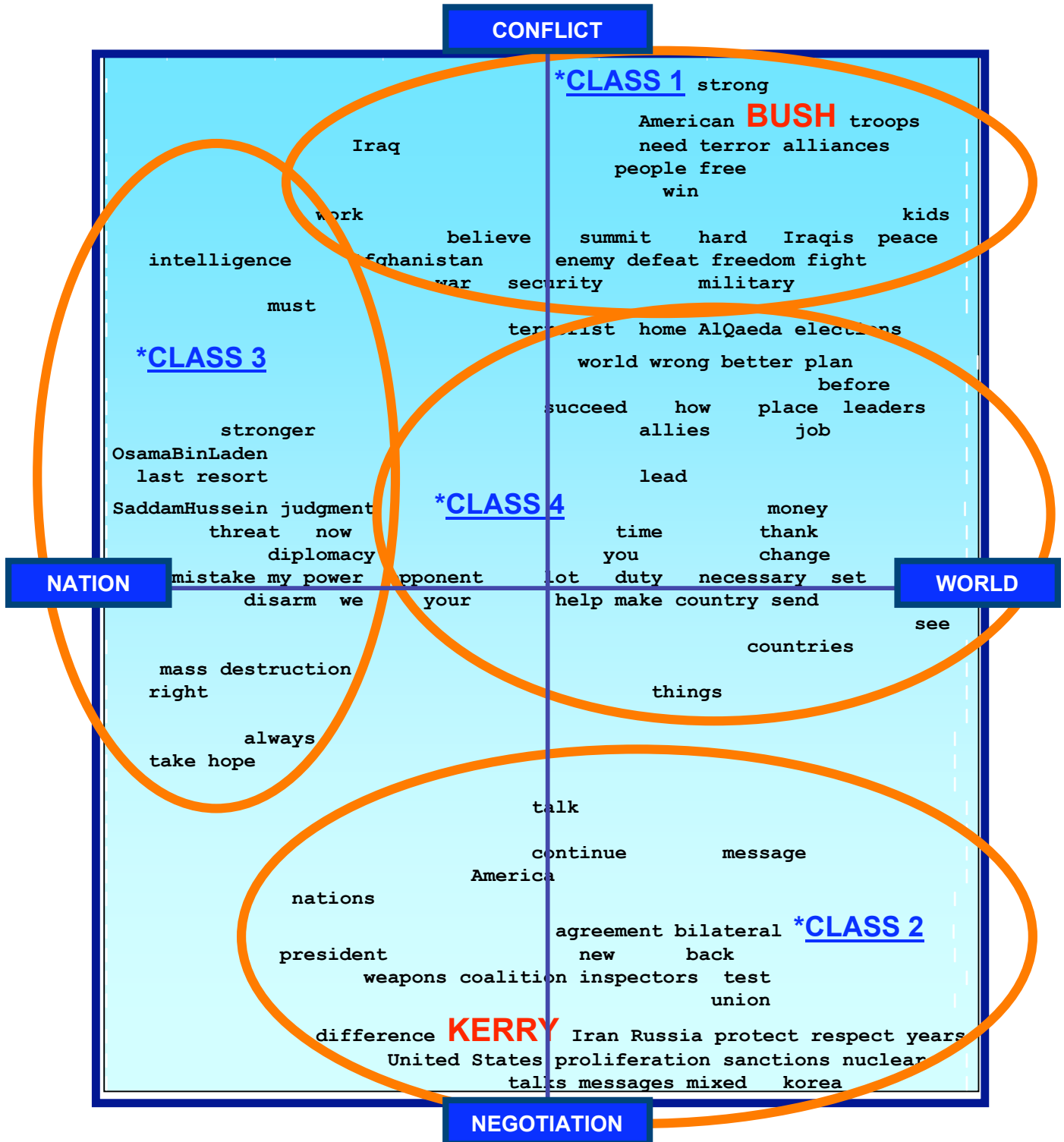
Mr. Kerry widens the perspective, he questions the President's decisions; in the text we find terms referring to topics such as international alliances, justifications and reasons for the war in Iraq, differences between Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. And, more important, his speech includes new issues and new countries. There is not one enemy and one threat; on the contrary, Mr. Kerry's language refers, in a very meaningful manner, to Iran, North Korea, China and Russia. He manages to broaden the thematic and linguistic spectrum of the debate, thus pushing Mr. Bush towards a less favourable ground.

