

Lexical Analysis of the Third Presidential Debate between George W. Bush and John Kerry (13th October 2004, Tempe, Arizona) – 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, 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 third and final presidential debate on domestic affairs.

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

The format of the final presidential debate is similar to the one of the first debate: no questions from the public and an anchorman, in this case Mr Schieffer of CBS News, as moderator among the two candidates.

The last debate is tuned on **domestic affairs**. The major areas of discussion are classified in the first and fifth lexical classes, who cover most of the significant sentences.

The first class is dominated by **ethical** and **moral issues**; the two candidates answer questions on homosexuality, civil rights, abortion and religion. The word *faith* is mentioned 18 times in the candidates' answers, the word *marriage* 15 times and *respect* 20 times.

Mr Kerry manages to dominate syntactically this first lexical class.

The other major lexical class covers the most conventional discussion on **economic** and **social issues**. The traditional divergences between conservatives and liberals clearly emerge; each candidate is willing to reiterate values and ideals of their parties and talk to their electorate.

President **Bush**

- defends his fiscal policy,
- reminds the period of recession he had to face during his presidency,
- accuses the opponent to make faint promises

Senator **Kerry**

- accuses the President to cut taxes only of the richest
- reminds the numbers of Americans who have lost the health insurance
- promises social reforms targeting middle class citizens.

The two most relevant topics of discussion are the **health system** (the word *health* is mentioned 52 times) and the **tax cuts** (the words *tax* and *taxes* compare jointly 50 times in the text)

None of the candidates is significantly associated to this class. Mr Kerry makes use of a more rich vocabulary covering a variety of issues while the President muses on the inconsistency of his opponent.

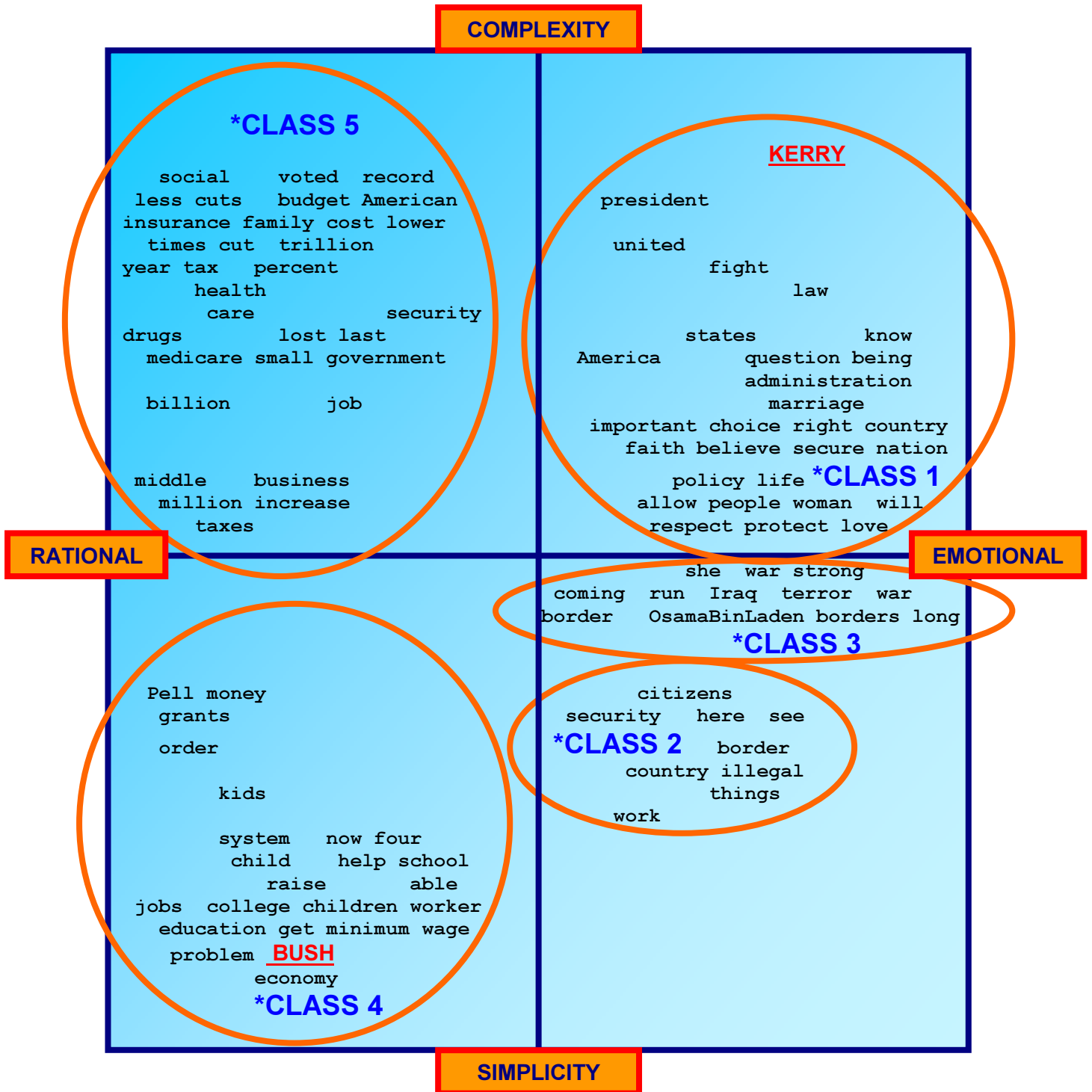
The question of **national security** takes the debate back to issues of foreign policy and war on terror, as happened in the previous debates.

