Discourse Analysis:
Political Propaganda in the United States Media

"Reality has a well-known liberal bias”
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0. Introduction

Political propaganda is not a new phenomenon. Yet, studying it is interesting because such a study provides us with insights into society, about public discourse and into the formation of opinions. The above claim is congruent with the following definition of ‘propaganda’:

*Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.* ¹

In some senses, this definition is too restrictive: it transforms all popularizing and media-oriented discourses into propaganda, thus making it impossible for us to distinguish different kinds of propaganda from each other. For instance, one can make propaganda for a scientific way of thinking, or about the virtues of democracy without being guilty of manipulating the cognitions of people. Such propaganda would merely popularize some ideas, making them more accessible to people. In this sense, when I use the word ‘propaganda’, I should like to use it with this caveat that I speak only of those kinds of propaganda that satisfy the above definition, while allowing for the existence of other kinds of propaganda as well.

This paper focuses on the question of how exactly this kind of propaganda is done, that is, which linguistic devices do the propagandists use and have at their disposal in order to ‘shape perceptions’ and ‘manipulate cognitions’? I look at the United States from the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 to the present.

I am interested in international politics and US foreign policy. It is my assumption that without a broad approval and acceptance of the American people, the invasion of Iraq could not have occurred. Not only this but there is also the fact that the American people chose to reelect the man who sent them to war, after the real motivations had become clear, almost two years after the invasion. That is when I started asking myself the questions about how the war had become possible and how it could continue to count on broad public support. How was it

possible that the president (a ‘war president’) who began a war could be reelected largely on that basis alone? These questions pushed me in the direction of studying the national discourse in the media, i.e. into a study of the tone of the public debates and an analysis of the ways in which issues are framed and opinions are formed. During the 2004 US presidential election campaign, a website (MediaMatters.org), which is also the source of my data, was founded. This website provided me with a means to answer my questions. It also helped me see how the public opinion was shaped to support and sustain the war; better put, to ‘stay the course’ – a very frequent phrase used by many republicans during the 2006 midterm election campaign, in which the Houses of Congress, i.e. the Senate and House of Representatives, stood for reelection. This site documents what they term ‘conservative misinformation’, which, in my eyes, comes down to political propaganda to further the cause of the conservatives, especially that of George Bush. I will talk more about this website later on in this paper.

Therefore, this paper is not meant as just a linguistic analysis of data about the mechanics of political propaganda. The excerpts that I present are not chosen merely because they are suitable units of analysis, but also, and much more importantly, because those media figures who uttered these words reached and continue to reach a broad public in the United States and thus help shape the national debate. If this was not the case, I would feel no inclination to analyze their discourse; linguistic analysis, from my point of view, should be, where possible, relevant to the society about which it talks. This should be borne in mind regarding every single excerpt I have chosen. To emphasize this point, I would like to refer to a recently published book: ‘What Happened?’ by Scott McClellan, who was the White House Press Secretary from 2003 to 2006. In this book, he describes the political climate in Washington which he characterizes as a ‘permanent campaign culture’ and discusses how destructive it can be to adopt this attitude while making policy. In order for such an attitude to work, one needs a media which channels this message and this attitude. In his book, he also criticizes the media for not asking tough questions about Iraq. This does not necessarily mean that the media takes its cues from the White House, even though there are news outlets, especially Fox News, which have often been criticized of doing exactly that. However, what should become clear from this paper is that the tone of discourse and debate is poisoned to such a degree that real discussion of serious issues often becomes impossible, at least on a national level, and that this serves the purpose of the White House. In this context, consider a very telling passage from McClellan’s book:
Their [the media’s] primary focus would be on covering the campaign to sell the war, rather than aggressively questioning the rationale for war or pursuing the truth behind it. ... The media would neglect their watchdog role, focusing less on truth and accuracy and more on whether the campaign was succeeding.²

Finally, there is the question of my methodology, i.e. what criteria were used to select my data and whether these are justifiable. The data I use is extremely limited, especially when one considers the vast amount of available data. My main criterion for choosing the data was not any specific timeframe or topic, but my personal reaction to the excerpt, namely that of disbelief and shock that the subject actually uttered these words. In other words, the common theme behind the selection of the data is the combination of shocking audio and video fragments with the knowledge that those who speak these words are popular, influential voices in the US media.

This criterion might appear hopelessly subjective. While pleading guilty to the charge of subjectivity, I should like to present a few considerations as to why it is not ‘hopelessly’ so and that, despite being subjective, my selection has some inter-subjective validity as well. In the first place, my shock and disbelief are cognitive in nature: the shock arising from the fact that reasonable and influential people could at all make such statements; the disbelief that not only have they done so but also that they are taken seriously by other reasonable people as well. In other words, I am working with a semi-normative idea (which I am unable to make explicit) about what it is to be a reasonable person in issues concerning public policy. This notion allows for people with different political persuasions to have differing reactions, while, nevertheless, circumscribing these within the bounds of reason. In the second place, my criterion places a higher burden of reasonableness upon those who are influential public figures. While one could ‘overlook’ an ordinary person on the street acting unreasonably, such latitude is not available to those who influence public opinion. By virtue of their function and position, they also incur a greater obligation to be reasonable when it involves issues of importance to the polity. What hope is there for a culture and a civilization when its public figures act as though they are bereft of all reason? Finally, when I played these fragments in my surroundings (family, friends, social circles), their reactions also paralleled mine: shock and disbelief that apparently intelligent and influential people could make such statements.

That is to say, my reactions were also inter-subjectively grounded. It is my hope and belief that the reader of this work will also experience same incredulity that I experienced.

It should also be noted that I do not aim or claim to provide a full, balanced and accurate picture of the media landscape in the United States. As said before, this paper aims to provide the reader with an idea of what the tone of the national discourse is and how some issues are framed. For this reason, it would be interesting to consider the Belgian example of Yves Leterme, because this example, in my opinion, has features very similar to my data.

1. Theoretical debate

1.1 Introduction

Before considering and analyzing the data, I need to establish a theoretical backdrop. To do so, I will attempt to define and delineate certain linguistic concepts and the way they are related to each other. These concepts are: context, presuppositions, ideology and reference.

