

Lexical Analysis of the Second Presidential Debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry (8th October 2004, St Louis, Missouri) – 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 second presidential debate.

Moderator and audience interventions have been excluded from the analysis.

Kerry: “I have a plan”. Bush: “He is changing positions”

In the second presidential debate the two candidates answer questions from the floor. The two contestants left away most of the fair play displayed during the first presidential debate and exploit most of their airtime for reciprocal accusations. The general rhythm of the debate is more lively, a number of topics enter the agenda of this second debate; the variety of themes is represented by the most frequent words used.

Compared to the first confrontation, Mr **Bush** shows a more aggressive attitude, an attitude often effective compared with his previous televised performance. He depicts himself as protector of Americans, capable to take decisions to safeguard America and its people, with a strong leadership, understanding and determination, kin to protect the domestic small business and promote the American values.

Mr **Kerry** often refers to kids, future, education, health system, a global coalition, the role of the United Nations, the middle class interests. He pays also attention to national economy that, according to him, has been undermined by Bush’s choices. He often refers to the opinion of Republican representatives (Senators Lugar, Hagel) and subjects symbolising US military engagement and experience (General Shalikashvili, Admiral Crowe, General McPeak, General Clark, General Baca) to support his arguments against Bush’s military management

The confrontation between the two candidates is shaped by recursive concepts through which each of the contestant attacks the other. Mr. Kerry defines his opponent on the basis of:

- wrong judgements (“*he’s really turned his campaign into a weapon of mass deception*”);
- international isolation of the US;
- no plan (“*to win the peace*”);
- protection of corporate interests against the middle class;
- the issue of the back-door draft on military service;
- the increase of taxation.

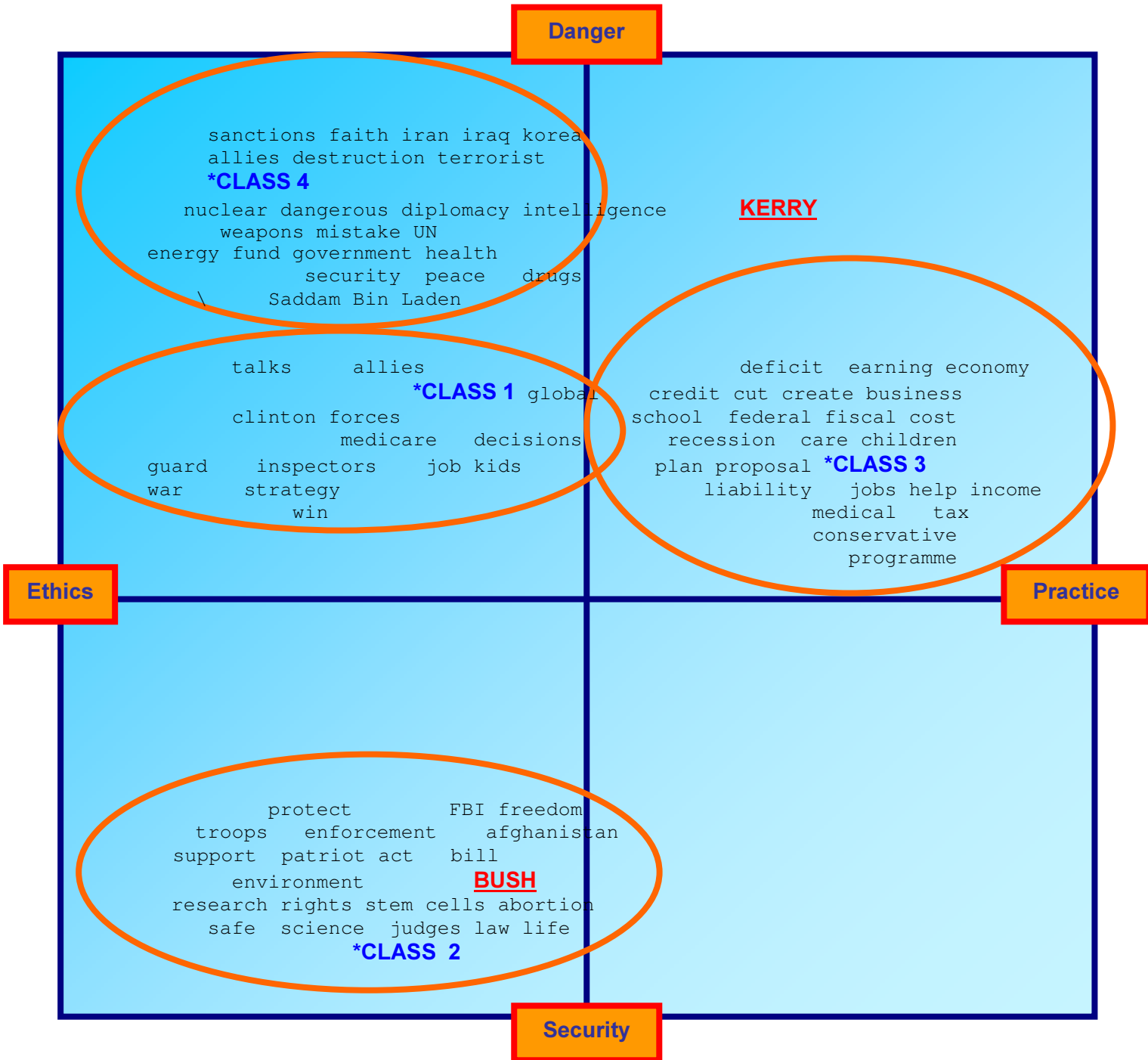
On his side, Mr. Bush stresses:

- the alleged inconsistency of his opponent (“*I don’t see how you can lead this country in a time of war, in a time of uncertainty, if you change your mind because of politics*”);
- Kerry’s plan for national social policy that will lead to an increased fiscal pressure;
- the fact that Kerry has no plan but only promises;
- the lack of financial sustainability of Kerry’s policies.

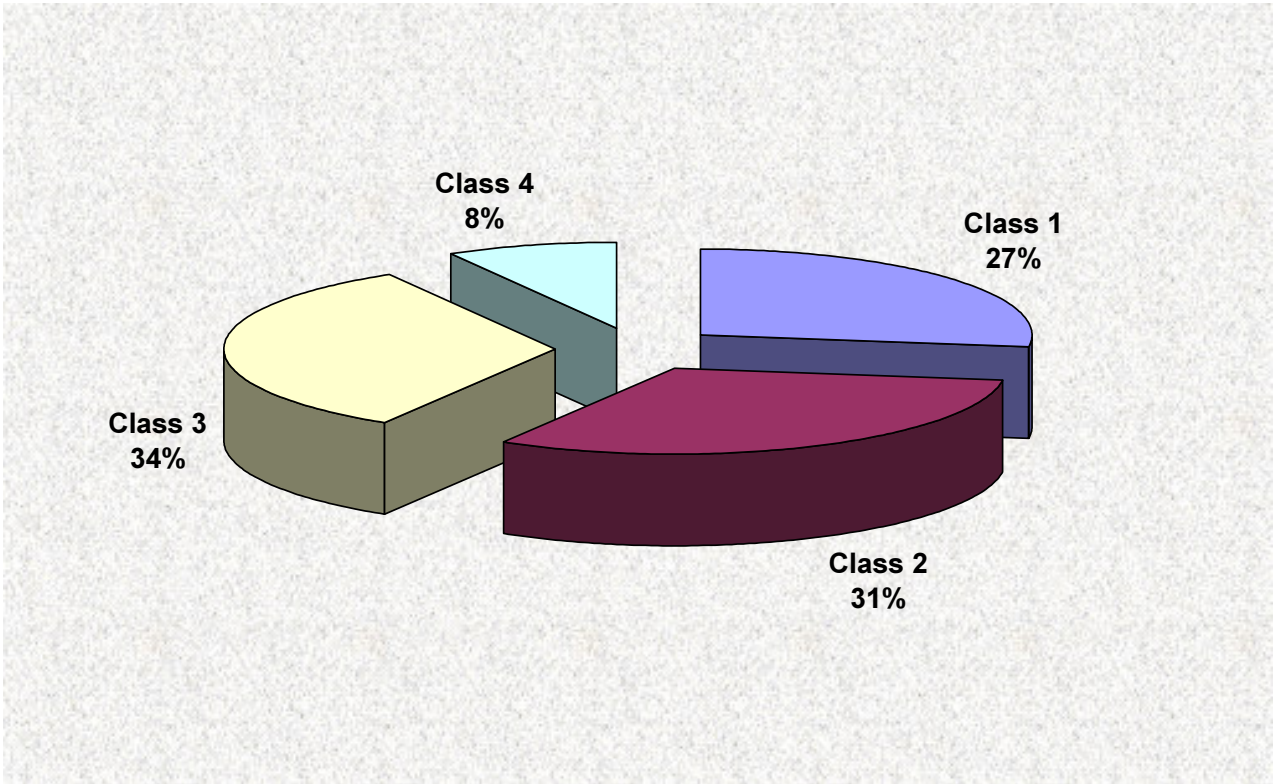
Both the candidates attack each other on the basis of their previous political experience: in a number of occasions, President Bush mentions the choices made by Mr. Kerry in the Senate to point out the swinging attitude of his opponent as for two sensitive issues for Kerry’s public profile: health and environment policies. Kerry’s identity is questioned during this confrontation, as well as his capability to maintain a credible and defined political line both at national and international level.