Mr **Bush** is associated only to the fourth class of the factor plan. This minor class is related to the education issue, proposed by the President as a pragmatic plan to endorse the problems of increasing unemployment.

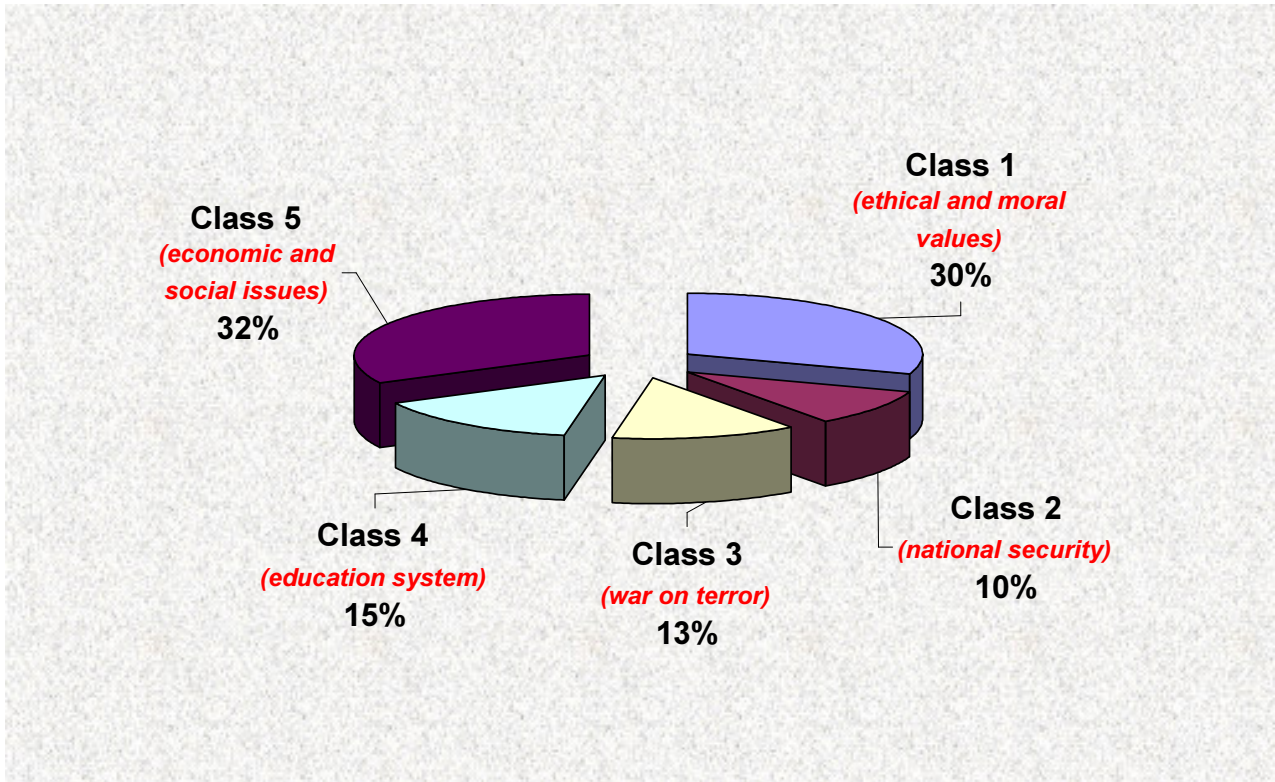
Factor Plan: Projection of Lexical Classes