On each of these concepts, the literature is immense: philosophers of language, linguists, logicians, sociologists (of language and knowledge), psycholinguists, communication theorists, etc have all authored multiple writings on these issues. Given the limitations of time and knowledge, it would be impossible for me even to provide a passable overview of the literature on all these notions. Besides, it is also not the aim of this work to provide a status questionis of the exisntant literature on the subject. Consequently, in consultation with the promoter of this thesis and on his advice, I have limited my choice to that set of writings which help me in an analysis of political propaganda. Thus, apart from classical writings on the subject (like Grice, for example), my reading is restricted to the pragmatics of language-use. Even here, I shall confine myself to mentioning only those authors whose ideas I use in the course of this thesis. While this situation is indeed unfortunate, I see no other way of completing the task I have set for myself within the given timeframe.
1.2 Context

While discussing the notion of contexts, we are confronted with different kinds of questions. At one end of the spectrum we have questions like ‘what is context?’ and ‘what is relevant context?’ At the other end, we face questions like ‘when have I given enough context?’ and ‘where does the relevant context begin and end?’ Situated between these two ends are many other questions that makes Hanks suggest, in his aptly titled chapter ‘Saturation by Context’:

What is context? Everything and nothing. Like a shadow, it flees from those who pursue it, evading the levels and categories of theory, and pursues those who try to flee from it, insinuating itself as the unnoticed ground upon which even the most explicit statements depend. ³

True, but hardly useful in my context and for my purposes! Not so with Jef Verschueren (1999: Understanding Pragmatics, p. 75-114) when he asks questions about the nature of contexts and seeks to identify their ingredients. On the basis of answers to these questions he tries to delineate the notion of a relevant context and identifies the various ingredients in a communicative context. There are two focal partners, the utterer (U) and the interpreter (I), each of whom has access to production and interpretation choices respectively. Both U and I also draw meaning from three different worlds. The first is the physical world, of which temporal and spatial deixis (the ‘now’ and the ‘here’) are the most visible ways of ‘anchoring language choices in the physical world’. Second, there is the mental world, which contains the cognitive and emotive elements of the participants. The former are about the way participants conceptualize their social interactions, whereas the latter are the ‘attitudinal prerequisites for engaging in, sustaining and colouring interaction’. Finally, the social world basically refers to person deixis, yet is not restricted to just that, as Verschueren explains:

Even where the identification of utterer and interpreter is concerned, the aspects of social deixis that we labelled attitudinal deixis get involved, affecting forms of address, (in many languages) pronouns choices and the like. Elements of social structure, moreover, not only affect deictic choices but also matters of style and content. ⁴

The channel between U and I is the linguistic context, which involves contextual cohesion, intertextuality and sequencing. For the purposes of this essay, I will not consider the latter two, as they have little relevance to the data of this paper. It is important to note that contextual cohesion involves the overt marking of relations within a text or discourse. This can be done with many different kinds of markers of cohesion.

In one of his preliminary remarks, before discussing the ingredients in detail, Verschueren makes an important point:

_Utterer and interpreter are presented as focal points because the contextual aspects of the physical, social and mental worlds (which are not strictly to be separated either – hence the broken lines) do not usually start to play a role in language use until they have somehow been activated by the language users’ cognitive processes._

However, this activation may pose a problem, namely that of the delineation of the context, or as Verschueren puts it, the ‘unboundedness of context’. If the context is seen as a reality that is ‘out there’, then everything becomes the context. Verschueren explains why this is not the case:

_Though in principle every possible ingredient of a speech event can show up as a contextually relevant element to be taken into account, not all those ingredients are relevantly mobilized on every occasion. In other words, out of a virtually infinite range of possibilities, contexts are created by the dynamics of interaction between utterers and interpreters in relation to what is (or is thought to be) ‘out there’. _

What is or thought to be ‘out there’? What are the elements that go into a selection of relevant features that, together, constitute the world? Stephen Levinson, in his _Pragmatics_ and following the lead of the linguist Lyons, talks about “the selection of just those features that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation of utterances” in the following way:

_(i) knowledge of role and status (where role covers both role in the speech event, as speaker or addressee, and social role, and status covers notions of relative social standing),_

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5 Ibidem, p.77.
(ii) knowledge of spatial and temporal location, (iii) knowledge of formality level, (iv) knowledge of the medium (roughly the code and style appropriate to a channel, like the distinction between written and spoken varieties of a language), (v) knowledge of appropriate subject matter, (vi) knowledge of appropriate province (or domain determining the register of a language).\(^7\)

Levinson adds that one needs to include the participant’s beliefs about these parameters, as well as the place of the utterance within the sequence of utterances. This seems to be closely related to what Verschueren calls the ‘mental world’.

However, Levinson points out that we do not have a theory which allows us to predict the relevance of all features in a certain context; the most that these parameters do is to reduce the vagueness of the concept of pragmatic context.

In *Meaning in Interaction*, Jenny Thomas\(^8\) argues that meaning is constructed dynamically between speaker and hearer, as well as the context of an utterance (by which she means physical, social and linguistic context) and the meaning potential. For the purposes of this paper, I confine myself to the hearer meaning, i.e. the way hearer makes sense of an utterance. Thomas speaks of two processes, namely, ‘assigning sense in a context’ and ‘assigning reference in a context’. The first process is about the meaning of words in a context: speakers do not provide the meaning of words they use; they assume these as understood. However, this is not enough to make sense of an utterance. The second involves determining who or what is being referred to. Even when it is possible to understand the meaning of the words uttered by the speaker, one still needs to know who or what that person is talking about. Without fixing reference, meaning cannot be generated.

### 1.3 Reference

However, what does it mean to fix or establish the reference of a word or a sentence? In the first place, it involves some kind of activity: both the utterer and the interpreter need to perform a cognitive or linguistic act, often jointly, as Verschueren notes:

Referring, or establishing reference is already an action, often accomplished interactively. A great deal of energy is spent in verbal interaction, even if unwittingly, in making sure or trying to negotiate what it is that one is talking about. ... [T]he same form can have many different referents, whilst the same referent may be pointed at by means of different referents.\(^9\)

Levinson suggests that the notion of a ‘topic’ can also be characterized in terms of reference. As he puts it:

*A and B are talking about the same topic if they are talking about the same things or sets of reference. However, topical coherence cannot be thought of as residing in some independently calculable procedure for ascertaining shared reference across utterances. Rather, topical coherence is something constructed across turns by the collaboration of participants.\(^{10}\)*

If this is the case regarding reference, then ‘context’ also can be thought of as a something constructed by participants, rather than just being ‘out there’.

Secondly, it involves seeing individual objects in the world as those belonging to certain kinds. For instance, the ability to identify a specific truck as an instance either of ‘vehicles’ or of ‘trucks’ requires the ability to organize our knowledge (including common-sense knowledge) in terms of kinds. Hanks calls this ‘typification’:

*To understand objects as being of certain kinds, as is characteristic of common-sense knowledge, is to typify them. The stock of knowledge is organized into types. Without it, there would be no prefabricated structures with which to derive socially viable understandings. ... Language is the typifying medium par excellence.\(^{11}\)*

However, not all ‘types’ (or kinds) are easy to identify. Consider, as an example, the problem of fixing the reference of abstract notions like ‘justice’, ‘exploitation’ or even, a point relevant to this thesis, ‘democracy’. As Verscheuren notes:

\(^9\) Verschueren, p.127.
\(^{10}\) Levinson, p. 313-314.
\(^{11}\) Hanks, p. 130-131.
At a more fundamental level, some referents may simply be very difficult to identify, or it may be useful to promote one type of identification over another. This is not only the case with abstract notions, such as democracy, which may require an entire conversation to reach the point where the term can simply be used in a mutually comprehensible way. Even the identity of concrete objects is negotiable, and this negotiability may be the prerequisite for any further interaction to take place.\(^\text{12}\) (p. 127)

In other words, fixing the reference goes beyond providing homonyms and synonyms. Often, a successful fixing of reference not only requires a shared context but also a shared set of presuppositions. What are presuppositions?