Factor Plan: Projection of Lexical Classes

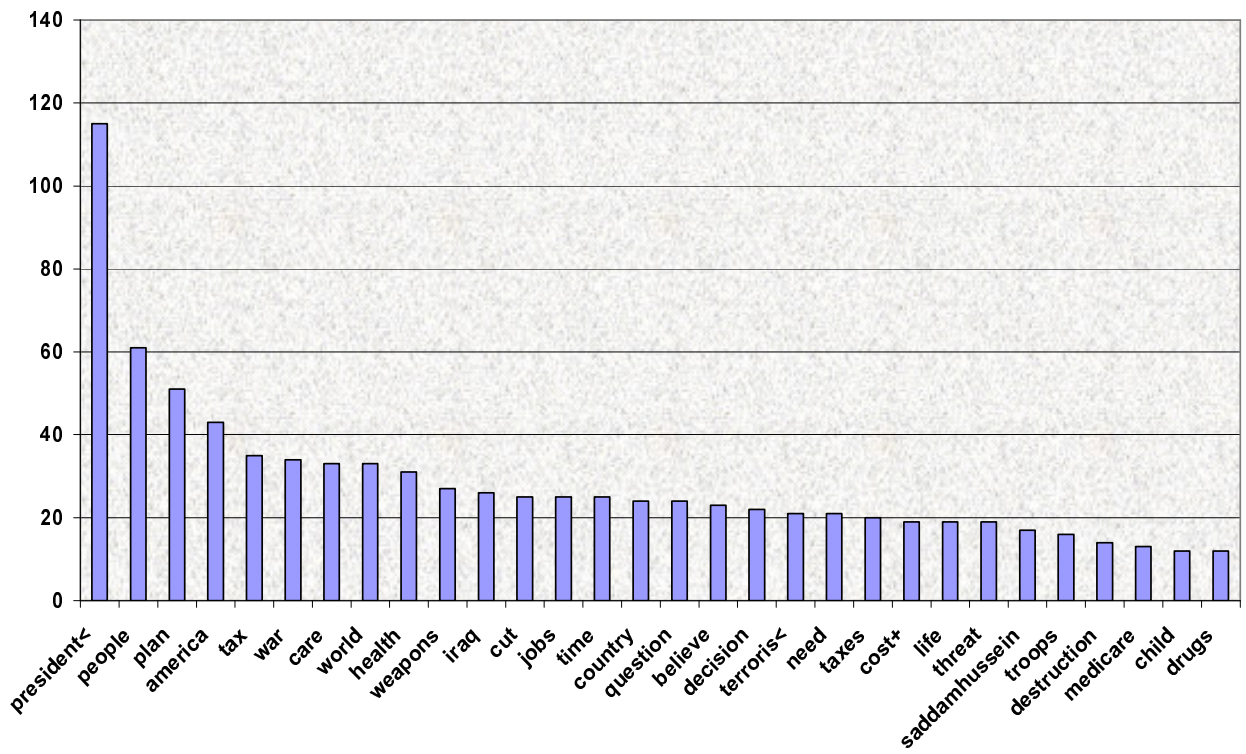
Horizontal Axis: 1st Factor : V.P. =.1909 (41.73 % inertia)
 Vertical Axis: 2nd Factor : V.P. =.1449 (31.68 % inertia)