Horizontal Axis: 1st Factor : V.P. =.2042 (32.48% inertia)

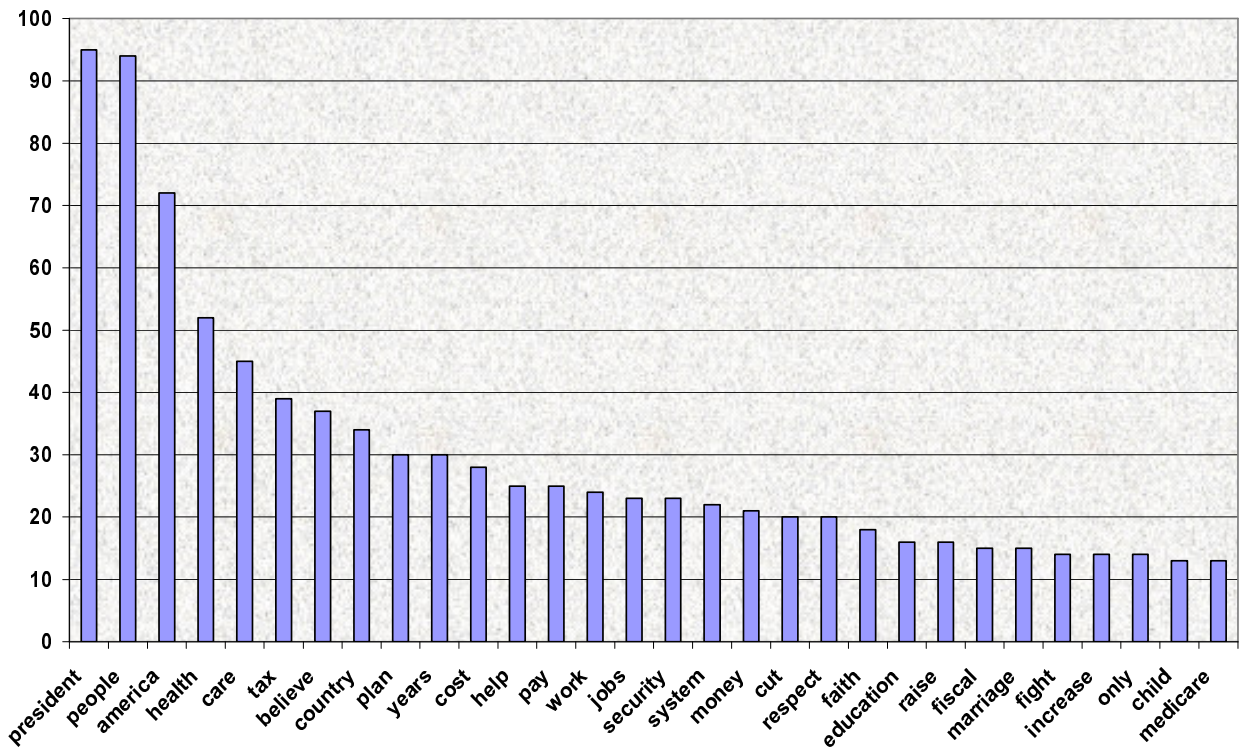
Vertical Axis: 2nd Factor : V.P. =.1718 (27.32% inertia)



Weight of Classes (number of meaningful sentences)



Frequency of the most meaningful words of the debate



Class 1: Ethical and moral values

The main thematic areas emerged during the analysis are:

- The attitude toward **homosexuality**,
- the views on **abortion**,
- the importance of **religion**

The first semantic class embraces the ethic sphere of the two leaders. The importance of **religion** is evident in both the contestants, however the role religion plays in shaping their beliefs in politics is quite different: Mr Bush underlines how religion is guiding and supporting his action, Mr Kerry suggests that personal faith should not be imposed legislatively to other people who don't share the same article of faith.

The question of **homosexuality** follows an expected pattern of arguments and language. Mr Kerry supporting the idea of natural condition (*I think if you were to talk to Dick Cheney's daughter, who is a lesbian, she would tell you that she's being who she was, she's being who she was born as*) and Mr Bush being more conservative (*as we respect someone's rights, and as we profess tolerance, we shouldn't change -- or have to change -- our basic views on the sanctity of marriage*). Both the candidates want to assure the American families clearly defining the marriage as an institution between a man and a woman.