### 1.4 Presupposition

For Levinson, presupposition is a kind of pragmatic inference that cannot be thought of as semantic in the narrow sense. That is, he does not see it as an act that is solely based on the actual linguistic structure of sentences. However, they remain tied to words or, better put, to aspects of the surface structure of language. Levinson calls linguistic items that generate these presuppositions presupposition-triggers. It would be useful to provide illustrations from his detailed, although selected and therefore limited, list of such words.

1. **Definite descriptions:**
   \(\text{John saw/didn’t see the man with two heads.}\)
   \(\Rightarrow\) there exists a man with two heads.
2. **Factive verbs**
   \(\text{John realized/didn’t realize that he was in debt.}\)
   \(\Rightarrow\) John was in debt.
3. **Implicative verbs**
   \(\text{John managed/didn’t manage to open the door.}\)
   \(\Rightarrow\) John tried to open the door.
4. **Change of state verbs**
   \(\text{John stopped/didn’t stop beating his wife.}\)
   \(\Rightarrow\) John had been beating his wife.
5. **Iteratives**

\(^\text{12}\) Verschueren, p. 127.
The flying saucer came/didn’t come again.
>> The flying saucer came before.

6. Temporal clauses

Since Churchill died, we’ve lacked/we haven’t lacked a leader
>> Churchill died.

7. Comparisons and contrasts

Carol is/isn’t a better linguist than Barbara.
>> Barbara is a linguist.

8. Questions

Who is the professor of linguistics at MIT?
>> Someone is the professor of linguistics at MIT.\textsuperscript{13}

Even if presuppositions are seen as inferences that are not purely semantic in nature, it is undeniable that they do have a clear semantic content. That is how Verschueren approaches this notion. In the context of covering implicit meaning, he uses the term ‘presupposition’ as a carrier of implicit meaning. It is seen as a tool for linking explicit content to relevant aspects of background information.

There are several kinds of presuppositions. The first, and most straightforward one, is existential presupposition. These kinds of presuppositions “all presuppose the existence, at a given place and/or time, of entities in a ‘real’ world, be it a town, a historically situated and labelled time span, or a person.” (p. 27) In other words, in saying something, one presupposes the existence of what one is talking about. There is a reason why Verscheuren uses scare quotes around the word ‘real’. As was made clear above, ‘reality’ refers to what the utterer (U) and the interpreter (I) take to be the world they are talking about. For instance, imagine a conversation (held, say, by the members of The Sherlock Holmes Society) where one discusses whether or not the famed detective ever really said, “Elementary, My dear Watson”. Such a discussion does make the existential presupposition that the two fictitious characters (Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson) lived in London and that the detective was addicted to Cocaine and such like. However, they do not hold that these characters existed in their world but ‘in the world that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created’. In this sense, in the context of their discussion, they are talking about a ‘real’ world too even if it is not the same as the real world in which they live.

\textsuperscript{13} Levinson, p. 181-184.
A second type of presupposition is what Verschueren\textsuperscript{14} calls logical implications, entailments or conventional implicature, which are arrived at through the process of pragmatic inference.

1.5 Ideology

Consider the point that was made earlier on about fixing the reference of abstract notions like ‘democracy’. It involves a difficulty of identifying democracy in such a way that it can be used in a mutually comprehensible manner. This touches upon one of the essential points of this thesis, namely the fact that such and other loaded words are often used without being truly mutually comprehensible. In fact and one can even go so far as to state that, often, people who use these words do not really know what they are referring to, but use it merely to provoke a strong emotional reaction in their audience. In effect, this mechanism can be closely tied to what is called ‘ideology’, which, following Verscheuren, can be defined as follows:

\begin{quote}
Any constellation of fundamental or commonsensical, and often normative, beliefs and ideas related to some aspect(s) of (social) ‘reality’. The commonsense nature of the beliefs and ideas is manifested in the fact that they are rarely questioned. ... Their not being questioned means that the beliefs and ideas are often carried along implicitly.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

This definition is very useful in the sense that, in the data I use, the premises are often not questioned at all. Instead, they are simply assumed as factual and true. The greatest cognitive dissonance takes place at this point because, if one debates with someone who assumes without any hesitation or doubt that he has his facts right, one is invariably portrayed as someone who denies truth.

Hanks identifies ideology as a dimension of communicative practice, along with activity and formal structure. Ideology is seen as the actors’ evaluations of language (formal structure) and communicative activities (activity):

\textsuperscript{14} Verschueren, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibidem, p. 238.
These evaluations could be called ideological in the sense of embodying broader values, beliefs and (sometimes) self-legitimating attitudes... They are part of what organizes agents’ own actions and their understanding of others’ actions.\textsuperscript{16}

In my analysis, I will make use of both these definitions, because they make very relevant points that are easily recognizable in my data. At this point, I would simply like to emphasize that ideology organizes how one acts and how one understands other people’s actions and thoughts, irrespective of whether that person truly intended a particular meaning.

2. Introductory example

2.1 General

Before focusing on the actual data from the United States, let us consider the following utterance made by Yves Leterme in an interview to the newspaper Het Belang van Limburg:

\textit{De RTBF als propagandazender van Joëlle Milquet. De RTBF is een zender met een eigen politieke agenda, een relict uit het verleden. Weten jullie hoe men de RTBF ook wel eens noemt? Neen? Radio Mille Collines.}

\textit{The RTBF as a propaganda channel of Joëlle Milquet. The RTBF is a channel with their own political agenda, a relic from the past. Do you know how people sometimes also call the RTBF? No? Radio Mille Collines.\textsuperscript{17} (Yves Leterme, 9/12/2007)}

Public figures, by virtue of their function and position in society, have a higher burden of reasonableness. I chose this excerpt because, like the data I will analyze, this utterance fails to live up to that standard and it is rather shocking to hear such things being said by someone in his position. This is not merely my personal response to the utterance, but also the response by various domestic and foreign dignitaries who heard this, and is therefore also inter-subjectively grounded. Let us look at the above utterance closely.