Weight of Classes (number of meaningful sentences)



Frequency of the most meaningful words of the debate



Class 1: Bush's Mistakes

The main thematic areas emerged in this class during the analysis are:

- The **evaluation of Bush's foreign policy**.
- The **evaluation of Bush's domestic policy**.

This class is dominated by Mr. **Kerry** whose rhetoric strategy is based on four main pillars: the President made wrong judgements, he internationally isolated the United States, he has no plan to win the peace, his choices worsened middle class life conditions.

This class is centred on the implications that the decisions taken by Bush's administration have for the future in a global and domestic dimension. The scenario drawn by Kerry tend to emphasise the political **differences** between him and his opponent by modelling his attack along opposite concepts: winning peace versus losing war, global alliance versus going alone, talks versus force, corporate interests versus middle class wealth, social and fiscal policy versus economical privileges.

Words defining this class reflect the dual perspective used by Kerry to undermine his opponent's credibility: the **international strategy** (*war, peace, security, global, decisions, inspectors*) and the **social policy** (*medicare, kids, drugs*).

In this second debate, Kerry defines himself as "commander in chief", thus following Bush's public definition of US President as a military leader.

Words	Verbs	Actors	Sentences
War Peace Security Global Decisions Inspectors Politic	Ask Break Involve Push Put Talk Try	President Clinton Generals Seniors Kids	<p><i>the president stood right here in this hall four years ago, and he was asked a question by somebody just like you, under what circumstances would you send people to war?</i></p> <p><i>and his answer was, with a viable exit strategy and only with enough forces to get the job done. he didn't do that. he broke that promise.</i></p> <p><i>the world is more dangerous today. the world is more dangerous today because the president didn't make the right judgments.</i></p> <p><i>I'm going to cut the deficit in half in four years. now, I'm going to restore what we did in the 1990s, ladies and gentlemen: pay as you go.</i></p> <p><i>I believe the president made a huge mistake, a catastrophic mistake, not to live up to his own standard, which was: build a true global coalition, give the inspectors time to finish their job and go through the UN.</i></p> <p><i>for two years, the president didn't even engage with North Korea, did nothing at all, while it was growing more dangerous, despite the warnings of former secretary of defence William Perry,</i></p> <p><i>that's the difference between us. the president sides with the power companies, the oil companies, the drug companies; and I'm fighting to let you get those drugs from Canada, and I'm fighting to let medicare survive.</i></p>
Allies Balanced Forces Hurt Strategy Talks Nation Question			
Job Medical Drugs Years			

Class 2: Personal Freedoms and Ethical issues

The main thematic areas are:

- The **Patriot Act**
- **Justice**
- **Ethics and science**

This is class where the two candidates address questions related to **personal freedom, rights** and **ethical issues**. Mr Bush is the dominant actor of the class.

The **patriot act** is one of the main issues discussed, followed by the **stem cell research** and **abortion**.

The most connotative words of this class refer to the emergency at domestic level (*patriot act, terrorism, risk, safe* but also *rights, freedom, law, Constitution*); the ethical issues like *stem cell* and *abortion* are of course correlated to words like *research, science* but also to words as *life, personal* and *ethics*.