When debating the question of **abortion**, the opposite views are even more palpable with the President against it and his opponent in favour. In this case words like *life* and *choice* symbolise the divergent approach to the issue.

These topics facilitate the candidates to express their personal feelings. Among the most characteristic repeated segments of text, personal statements beginning as *I think* or *I believe* are here exceptionally recurrent.

The most connotative terms of this class are *religion, god, love, life, catholic, faith*; other principles related to the traditional American values are *Constitution, freedom, law, rights*, while verbs like *share* and *respect* reinforce the idea of tolerance.

As for the variety of language, Mr Kerry manages to dominate this class.

Words	Verbs	Repeated segments	Sentences
America	Can	I think	<i>I think we have to respect that. the president and I share the belief that marriage is between a man and a woman. I believe that.</i>
Catholic	Allow	I will	
Choice	Be	I believe	<i>I believe marriage is between a man and a woman.</i>
Constitution	Believe		
Country	know	I was	<i>what is an article of faith for me is not something that I can legislate on somebody who doesn't share that article of faith. I believe that choice is a woman's choice. it's between a woman, god and her doctor.</i>
Decisions	pray		
Faith	protect		<i>just as I fought for our country as a young man, with the same passion I will fight to defend this nation that I love. and, with faith in god and with conviction in the mission of America, I believe that we can reach higher.</i>
Freedom	respect		
God	share		<i>I believe that god wants everybody to be free. that's what I believe. and that's been part of my foreign policy. in Afghanistan, I believe that the freedom there is a gift from the</i>
Important	will		
Law			
Life			
Love			
Marriage			
Nation			
Question			
Religion			
Rights			
Safe			
Secure			

Woman
world
Kennedy

almighty.

*It's important that we do that. and I also know in a free **society** people, consenting adults can live the way they want to live. and that's to be honoured. but as we respect someone's **rights**, and as we profess tolerance, we shouldn't change or have to change our basic views on the sanctity of **marriage**.*

*I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I think it's very important that we **protect marriage** as an institution, between a **man** and a **woman**. I proposed a constitutional amendment. the reason I did so was because I was worried that activist judges are actually defining the definition of marriage, and the surest way to protect marriage between a man and woman is to amend the constitution.*

*121 9 I **respect** their views. I completely respect their views. I am a **catholic**. and I grew up learning how to respect those views. but I disagree with them, as do many. I **believe** that I can't legislate or transfer to another American citizen my article of faith.*

128 9 that's why I fight against poverty. that's why I fight to clean up the environment and protect this earth. that's why I fight for equality and justice.

and god bless the united states of America.

my hope for America is a prosperous America, a hopeful America and a safer world

*I was an altar boy. I know that throughout my life this has made a difference to me. and as president **Kennedy** said when he ran for president, he said, I'm not running to be a **catholic president**.*

Class 2: National security

The main thematic area is:

- The **border** security

The national security issue is here treated as a domestic question. Are we secure in our homeland? Mr Kerry accuses President Bush of not doing all the needed to secure the borders, Mr Bush reminds his opponent supported an amnesty for illegal aliens. The question should be seen also as a human rights issue, Mr Kerry replies.

The class is quite small, in terms of number of meaningful sentences, and none of the two candidates seems to prevail.

Words	Verbs	Repeated segments	Sentences
Across Border Citizen Country Illegal Line People Policy Provide Security Time Work	Can Coming Could Going Say See Stand	across the border we have	<p><i>I don' t think we ought to reward illegal behaviour. there are plenty of people standing in line to become a citizen. and we ought not to crowd these people ahead of them in line.</i></p> <p><i>we' re not doing what we ought to do in terms of the technology. we have iris identification technology. we have thumbprint, fingerprint technology today. we can know who the people are, that they' re really the people they say they are when they cross the border. we could speed it up.</i></p> <p><i>the best way to take the pressure off our troops is to succeed in Iraq, is to train Iraqis so they can do the hard work of democracy, is to give them a chance to defend their country, which is precisely what we' re doing.</i></p> <p><i>it makes sure that the people coming across the border are humanely treated, that they' re not kept in the shadows of our society, that they' re able to go back and forth to see their families.</i></p> <p><i>I blame the president for the things the president could do that has an impact on it. outsourcing is going to happen. I've acknowledged that in union halls across the country.</i></p> <p><i>four thousand people a day are coming across the border. the fact is that we now have people from the middle east, allegedly, coming across the border.</i></p> <p><i>it' s a subject I'm very familiar with. after all, I was a border governor for a while. many people are coming to this country for economic reasons.</i></p> <p><i>we' re increasing the border security of the united states. we've got 1, 000 more border</i></p>

patrol agents on the southern border. we' re using new equipment. we' re using unmanned vehicles to spot people coming across. and we'll continue to do so over the next four years.