\textsuperscript{16} Hanks, p.230.
\textsuperscript{17} \url{http://www.standaard.be/Artikel/Detail.aspx?artikelId=R81L6SG6&word=yves+leterme+rtbf}. Personal translation to English.
2.2 In detail

2.2.1 Context

First of all, there is the question of context and relevant context. What kind of contextual information is needed in order to understand and interpret the utterance? It is here that the problem of delineation clearly manifests itself. For a Belgian closely following the media and who is immersed in the context does not feel the need for an explanation about all the details surrounding the political climate and situation, and what ‘Mille Collines’ refers to in this excerpt. Yet, is one obliged to make this clear to someone completely unfamiliar with the situation in order to make sense of the comment. We face this problem in its generality when analyzing the data in this thesis. I would suggest that there are layers of understanding context, and therefore excerpts and comments can be understood and analyzed without being fully immersed in the subject matter.

Turning to the example with Leterme, the context is one of political crisis and an increasing polarization and mistrust between the two major parts of the country. One can go deeper into the sketching of the social, political, historical and cultural context; yet, one is faced with the question about the extent to which all of these are absolutely relevant to the excerpt. In my data from the United States, I will simply try to confine myself to situating the specific media figures within the domain of the national discourse.

2.2.2 Reference

A second, more pressing question is establishing reference. As I mentioned already, even when one understands the words being uttered, if the reference is not fixed, meaning cannot be generated. For my data, even the process of fixing reference can become problematic. Verschueren noted that this involves negotiating what one is talking about, as meaning generated through reference is accomplished interactively.

In Leterme’s example however, fixing reference is not problematic. It does become clear how crucial establishing reference is to understanding the meaning of the utterance. One needs to know what RTBF and Radio Mille Collines refer to; otherwise one cannot make
sense of the comment. In our data from the US, references will be made at times to organizations or people who are not or hardly known by people in our context.

For Leterme’s comment, one can say the following: The RTBF refers to Radio-Télévision belge de la Communauté française, or simply put, the Walloon public broadcasting channel. Radio Mille Collines refers to a Rwandese radio channel in the early nineties which called for the extermination of all Tutsi’s, and which played a role in the Tutsi genocide of 1994. Finally, Joëlle Milquet is a Walloon politician of the political party CDH, involved in the formation of a new government after the June 2007 election in Belgium.

### 2.2.3 Presuppositions

As I noted in the introduction, the successful fixing of reference not only requires a shared context but also a shared set of presuppositions. Levinson noted that linguistic items generate presuppositions, and provided a list of how words can perform such a function. Verschueren then further structures the types of presuppositions available, namely purely existential presuppositions, and entailments.

#### 2.2.3.1 Existential presuppositions

For this particular utterance, I will try to extract as many existential presuppositions as I can. However, it seems to me that doing so for the large chunks of data that I have would be superfluous, especially within the confines of this thesis. The existential presuppositions contained in Leterme’s comment are roughly the following.

First of all, the RTBF is a broadcasting channel. Second, Joëlle Milquet is a Walloon politician. Third, Radio Mille Collines was a radio channel. Fourth, a broadcasting channel can have a political agenda. Finally, there are other people with an opinion about the RTBF.

#### 2.2.3.2 Entailments

The second part of extracting presuppositions from an utterance involves looking at the entailments. These are the entailments I have identified in Leterme’s comment: First of
all, the political agenda of the RTBF is a relic from the past. Secondly, there are two communities at play, which are divided from one another. These two communities logically also have different interests to defend. A further entailment from Leterme’s comment is then, that Belgium has become an umbrella term for two communities without having any real meaning anymore. Since Radio Mille Collines incited hatred between two communities, and the RTBF is compared to this radio channel, another entailment is that the RTBF is causing (increased) fear, enmity, etc. between these two communities. Therefore, what the RTBF is doing is morally unacceptable.

2.2.4 Ideology

The last step of the theoretical analysis is ideology. At this point, the central question of my thesis, namely, which linguistic devices are used to shape perceptions and manipulate cognitions becomes important. How does ideology function within this comment of Leterme?

I would suggest that it functions in the following way: Leterme puts a certain moral weight on a social or societal reality that he believes is there; in this case, he believes there two different communities with different interests to defend. He then proceeds to describe this difference with reference to an event in the past which he (and everybody else hopefully) sees as immoral.

This ‘hope’ is far from unique, especially considering the data I am analyzing. I would even suggest that in my data, the speakers go so far as to force one to take sides, either to be with the speaker or against him (which is deemed immoral), something Leterme does not do. In other words, ideology allows someone to describe something in a particular way, and attach moral weight to that description.

3. General introduction to the data

3.1 Source of the data

Here in Belgium, we do not have access to local American news channels. Even a television channel like CNN is not the same here as it is in the United States. My data therefore, does not come directly from the television and radio channels, rather from an
American website which tapes these audio and video excerpts, and posts them on their website.

I would like to make two important remarks concerning my source. The first is that this website selects their excerpts from the data available to them, which means that my data is a selection of a bigger selection. In other words, in the collection of my data, I am confined to a selection already made by someone else.

As to the website itself, it is called Media Matters for America (often shortened to MMFA). This is their stated goal, as defined on their website:

*Media Matters for America is a Web-based, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media.*

When trying to characterize the national discourse based on fragments taken from this website, one’s overview will inevitably be rather skewed. Not only does MMFA focus on a particular kind of ‘misinformation’, as they term it, (meaning certain media personalities are never, or hardly ever mentioned) but one also has the impression that the people they do mention always talk in that particular way (this is especially relevant when dealing with someone like Michael Savage, whom I will talk more about in the following chapter).

A second point is that, as will be evident from the data, my source’s legitimacy and accurateness is questioned (often in very colorful terms). I doubt that the media figures whose discourse I will be analyzing would approve of me using this website as a source for a scientific research paper. Since it is their discourse I am analyzing, the question could be raised whether I am justified in using a controversial source without questioning its accuracy. I believe I am; I think that the data is accurate and correct. I will talk more about this in the following section.

Furthermore, both monologues and dialogues (i.e. interviews) will be considered. For monologues, it is obvious who I am analyzing; for the interviews, I will primarily focus on the interviewer. I choose the fragments based on the rhetoric of the media figures, which

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18 Quote from: http://mediamatters.org/about_us/
obviously includes ways of framing questions and attitudes towards their guests. Although the guests themselves are often very interesting in their own right, they are not the primary focus of this paper.

3.2 General contextualization of the data

3.2.1 Differences in public discourse

Even though I have been following the US media landscape for some time, I am no expert in this area and certainly not in American culture. I would like to provide a few remarks and highlight some differences between these two contexts (ours and the US), based on what experience I have with the data. This section will serve as an opener, as something that provides a more general contextualization, after which I will briefly discuss the background of the separate excerpts, and analyze the excerpts themselves.

One of the most obvious and noticeable differences between our public discourse and the one in the US is about the role of the journalists: they act both as reporters of the news and as pundits and commentators on the news. I have often heard people argue that the journalists in the US have, by and large, even neglected their role of reporting the news and asking tough questions, and instead prefer just to comment on the news. Often these comments have very little in terms of their news value; instead, they focus on non-issues, made-up scandals, trivia and infotainment. Examples of these, which have dominated the news in the past, are a 500 dollar haircut of former Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards, the absence of an American flag pin on his colleague Barack Obama, or the so-called ‘hysterical’ laughter and the cleavage of Hillary Clinton.