Words	Verbs	Actors	Sentences
Terrorism Patriot act Afghanistan Constitution Countries Freedom Law Risk Life Person Personal Rights Safe Science Stem Cell Research Abortion Enforcement Environment Troops World United States	Can Be Believe Continue Do Interpret Judge Know Make Pick Share Spend Support Take Talk	Fbi Judges	<p><i>I believe in the patriot act. we need the things in it that coordinate the FBI and the CIA. we need to be stronger on terrorism. but you know what we also need to do as Americans is never let the terrorists change the constitution of the united states in a way that disadvantages our rights.</i></p> <p><i>16 there are 30 countries there. it denigrates an alliance to say we're going alone, to discount their sacrifices. you cannot lead an alliance if you say, you know, you're going alone.</i></p> <p><i>will we have equal opportunity? will women's rights be protected? will we have equal pay for women, which is going backwards? will a woman's right to choose be protected? these are constitutional rights, and I want to make sure we have judges who interpret the constitution of the united states according to the law.</i></p> <p><i>I also think we ought to continue to have good adoption law as an alternative to abortion. and we need to promote maternity group homes, which my administration has done.</i></p> <p><i>the patriot act is necessary, for example, because parts of the FBI couldn't talk to each other. the intelligence gathering and the law enforcement arms of the FBI just couldn't share intelligence under the old law.</i></p> <p><i>I too hope that we'll discover cures from the stem cells and from the research derived. but I think we've got to be very careful in balancing the ethics and the science.</i></p> <p><i>and the result is that you've been bombarded with advertisements suggesting that I've changed a position on this or that or the other. now, the three things they try to say I've changed position on are the patriot act; I haven't. I support it. I just don't like the way john Ashcroft has applied it, and we're going to change a few things</i></p>

Class 3: Economic and Social issues

The main thematic areas are:

- **Economy and employment**
- The **welfare state**
- **Fiscal policies**

The economic and social problems reflect the most traditional differences between the Democratic and the Republican parties. Both the candidates try to reinforce their identity in front of their traditional electorate.

Mr **Bush** underlines his view to overturn a period of recession and again points out the weak credibility of his opponent on the fiscal policy. Mr **Kerry** presents evidences on the worsening of domestic welfare state: deficit, health system and unemployment.

The field of closer debate is the question of **taxes**: Mr Kerry promising not to raise taxes for the middle class, Mr Bush accusing his opponent to be not credible on that. At the end, none of them clearly dominates this semantic class, even if Mr Kerry manages to introduce more issues in the agenda of the debate.

The most characteristic words are related to the **economic discourse** (*business, credit, deficit, earning, economy, recession*), the **taxes issue** (*fiscal, taxes and related verbs like cut or raise*) and to the **welfare state** (*care, child, earning, health, jobs, medical, school*)

Words	Verbs	Actors	Sentences
Businesses Credit Deficit Earning Economy Energy Recession Fiscal Cost Taxes Income Care Health Jobs Medical School Reform System American Credible Liability Million Months Plan Record Work	Create Cut Raise Got Help Increase Keep Look Lose Propose Run Fund	Government Children Child	<i>I mean, compassionate conservative, what does that mean? cutting 500, 000 kids from after school programs, cutting 365,000 kids from health care, running up the biggest deficits in American history.</i> <i>I have a plan to provide health care to all Americans. I have a plan to provide for our schools so we keep the standards but we help our teachers teach and elevate our schools by funding no child left behind</i> <i>he says he is going to tax the rich to close the tax gap. he can't. he' s going to tax everybody here to fund his programs.</i> <i>right into the camera. yes. I am not going to raise taxes. I have a tax cut. and here' s my tax cut. I raise the child care credit by..</i> <i>five million Americans have lost their health care; 620,000 Missourians have no health care at all; 96,000 Missourians have lost their health care under president Bush.</i> <i>200, 000 a year. that' s all. ninety eight percent of America, I'm giving you a tax cut and I'm giving you health care.</i> <i>he' s just not credible when he talks about being fiscally conservative. he' s just not credible. if you look at his record in the senate, he voted to break the caps the spending caps over 200 times.</i> <i>I think you ought to get the break. I want to lower your cost to health care. I want to fully fund education, no child left behind, special needs education.</i> <i>and here he says he's going to be a fiscal conservative, all of a sudden. it's just not credible. you cannot believe it. and of course he's going to raise your taxes. you see, he's proposed..</i> <i>and we paid down the debt of our nation for two years in a row, and we created 23 million new jobs at the same time.</i>

Class 4: War on Terror

The main thematic areas are:

- The different **positions on Iraq War**
- The **war against terrorism**

This semantic class recall most of the language and concepts of the first presidential debate. Also the strategies of the two candidates follow a consistent pattern of argumentations.