if they want to become a **citizen**, they can stand in line, too. and here is where my opponent and I differ. in September 2003, he supported amnesty for **illegal aliens**.

and we' re going to have a manufacturing jobs **credit** and a job hiring credit so we actually help **people** be able to hire here. the second thing that we can do is provide a **fair** trade playing field. this president didn't stand up for Boeing when airbus was violating international rules and subsidies.

I see it as a serious problem. I see it as a **security** issue, I see it as an **economic** issue, and I see it as a **human rights** issue.

Class 3: War on terror

The main thematic areas are:

- The **security** issue,
- the **war in Iraq**

The third semantic class is very close to the second class. The question of **national security** is linked to **foreign affairs** and predominantly to the Iraqi war. The state of emergency is the prevailing message behind the language used by the two contenders; they repeat most of the positions expressed in the two previous debates.

Mr Bush's strategy tries to link the question of national security to a clear success in Iraq, Mr Kerry points out once more a different view on the ways to fight the terrorists, reminding that the focus should have been Osama Bin Laden and not Iraq.

Like in the previous debates, this area is dominated by words like *strong, terror, war* and *Osama Bin Laden*.

Words	Verbs	Dominant actor	
Borders Iraq Plan Real She Strong Terror Texas War Words	did guess take tell think understand	Osama Bin Laden	<p><i>six months after he said Osama bin laden must be caught dead or alive, this president was asked, where is Osama bin laden? he said, I don't know. I don't really think about him very much. I'm not that concerned. we need a president who stays deadly focused on the real war on terror.</i></p> <p><i>he said he would work through a real alliance. he said in Cincinnati we would plan carefully, we would take every precaution. well, we didn't. and the result is our forces today are overextended. the fact is that he did not choose to go to war as a last result.</i></p> <p><i>well, to say that the borders are not as protected as they were prior to September the 11th shows he doesn't know the borders. they're much better protected today than they were when I was the governor of Texas. we have much more manpower and much more equipment there.</i></p> <p><i>with respect to immigration reform, the president broke his promise on immigration reform. he said he would reform it. four years later he is now promising another plan. here's what I'll do: number one, the borders are more leaking today than they were before 9/11.</i></p> <p><i>gosh, I just don't think I ever said I'm not worried about Osama bin laden. it's kind of one of those exaggerations. of course we're worried about Osama bin laden. we're on the hunt after Osama bin laden. we're using every asset at our disposal to get Osama bin laden.</i></p> <p><i>yes. when the president had an opportunity to capture or kill Osama Bin Laden, he took his focus off of them, outsourced the job to afghan warlords, and Osama bin laden escaped.</i></p>

Class 4: Education system

The main thematic areas are:

- The **economic** situation,
- the **education** reform

This class is semantically dominated by President **Bush**, who answers most of the questions about economy tuning his speeches on the role of **education**. This is what the President wants to stress: to grow the economy and create jobs we need excellence in our education system and that is our reform (*perhaps the best way to keep jobs here in America and to keep this economy growing is to make sure our education system works*).

The link between education and words like *jobs, diploma, spending, economy* and, at less extend *productive* and *competitive*, shows the idea of the President of increasing individual opportunities without intervening with public policies. The strategy works in dominating the language, also in few cases the President's answers differ from the questions.