The second noticeable difference involves the popularity of talk show radio. All the media figures that I discuss have their own talk shows as radio programs. In fact, because of the fact media figures assume the role of both reporters and commentators they create their own celebrity status. I suppose the reason for this lies in American culture, but I am no expert in this field and researching this phenomenon does not directly pertain to the topic of this paper, so I just leave it as a remark without exploring its roots.
A third general comment I would like to make about all of the media figures analyzed, is their striving to be seen as independent of political affiliations. They do not mind telling their audience that they are more conservative or liberal on some issues, but they will avoid continuously endorsing one political figure or party, in order not to be accused of being biased and therefore trying to establish the fact that they are a credible source of information and opinion.

My fourth remark, though it does not show itself directly from the data, is that there is a large amount of self-reflexivity among the US media about its own reporting of issues. Quite often the media do not discuss important political issues, but rather their own or someone else’s reporting of a particular issue, often charging that it is biased or prejudiced in some way. This is why I found Leterme’s comment so particularly striking, because it deals with exactly this topic, namely supposed political affiliation of an important news outlet. In my experience, this particular argument is rarely made here; I have only heard Vlaams Belang make this point consistently. It certainly is not an integral part of the political discourse in our country.

3.2.2 “Reality has a well-known liberal bias”

The subtitle of my thesis is this sentence, which was uttered by the famous and popular comedian and political satirist Stephen Colbert, during his legendary and scathing comedy routine in the 2006 White House Correspondent’s Dinner. It was made in front of President Bush and thousands of V.I.P.’s, legislators and members of the media. In my opinion, it captures the core of what political debate is about in the United States and fits very nicely with the content of this thesis.

As mentioned above, the source of my data is not undisputed, its accurateness is questioned and charges of bias are often leveled against it. Yet I use it without any reservations, because the data being offered is simply factual. Unless the media figures contend that the data available has been altered or forged in some way, which they do not do, then they are simply arguing with what is fact, with what is reality. This attitude, however, is very typical with these media figures.
Issues which the media in general pays a lot of attention to, but which could reflect badly on themselves and what they have said in the past (e.g. President Bush and on conservatives in general), cause them to level the charge of liberal media bias. One such example is global warming. Arguing against that is arguing against reality, yet this is exactly what Glenn Beck does, as we will see in the data. It is particularly striking that what is a scientific fact is given political motivations in order to allow for a different point of view.

In fact, this is the crux of the problem. An issue is given a political motivation and ideology (i.e. ‘liberal bias’), in order to allow for an opposing point of view. This point of view, because it is opposing, is necessarily both ‘conservative’ (as opposed to ‘liberal’) and a more balanced one (as opposed to being biased) in the eyes of those making the argument. But because ‘liberal bias’ is equated with reality, the opposing point of view automatically becomes estranged from reality. Thus, it heaps scorn on those making the ‘conservative’ argument. I use scare quotes for ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ because I do not believe these opposing points of view are related to being conservative or liberal politically, even though these media figures may believe so. (Even Media Matters talk about refuting ‘conservative misinformation’.) Indeed, arguing about global warming in terms of ‘liberal’ and ‘conservative’ strikes me as nothing more than bizarre, polarizing and irrelevant.

If many of the failures and shortcomings of the Bush presidency are simply ascribed to liberal media bias, then for someone who believes in this liberal media bias, it quickly becomes an established fact which requires no in-depth argument. Therefore it becomes ‘well-known’ and its existence cannot be questioned. Those who do are inevitably biased themselves or simply uninformed. By equating ‘liberal bias’ with ‘reality’, Colbert effectively changes the meaning of the word ‘well-known’ in that sentence: those who contend there is liberal media bias switch roles and are now seen as arguing against the ‘well-known’ reality. Considering that these people support the Bush administration’s actions and policies as much as they can, this sentence is a biting comment not only about those who do just that, but also about the Bush administration itself, because, in the end, these are the topics of commentaries.
4. Analysis of the data

4.1 Michael Savage

4.1.1 General context

Michael Alan Weiner, born in 1942, is best known by his pseudonym Michael Savage. He is a San Francisco based author and radio personality, and his daily radio programme The Savage Nation (which I am taking an excerpt from) has about 10 million listeners on 410 stations across the US, making it the third most listened to radio show in the country, behind 2 other conservative radio shows (Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity). He is especially known for his ‘explosive’ rhetoric.

It is especially relevant for this case, as I noted before, that MMFA selects fragments of ‘misinformation’ rather than give a full picture of his discourse. According to Wikipedia, Savage has a very varied radio show: “much of his show involves ruminating on topics such as history, culture (food, books, television), health issues, and personal anecdotes”. Savage has a Masters Degree in medical botany and medical anthropology and has a PhD in nutritional ethnomedicine. This is merely to point out that Savage has more to say than just his political views.

This excerpt is dated July the 3rd 2007.

4.1.2 Reference

In my introduction, I noted that fixing reference is a process achieved interactively, and therefore, it can be problematic. This was not the case in my introductory example, as references were fairly straightforward. One of the very difficult and in my opinion slightly amusing things about Savage’s rhetoric though, is trying to identify what exactly some of his
words and phrases refer to. Very often, one can only assume, based on his own explanations. Even then, one is left with the question why exactly he refers to a group of people in that particular way. For example, my source MMFA is according to him (part of) the homosexual (or gay) mafia.

Here I can refer back to Verschueren’s remark about the difficulty of fixing the reference of ‘democracy’ in a mutually comprehensible way. If that would require an entire conversation, then this excerpt would require so much more. Savage obviously does not attempt to do this. Rather, I would point to the opposite, namely that not fixing these references is a linguistic strategy of Michael Savage. It allows him to refer to people, groups and organizations without the chance of being contradicted by further explicating the referents. It is necessary, however, to fix the references as best I can.

Savage does not say who the radical left is, but based on other excerpts from his show, I would say it is grassroots political movements that are anti-war, of which MoveOn.org is the most prominent one. Also the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is often defined by Savage as part of the radical left.

Radical Islamists refer to certain elements within the Muslim faith that are, for example bent on implementing the Shariah law everywhere. The Shariah law refers to a body of Islamic religious law. It is the legal framework within which the public and some private aspects of life are regulated.

Talk radio, as I already mentioned above, is a particularly popular medium in the United States for political talk, which is heavily dominated by the conservatives.

Savage says that “liberalism is a mental disorder”. This phrase is an exact quote of the title of one the books he has written. It should be noted that Savage often uses liberalism and radical left more or less as synonyms.

Mafia, in this context, simply refers to a criminal organization.