The other two lexical classes identified during the analysis represent the basis for a "linguistic meeting" between the contestants: Class 3, which is focused on their diverging positions over the Iraqi war and the intervention in Afghanistan, is apparently more favourable to Mr. Kerry. On the contrary, Class 4, which is directly related to the vote for US elections and targeted to potential voters, is dominated by Mr. Bush.

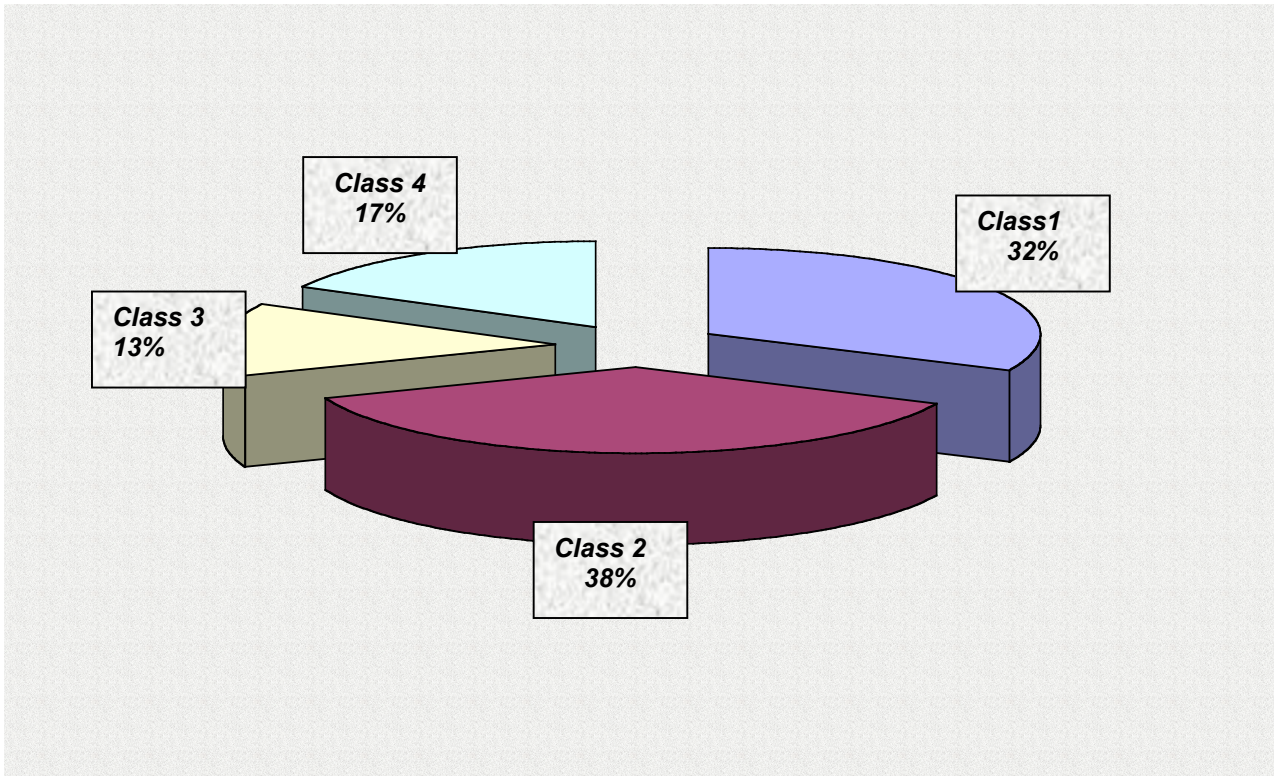
Factor Plan: Projection of Lexical Classes