Words	Verbs	Repeated segments	Sentences
Problem	Able	education system	<i>he talked about children whose parents don't speak English as a first language? absolutely we've got to make sure they get educated.</i>
Act	Continue	no child left behind Act	<i>and that's what the no child left behind act does</i>
Behind	Get		
Century	Grow	over the next four years	
Child	Help		
Children	Make		<i>I'd say, bob, I've got policies to continue to grow our economy and create the jobs of the 21st century. and here's some help for you to go get an education.</i>
College	Move		
Community	Raise		
Difference	Realise		
Early	Solve		
Economy			<i>to continue to expand pell grants to make sure that people have an opportunity to start their career with a college diploma</i>
Education			
Gap			
Grants			
Jobs			<i>I remember a lady in Houston, Texas, told me, reading is the new civil right, and she's right. in order to make sure people have jobs for the 21st century, we've got to get it right in the education system, and we're beginning to close a minority achievement gap now.</i>
Kids			
Measure			
School			
Spending			
Standards			
System			<i>we reformed our school system, and now there's an achievement gap in America that's beginning to close. over the next four years, we'll continue to insist on excellence in every classroom in America so that our children have a chance to realise the great promise of America.</i>
			<i>no, education is how to help the person who's lost a job. education is how to make sure we've got a workforce that's productive and competitive.</i>
			<i>I went to Washington to solve problems. and I saw a problem in the public education system in America. they were just shuffling too many kids through the system, year after year, grade after grade, without learning the basics.</i>

Class 5: Economic and social issues

The main thematic areas are:

- The **health care**,
- the **tax cuts**.

This is the most relevant class, in terms of number of significant sentences in the debate, together with the first class on ethical and moral issues. This is the core of **domestic affairs** political platforms and where the two candidates vary more as for their policies, views and ideals.

The traditional axes of conservatives and liberals are proposed in the debate. *Health care, health insurance and social security* on one side and *small business and tax cuts* on the other. Mr **Kerry** lists all the failures of the current presidential administration and its damaging consequences on the American families (*five million Americans have lost their health insurance in this country*); Mr **Bush** concentrates his messages in the inconsistency of his opponent, promising things he is not going to realise (*he voted to increase taxes 98 times*).

Both the candidates talk directly to their traditional electorate but also to the important bulk of undecided voters. The statements targeting the **middle class** take an important part of the final presidential debate.

The fifth class is characterised by words related to the economic and social issues discussed: the **health care** with *drugs, cost, medicare, insurance, prescription* and the **fiscal system** with *tax cuts, middle class, budget, business, income*.

None of the candidates clearly prevailed on the opponent, even though Mr **kerry** manages to introduce more favourable topics in the agenda of the debate.

Words	Verbs	Repeated segments	Sentences
American Cost Benefits Billion Budget Business Care Middle class Cuts Drugs Family Government Health Income Insurance Less Lower Medicare Million Prescription Programs Relief Social Tax Taxes Workers	Cut Increase	health care health insurance tax cut social security small business tax relief tax cuts Pell grants	<p><i>the take home pay of a typical American family as a share of national income is lower than it' s been since 1929. and the take home pay of the richest. 1 percent of Americans is the highest it' s been since 1928. under president bush, the middle class has seen their tax burden go up and the wealthiest' s tax burden has gone down.</i></p> <p><i>and what the president said about the tax cuts has been wiped out by the increase in health care, the increase in gasoline, the increase in tuitions, the increase in prescription drugs.</i></p> <p><i>five million Americans have lost their health insurance in this country.</i></p> <p><i>my opponent talks about fiscal sanity. his record in the united states senate does not match his rhetoric. he voted to increase taxes 98 times and to bust the budget 277 times.</i></p> <p><i>the president blocked you from the right to have less expensive drugs from Canada. we also wanted medicare to be able to negotiate bulk purchasing. the va does that. the va provides lower cost drugs to our veterans. we could have done that in medicare. medicare is paid for by the american taxpayer.</i></p> <p><i>he talks about being a fiscal conservative, or fiscally sound, but he voted over he voted 277 times to waive the budget caps, which would have cost the taxpayers</i></p>

***medicare** premiums went up 17 percent a few days ago; prescription drugs are up 12 percent a year. but guess what, America? the wages of Americans have gone down.*

*this really underscores the problem with the American **health care system**. it's not working for the American family. and it's gotten worse under president bush over the course of the last years.*

*he forgot to tell you he voted to **tax social security benefits** more than one time. I didn't hear any plan to fix **social security**. I heard more of the same. he talks about **middle class tax cuts**. that's exactly where the tax cuts **went**. most of the tax cuts went to low and **middle income Americans**.*

*I think it's important, since he talked about the **medicare** plan, has he been in the united states senate for 20 years? he has no record on reforming of **health care**. no record at all. he introduced some 300 bills and he's passed five. no record of leadership.*