### 4.1.3 Presuppositions

#### 4.1.3.1 Existential presuppositions

There are quite a lot of existential presuppositions at play in this excerpt. I try to list those that I can detect. First of all, it is vacation time at the moment of speaking. Secondly, there used to be a different America, one which people seem unaware of, or at least
indifferent. They do not pay attention to the changes in society. Thirdly, there is a conflict of different groups of people in America, among which are radical Islamists, the radical left, the homosexual mafia and talk radio. There is also a basic moral presupposition at play, namely taking away the life or the freedom of people within society is wrong, and therefore, Sharia law, which does this, is immoral.

4.1.3.2 Entailments

Then there are the entailments contained in this excerpt. Again I try to list those that I can detect. First of all, the radical left, the homosexual mafia and radical Islamists share at some level ideas about society, or about how society should not be. Secondly, talk radio is important and influential enough to be worth the effort of being silenced by these groups. Thirdly, the homosexual mafia are liberals, or at least part of them. Finally, liberalism is a mental disorder, because of which they do not understand that working with radical Islamists means working towards their own destruction.

4.1.4 Ideology

What I find so particularly striking about Savage’s rhetoric, is the grouping together of groups who cannot possibly share anything, let alone work together for a common goal. It is obvious to us that, should radical Islamists take over American society and bring a Shariah law there, it would destroy their free and open society. I think all of us also view the killing of homosexuals and restricting the freedom of women is morally reprehensible. Yet it is exactly these images that Savage combines with liberals, homosexuals and radical left. These three groups, according to Savage, are also working towards the completely immoral goal of killing homosexuals and implementing Shariah law. The only one standing in their way, he says, is himself and talk radio.

In other words, Savage describes groups like Media Matters against the moral backdrop of radical Islamists and Sharia, and ones aversion towards the latter. I made a remark about this very aspect when I mentioned Verschueren’s definition of reference. His audience would have a very negative emotional reaction towards the phrases ‘radical Islamists’ and ‘Sharia law’, and he uses this to frame his way of thinking.
4.2 Sean Hannity

4.2.1 General context

*Hannity and Colmes* is a popular Fox News Television show, with the aim of confronting a liberal and a conservative angle. The liberal angle is represented by Alan Colmes, the conservative angle by Sean Hannity. This show is also a typical illustration of the Fox News slogan of ‘fair and balanced’ reporting. Note that the conservative voice in this show, Sean Hannity, also has his own radio show, which as I have mentioned while discussing Michael Savage is the second most listened to radio show in the United States.

In the excerpt, we have two guests with opposing viewpoints. This mode of interviewing is typical for the Hannity and Colmes program. Karen Hanretty is a Republican strategist, Jane Fleming is a Democratic strategist.

This excerpt is dated April the 24th 2007.

4.2.2 Reference

First, Harry Reid is the Democratic Senate Majority Leader. In this interview, a reference is made to a ‘war is lost’ comment made by Harry Reid during an earlier press conference. As MMFA points out, Reid did indeed say so but added after that the war in Iraq can only be won “diplomatically, politically and economically”. Secondly, the bill being talked about here is about funding the war in Iraq. The Democrats wanted to include a timetable for withdrawal in Iraq, something which President Bush threatened to veto.

4.2.3 Presuppositions

4.2.3.1 Existential presuppositions

There are a few existential presuppositions here. First of all, Harry Reid is the Democratic Senate Majority leader, and he was elected to office. Also, there are troops in
harms way in Iraq and those troops need funding and support by the American people and its Congress. Finally, there is a difference in opinion about how the war in Iraq is going at the moment of speaking.

4.2.3.2 Entailments

There are several entailments. First of all, representing a particular opinion, especially by one who has a nationwide audience, has the possibility of harming the soldiers who are active in Iraq. Therefore, saying that the war in Iraq is lost, is serving as a propaganda minister for America’s enemies. The phrase ‘propaganda minister’ is made in reference to Joseph Goebbels, a notorious historical figure who was minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda during the Nazi Regime in Germany from 1933 to 1945 (look up details). Secondly, defending the comment “the war is lost” is a liberal talking point, and from that logically follows that liberal talking points serve as propaganda for the enemy, it demoralizes the troops and emboldens the enemy.

4.2.4 Ideology

This is an excellent example of how ideology can force somebody in someone else’s mind to choose between good and evil. We have a particular phrase, namely Harry Reid’s comment, and what Hannity does here is put a moral weight on this phrase in such a way that one is forced into a moral position if one accepts his interpretation. Anything that comes close to defending Reid’s comment serves as propaganda for the enemy and therefore is not a valid position from which to argue. I talked in my introduction about cognitive dissonance in debating someone who thinks he has all his facts right, and this becomes especially clear with Sean Hannity. When I think of any important conservative media figure who consistently and repeatedly called opposing viewpoints traitorous, Hannity comes to mind immediately. It is also with him in mind that I found Hanks’ definition of ideology so fitting, because what Hannity does is structure in his own mind what other people say and mean to say, without questioning whether he is right in the way he does it. Very often, as this example shows, he does not consider any contextual information that could contradict this way of structuring.
4.3 Glenn Beck

4.3.1 General context

Glenn Beck became famous through his talk show radio programme, The Glenn Beck Programme, which was launched in 2003. By 2006, it was ranked 9th in the amount of listeners and 3rd in the amount of listeners in the crucial 25 to 54 age category. It is from his radio show that I have taken the excerpt.

However, to accentuate Beck’s success, I have to mention that he was made anchor of Headline News on CNN in May 2006, which airs at 7pm Eastern Time (and is repeated also later in the night), which is a very important timeslot, since it falls immediately into prime time.

This excerpt is dated April the 30th 2007.

4.3.2 Reference

There are quite a lot of references that need to be fixed in this excerpt. First, global warming refers to the thesis that the earth is warming up, in this context used as manmade global warming, brought to attention recently by former American Vice President Al Gore in his documentary “An Inconvenient Truth”, a thesis which is also shared with the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Secondly, the United Nations (UN) is an international organization whose stated aims are to facilitate cooperation in international law, international security, economic development, social progress and human rights issues. It comprises of 192 member states, including of course the United States.

Thirdly, I am not entirely sure what globalization in this context would refer to other than what Beck himself explains as the United Nations running the world. Carbon tax refers to a tax on energy sources which emit carbon dioxide, and is an example of a pollution tax.

Finally, Hitler refers to Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi-party and Chancellor of Germany between 1933 and 1945, primarily responsible for the extermination of over 6 Million Jews during those years.
4.3.3 Presuppositions

4.3.3.1 Existential presuppositions

The existential presuppositions are the following. First, there are people who believe in anthropogenic or manmade global warming. Al Gore and the UN are trying to convince people to fight this anthropogenic global warming. Secondly, the Nazi’s propagated the pseudo-science eugenics, which divided humans into different races, making their own race the superior one.