Horizontal Axis: 1st Factor : V.P. =.1699 (39.72% inertia)

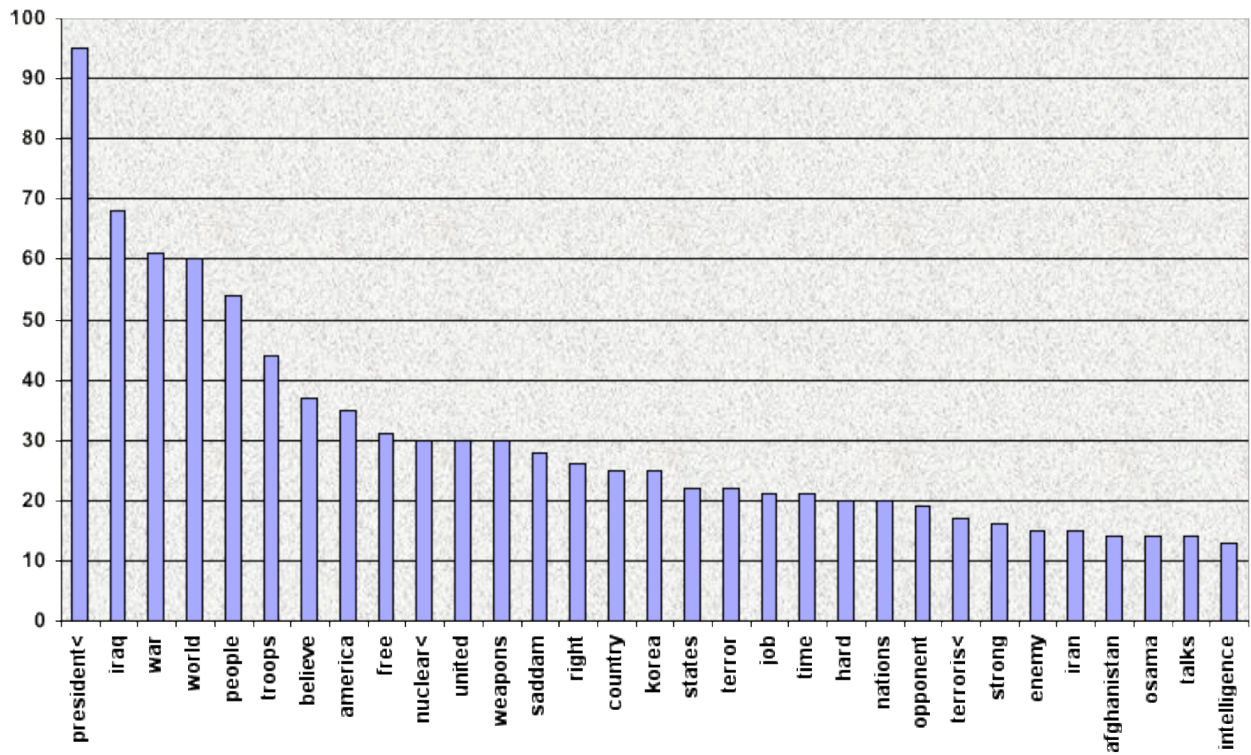
Vertical Axis: 2nd Factor : V.P. =.1531 (35.81% inertia)



Weight of Classes (number of meaningful sentences)



Frequency of the most meaningful words of the debate



Class 1: Crisis and Warfare

The main thematic areas emerged during the analysis are:

- **The war on terror.**
- The situation in **Iraq after the war.**

This is typically Mr. Bush's class and it is characterised by a specific and emergency language.

Afghanistan and Iraq are two sides of the same coin, two fields for the same battle against international terrorism.

President Bush presents simple equations: our enemy is the enemy of a free Iraq, the enemy in Iraq is the same as Afghanistan, our enemy fights against freedom. The condition of crisis after 9/11 needs determination and continuity.