Mr **Bush** focus on the **emergency** of the war on terror and warns the audience on the weakness of his opponent's position. According to Mr Bush's rhetoric, the democratic candidate is inconsistent, changing positions and being not fit to lead a country in war period. He often points out that his opponent's plan for Iraq is not credible: *"And what is he going to say to those people that show up at the summit? Join me in the wrong war at the wrong time at the wrong place. Risk your troops in a war you've called a mistake"*

Mr **Kerry** is once more stressing the argument of the **weapons of mass destruction**, given as official reason to rush to war on Iraq. The argument is the same as the previous debate: this was the official reason for attacking Iraq, the weapons were never found, therefore the President did a mistake not persevering in a diplomatic action. The question of international **allies** and the role of UN **Inspectors** is again functional to the critics towards the current presidential administration.

The words characterizing this semantic area recall the **danger** (*nuclear, terrorists, threat, war, weapons*) and the different **policies** (*allies, diplomacy, intelligence*). Different **countries** enter into the area as examples for the arguments of the two contestants (*Iraq, Iraq, Korea*).

Again the two main actors mentioned by Bush and Kerry are **Saddam Hussein** and **Osama Bin Laden**. These are the two names symbolizing the differences of judgements of the two candidates on the most crucial decisions on foreign policy.

The **rhythm** of these passages is more frantic compared with the previous debate. Mr Bush manages to control more the field, Mr Kerry run after. As for the language, this part is not dominated by any of the two candidates, ending with a substantial balance.

Words	Verbs	Actors	Sentences
Nuclear Threat War Weapons Dangerous Mass Destruction Allies Diplomacy Intelligence Sanctions Nations Mistake Faith Place Power Program Reason Report	Call Could Find Move Pushed Rushed Thought Trying Use Rid	Clinton Terrorists Iran Iraq Korea OsamaBinLaden SaddamHussein	<i>Saddam Hussein was a threat because he could have given weapons of mass destruction to terrorist enemies. sanctions were not working. the united nations was not effective at removing Saddam Hussein.</i> <i>and the Taliban is no longer in power, and Al Qaeda no longer has a place to plan. and i saw a unique threat in Saddam Hussein, as did my opponent, because we thought he had weapons of mass destruction.</i> <i>but Saddam Hussein was a unique threat. and the world is better off without him in power. and my opponent' s plans lead me to conclude that Saddam Hussein would still be in power, and the world would be more dangerous.</i> <i>he was trying to get rid of sanctions for a reason: he wanted to restart his weapons programs. we all thought there was weapons there, robin. my opponent thought there was weapons there. that' s why he called him a grave threat. I wasn't happy when we found out there wasn't weapons, and we've got an intelligence group together to figure out why.</i> <i>this president rushed to war, pushed our allies aside. and Iran now is more dangerous, and so is north Korea, with nuclear weapons. he took his eye off the ball, off of Osama Bin Laden. he didn't have weapons of mass destruction, Mr president. that was the objective. and if we' d used smart diplomacy, we could have saved..</i>

I wanted to give **Clinton** the **power** to use force if necessary. but I would have used that force wisely, I would have used that authority wisely, not **rushed** to war without a plan **to win** the peace.

now, everyone in the world knows that there were no **weapons of mass destruction**. that was the reason congress gave him the authority to use force, not after excuse to get rid of the regime.

the unique **threat** was that he could give **weapons of mass destruction** to an organization like Al Qaeda, and the harm they inflicted on us with airplanes would be multiplied greatly by **weapons of mass destruction**.

and secondly, it' s a fundamental misunderstanding to say that the war on terror is only **Osama Bin Laden**. the war on terror is to make sure that these **terrorist** organizations do not end up with **weapons of mass destruction**.

I would have brought our **allies** to our side. I would have fought to make certain our troops had everybody possible to help them win the mission.

we'll deny sanctuary to these **terrorists**. we'll make sure they do not end up with **weapons of mass destruction**. it' s the great nexus. the great threat to our country is that these haters end up with weapons of **mass destruction**. but our long term security depends on our deep **faith** in liberty