4.3.3.2 Entailments

Al Gore and UN share with Hitler the method with which they try to unite people behind them. The enemy (i.e. global warming) is created by Gore and the UN out of need to have an enemy. They do not have any credibility as to whether the danger this enemy poses is real or as serious as they deem it to be.

In fact, the science is not real at all, but similar to eugenics in the 1930s. Therefore, this science is used as a means to harm people. Those who do not accept this, and therefore do not agree to act because they do not accept the false science are forced to conform. Free speech and dissent is being silenced when it comes to this issue, just as it was when eugenics was propagated back in the 1930s.

4.3.4 Ideology

Even from this small piece of data, it becomes very clear that Beck does not believe in manmade global warming. He goes even further, and links the campaign around this issue to the eugenics of the Nazi’s. In this way, he creates a new moral balance: those supporting Al Gore are behaving in the same immoral way the Nazi’s did in the past, and those opposing him are doing their duty as moral human being by speaking out against it. Because of this, the science behind global warming turned into a moral issue. This is, of course, completely contrary to what Gore has said, namely that the fight against global warming is a moral, and not a political issue. It turns the framing of the issue around, because if one does not act and
accepts Gore’s framing, one becomes immoral. By constructing a new moral framework, Beck denies global warming and can refuse to fight it without being pushed into Gore’s framework and therefore being considered immoral.

4.4 Rush Limbaugh: First excerpt

4.4.1 General context

Rush Hudson Limbaugh III, or simply Rush Limbaugh, was born in 1951. He is the most well-known and highest-rated radio talk show host in the United States, and is apparently even aired throughout the world. His show, The Rush Limbaugh Show began in 1988, and is often seen as the show which revived and popularized political talk radio. Without a doubt, it can be said that Rush Limbaugh still is one of the most influential political voices, and is considered to have been a ‘kind of national precinct captain’ for the conservative movement in 1994, leading to a Republican congressional victory. Indeed, for someone following national political debate, it is hard to get around the figure of Rush Limbaugh. He can put issues and talking points on the political landscape like no other media figure can. After Bill Clinton’s victory in 1992, former President Ronald Reagan sent Limbaugh a letter, in which he thanked him "for all you’re doing to promote Republican and conservative principles... [and] you have become the Number One voice for conservatism in our Country."

Despite all this I have repeatedly heard Limbaugh make the claim that he allows both conservative and liberal views equal airtime and presents them in an unbiased way. This further accentuates the point I made in the general introduction, namely that media figures often describe themselves as more conservative or liberal on issues, but strive to be seen as a fair and honest reporter of the news, and therefore do not systematically endorse one political figure.

Because of the importance of Limbaugh as illustrated above, and his regular inflammatory rhetoric, I have decided to analyze two different excerpts of his show. As I mentioned before, Media Matters could give a rather skewed view of certain media figures, because they only highlight certain types of talk. However, contrary to Michael Savage and perhaps some other media figures, I do not believe Rush Limbaugh has various different
styles and topics which he talks about, and the two excerpts give a fairly complete view of the way he talks in his radio show.

This excerpt is dated June 24th 2008.

4.4.2 References

Ahmedinejad refers to the current Iranian President. He was born in 1956, and became president of Iran after winning the 2005 Presidential elections. Currently he is under pressure by the world community for pursuing nuclear technology, which according to him is used only for energy purposes and not to try to create a bomb. Among his most controversial and infamous statements, even though not all translations agree with it, was that he called for Israel to be wiped off the map. In the US media, this statement is seen as one of his most characterizing and defining statements.

Hugo Chavez, born in 1954, refers to the current Venezuelan president. He promotes a political doctrine of democratic socialism and Latin American integration. He is also a vocal critic of neoliberalism, globalization and United States foreign policy. It is important to note that although Limbaugh refers to him as a despot, he still is a democratically elected president.

Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri refer to two high-profile members of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda, universally thought to be responsible for the terrorist attacks on the 11th of September.

Obama refers to Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, the Democratic presidential candidate. John Kerry refers to the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate, who lost in a very narrow race against George W. Bush.

Hamas refers to the Palestinian Sunni Islamist militant organization and political party which currently holds a majority of seats in the elected legislative council of the Palestinian Authority. Notorious for its numerous suicide bombings and other attacks on Israeli civilians and security forces, Hamas also runs extensive social programs and has gained popularity in Palestinian society by establishing hospitals, education systems, libraries and other services throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hamas is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States.

A final remark I should make, is the ungrammatical phrase ‘Democrat Party’. It should be ‘Democratic Party’, yet most likely this is not an innocent slip of the tongue. The phrase ‘Democrat Party’ is a political epithet used in the United States by some people (in many
cases, conservative commentators or some members of the Republican Party in speeches and press releases) instead of the name Democratic Party.

4.4.3 Presuppositions

4.4.3.1 Existential presuppositions

I distinguish the following existential presuppositions. First of all, Ahmedinejad, Zawahiri and bin Laden all talk in a particular and similar way. The Democratic party also talks in that particular way. This similarity is true because ‘they’ (whoever that refers to) have said as much. Secondly, Obama is standing for election for President of the United States. Thirdly, both Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and the Palestinian organization Hamas want Obama elected and endorse him. Obama is a strong ally for Hamas in their fight against Israel. Terrorists have not attacked the United States. They support Obama’s candidacy.

4.4.3.2 Entailments

All entailments start from the same basic presupposition, namely that democrats, including Obama, have similar talking points and agendas as the aforementioned terrorists, terrorist organizations and despots. First of all, these terrorists are criminal and evil and wish to do harm to the United States. And because they (partly) share talking points and endorse the democrats and Obama, the latter must also be evil, corrupted and indeed also traitorous. Secondly, and following from this, the only patriotic and even sensible thing to do has to be denouncing the Democrats, Obama and everything they stand for, because that is exactly the attitude one needs to take towards terrorists. Finally, all people wishing to hurt the United States are very acutely aware that they should not hurt Obama’s candidacy, and their lack of terrorist activity against the United States inside its borders has to be explained through this reasoning. This also ignores any differences between the various ‘enemies’ of the United States and unites them because of their common enemy. This could suggest a ‘us versus them’, or better put a ‘good versus evil’ mentality, which seems to me to be a rather superficial approach.
4.4.4 Ideology

Verschueren pointed out one of the central ideas of how ideology functions when he said that commonsense ideas are not being questioned. Limbaugh seems to be aware his comments could be somewhat controversial; he poses the question of whether he’s politically incorrect, but does not seem to care much and simply says “we all know it to be true”. This sentence basically gives the exact meaning of the word ‘commonsense’. Anyone disputing his remarks inevitably denies the truth, although that ‘truth’ may be hard to swallow for some people. Inherent in much of Limbaugh’s talk is the thought that he tells the unfiltered truth, without regard for the consequences

A second mechanism of ideology is at play when one looks at the sentence “they’ve said as much”. Here Hanks’ definition once again becomes useful, because as I remarked, ideology structures and organizes other people’s words and thoughts, irrespective of whether they have truly said or intended to say that. Or more simply put, ideology allows someone to put words in someone else’s mouth. Limbaugh says "Hamas has endorsed Obama". I do not think it is true, but researching whether it is, is not relevant. More important is, which message does this sentence send? Simple: The Democratic candidate for President of the United States has common interests with a terrorist organization, or at the very least his policies would be beneficial to that organization.