The typical words of this class refers to military slang and to the vocabulary of war: among them, *borders, defeat, defend, enemy, forces, soldiers*, which are terms connotating the sense of the battle (*duty, freedom, liberty, peace, justice, security*) and other defining the typology of enemy (*hard, terrorist*). Verbs identify a dimension of action and fight. Geographical areas defining the context of this action are Iraq e l'Afghanistan

Words	Verbs	Areas	Sentences
Al Qaeda Hard Terror Terrorists	Achieve Bring Give	Iraq Afghanistan	<i>Yes, we're getting the job done. It's hard work. Everybody knows it's hard work, because there's a determined enemy that's trying to defeat us.</i>
Alliances	Kill Fight		<i>the enemy understands a free Iraq will be a major defeat in their ideology of hatred. That's why they're fighting so vociferously. They showed up in Afghanistan when they were there, because they tried to beat us and they didn't; and they're showing up in Iraq for the same reason.</i>
Borders Defeat Defend Duty Enemy Forces Military Security Soldiers			<i>They're fighting us because they're fighting freedom. They understand that a free Afghanistan or a free Iraq will be a major defeat for them.</i>
Liberty Free Freedom Homeland Justice Peace			<i>a free Iraq will be an ally in the war on terror, and that's essential. a free Iraq will set a powerful example in the part of the world that is desperate for freedom.</i>
People			<i>we've climbed the mighty mountain. I see the valley below, and it's a valley of peace. By being steadfast and resolute and strong, by keeping our word, by supporting our troops, we can achieve the peace we all want.</i>
			<i>they're trying to defeat us. and if we lose our will, we lose, but if we remain strong and resolute, we will defeat this enemy.</i>

Class 2: International Policy

The main thematic areas are:

- The issue of **international alliances**.
- **Disarmament and weapons of mass destruction**.

This is Mr. Kerry's class and it is characterised by a varied language defining a more articulated and complex scenario than those drawn by Mr. Bush.

In his speech, Mr. Kerry sets out an extended overview of international relations. Here, it is interesting to observe the number and the typology of those countries that are mentioned: Cina, Iran and North Korea widen the perspective and underline the complexity of US foreign policy.

The characteristic words of this semantic class are related to one of the main points of Kerry's campaign: the reasons for US decision to attack Iraq and the way the war on terror was undertaken by Bush's administration. It is a dimension strongly related to US policy before the war and the possible options alternative to war. Words such as *agreement, bilateral, coalition* propose a semantic universe opposed to the one supported by Bush. Kerry's harsh criticism here is evident: President Bush was not able to build up a wide and strong alliance against US enemies.

Among the characteristic words, we find terms such as *inspectors, sanctions, weapons*, directly linked to the official justification for the invasion to Iraq, the alleged presence of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Kerry broadens the discussion about security. In addition to the issue of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, he focuses on the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the danger these weapon imply for world stability as well as on the negotiation for their reduction and disarmament. In this perspective he points out a plurality of possible referents (namely China, North Korea and Russia). Quite interestingly, none of the two contestants refers explicitly to Europe as a key referent for this dimension of action.

Words	Verbs	Areas	Sentences
Agreement Bilateral Coalition International Interest Talks	Begin Get Let Send Tell	Great Britain China Iran North Korea	<i>Weapons of mass destruction, nuclear proliferation. but again, the test or the difference between us, the president has had four years to try to do something about it, and north Korea has got more weapons; Iran is moving toward weapons.</i>
Order Democracy Difference Global	Involve Protect Respect Put	Russia United States	<i>it will take 13 years to secure those weapons in Russia. i m going to do it in four years, and I'm going to immediately set out to have bilateral talks with north Korea.</i> <i>Iran is moving toward nuclear weapons and the world is more dangerous. Darfur has a genocide.</i>
Inspectors Nuclear Proliferation Sanctions Weapons			<i>with respect to Iran, the British, French, and Germans were the ones who initiated an effort without the united states, regrettably, to begin to try to move to curb the nuclear possibilities in Iran.</i>
Years			<i>secretary of state Colin Powell told this president the pottery barn rule: if you break it, you fix it.</i>

Class 3: the Confrontation on Iraq and Afghanistan

The main thematic areas are:

- The **decision to invade Iraq**.
- The **strategies for fighting terrorism**.

This is the class of the confrontation between the two contestants over the wars undertaken by the US. Symbolic subjects of this area are Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden. Candidates have different positions as for the political analysis of the situation US are involved into and language includes key words such as *disarm, diplomacy, intelligence*.

However, this class is largely characterised by terms expressing reciprocal accusations: words such as *mistake, misleading* represent differences of judgement and differences of decisions.

Words	Verbs	Areas	Sentences
Diplomacy Disarm Intelligence	Act Decide Use Go	Iraq Afghanistan	<i>We can't leave a failed Iraq. But that doesn't mean it wasn't a mistake of judgment to go there and take the focus off of Osama bin laden.</i>
Judgment Misleading Mistake	Take Resort		<i>We had Saddam Hussein trapped. he also promised America that he would go to war as a last resort. Those words mean something to me, as somebody who has been in combat.</i>
Osama Bin Laden Saddam Hussein Threat War	Hope Look Misled Turn Vote		<i>smart means not diverting your attention from the real war on terror in Afghanistan against Osama bin laden and taking it off to Iraq where the 9/ 11 commission confirms there was no connection to 9/ 11 itself and Saddam Hussein,</i> <i>my opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at and declared in 2002 that Saddam Hussein was a grave threat. He also said in December of 2003 that anyone who doubts that the world is safer without Saddam Hussein does not have the judgment to be president.</i> <i>I wasn't misleading when I said he was a threat, nor was I misleading on the day that the president decided to go to war when I said that he had made a mistake in not building strong alliances and that I would have preferred that he did more diplomacy.</i>

Class 4: Appeal for People's vote

The main thematic areas are:

- The **credibility of the leadership**.
- The **appeal for vote** and the **confidence** of Americans.

This is the semantic class of the final confrontation between Mr. Bush and Mr. Kerry. Bush stresses the supposed inconsistency of his rival asking for a vote and a mandate in favour of the continuation of the war on terror. Kerry stresses President Bush's mistake for carrying US into war.

The appeal for support are characterised by words evoking patriotism and the pride in being Americans; these terms go back to the topics and the language shaping the whole debate and words connotating a general evaluation of candidates emerge.

Mr. Bush points out that voting is to elect a commander in chief, while stressing the importance of leadership and credibility as well as the need not to change political line during the ongoing war.

Mr. Kerry returns to those issues discussed during the debate and, finally, likewise President Bush, addresses directly to voters asking them to give him confidence for next four years.

Words	Verbs	Areas	Sentences
Allies	Believe Expect	Iraq	<i>I don't see how you can lead this country to succeed in Iraq if you say wrong war, wrong time, wrong place. What message does that send our troops? What message does that send to our allies? What message does that send the Iraqis?</i>
Chief			
Commander	Follow		
Leaders	Join		
Credibility	Keep		<i>you cannot lead the war on terror if you keep changing positions on the war on terror and say things like, well, this is just a grand diversion.</i>
War	Know		
World	Look		
My			<i>they' re not going to follow somebody who says this is the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time. They' re not going to follow somebody whose core convictions keep changing because of politics in America.</i>
Country	Make		
Nation	Say		
Diversion	Talk Thank		<i>I made a mistake in how I talk about the war, but the president made a mistake in invading Iraq. Which is worse? I believe that when you know something' s going wrong, you make it right. that's what I learned in Vietnam.</i>
Message	Try Understand		
Opponent			
Parents	Vote		<i>that' s the country that I m going to fight for. and I ask you to give me the opportunity to make you proud. I ask you to give me the opportunity to lead this great nation, so that we can be stronger here at home, respected again in the world, and have responsible leadership that we deserve.</i>
Place	Win		
Positions	Lead		
Time	Succeed Change		
Wrong	Lose		<i>I know that for many of you sitting at home, parents of kids in Iraq, you want to know who' s the person who could be a commander in chief who could get your kids home and get the job done and win the peace.</i>