4.5 Rush Limbaugh: Second excerpt

This excerpt is dated July the 31st 2007.

4.5.1 References

The only reference which may not be readily understood is IED. It is a bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. They may be partially comprised of conventional military explosives, such as an artillery round, attached to a detonating mechanism. In the 2003–present Iraq War, IEDs have been used extensively against coalition forces and by the end of 2007 they have been responsible for approximately at least 40% of coalition deaths in Iraq.
4.5.2 Presuppositions

4.5.2.1 Existential presuppositions

There is a war. Both ‘enemies’ and Americans are dying in this war. The ‘enemy’ kills US soldiers, at times with an IED. The US soldiers kill enemy fighters. This war has an effect on the political aspirations, also of Democrats. There is almost a mathematical formula to calculate how this affects Democrats. Any kind of success in Iraq adversely affects the political aspirations of Democrats.

4.5.2.2 Entailments

Although this excerpt shows similarities to the previous one, it has its own features. The Democrats approve of the killing of US soldiers, and when US soldiers kill enemies, they do not show approval and instead stay silent. Limbaugh makes this very explicit, by stating “They (Democrats) have aligned themselves with the enemy”. Secondly, if the Democrats are the PR spokespeople of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda, then naturally they must approve and believe in their fight. That is a logical implication of being someone’s spokesperson. So not only have Democrats ideologically aligned themselves with Al Qaeda, they also have taken it upon themselves to justify their behaviour and existence to the American people. Thirdly, the Democrats will not admit to assuming this role, which means they are lying. If they lie about an issue like this, they simply cannot be trusted to tell the truth about anything. Fourthly, if the Democrats’ political hopes are diminished when progress is made in Iraq, that means they have set themselves against progress in Iraq. This attitude originates from their opposition to the unpopular war in Iraq. In other words, the more people suffer and die in Iraq, the more the Democrats like it because that serves to emphasize their political viewpoint. Finally, the fact that they do all this shows how stupid they are, because nobody in their right mind should vote for them. This has not been forced on them by someone else, as Limbaugh says; instead they have positioned themselves like this on purpose and are therefore responsible for their situation.
4.5.3 Ideology

Many of the media figures make highly dubious statements and present them as fact. From there they proceed with their argument without questioning their facts. In the previous excerpt from Limbaugh, this shows itself clearly. The Democrats, Limbaugh said, were using the talking points of terrorists and received support from them. In this excerpt however, he explains why the Democrats have taken up this attitude, namely political expediency. This is an argument which is made frequently and it will come back very explicitly when I discuss Brit Hume’s excerpt.

As with the first excerpt, Limbaugh structures the Democrats’ actions and thoughts, even though we do not have direct access to the specific pieces of talk Limbaugh himself refers to. Through their rhetoric, the Democrats apparently support and justify the terrorists. Whenever the terrorists strike, the Democrats can be counted on to show their support for these actions. This is only one step away from saying that the Democrats themselves are terrorists.

4.6 Bill O’Reilly: First excerpt

4.6.1 General context

4.6.1.1 The O’Reilly Factor

Bill O’Reilly is arguably the most famous voice today on Fox News. He is the host of The O’Reilly Factor, which is as he likes to point out, the highest-rated show on the 24-hour news networks. The show airs in prime-time, which is 8pm Eastern Standard Time. He is especially known for his confrontational method of interviewing, of which I will consider one of the most telling and famous ones, namely the one with Jeremy Glick, an author and activist whose father was killed in the terrorist attacks of September the 11th. O’Reilly divides his show in various segments.
4.6.1.2 Context of specific excerpt

The interview is from the ‘Personal Story’ segment. It is not available on Media Matters, although it is through their reporting on this interview that I found out about it. As I mentioned in the introduction, I am especially interested in the behaviour of Bill O’Reilly as an interviewer here. Although Glick himself certainly does merit a lot of attention, it would take me too far considering the size of this interview and the scope of this essay.

It is perhaps also worth noting that after the interview, O’Reilly apologises to his audience for inviting Glick to the show, saying he would never have done so if he knew the content of what Glick would be saying.

This excerpt is dated February the 4th 2003.

4.6.2 References

Glick refers to a lot of history and names that might require additional explication. It is already very telling though, that if one looks only at O’Reilly’s side of the interview, much less explication is needed. He does not really engage in any form of debate with Glick concerning the references he makes. He does something else, which is what I will obviously come back to.

4.6.3 Presupposition

4.6.3.1 Existential presuppositions

First of all, terrorists attacked the United States on September the 11th 2001. It killed thousands of people, who have surviving family members. Jeremy Glick is one such family member. His views on these terrorist attacks and the US response differ from some other people’s views. Secondly, the United States responded to the September 11th attacks by invading Afghanistan. Glick is against this war on Afghanistan and signed an anti-war advertisement.
There are perhaps a lot more existential presuppositions contained in this interview, especially if one considers both sides of the interview in detail, yet my goal here was to just sketch the circumstances surrounding this particular interview.

4.6.3.2 Entailments

O’Reilly says the document signed by Glick morally equates the United States to terrorists. Glick argues against that, yet judging from O'Reilly's response he does not accept it. Instead he calls Glick's rhetoric far-left and his position marginal in society, and continues that Glick said the US is a terrorist nation (for which his father, according to O'Reilly, would be upset about). If the US is morally equivalent to terrorists, then it is not possible for those who think so to love their country. In fact, they would hate their country just like any reasonable person would hate terrorists, especially if those terrorists had killed a loved one. It is this which O’Reilly, later in the interview, calls ‘warped’.

4.6.4 Ideology

First of all, I would like to highlight two major patterns throughout this interview if one looks at O’Reilly’s behaviour. The first is his unwillingness to debate any issues and to silence his interviewee, which in itself is extremely strange because that is exactly what the interview, and any interview, is for. This shows itself through the various sentences, namely: “I don’t want to debate world politics with you”, “I don’t really care what you think”, “So you keep your mouth shut when you sit here exploiting those people”, “Shut up. Shut up.” And lastly “Cut his mic. I’m not going to dress you down anymore, out of respect for your father”.

A second pattern is an attempt to appeal to Glick’s shame through the invocation of his parents, both his mother and his murdered father. We can see that pattern manifest itself in the following sentences: “I’m sure your beliefs are sincere, but what upsets me is I don’t think your father would be approving of this.”, twice he yells “Who killed your father!” referring to the people of Afghanistan, then “Man, I hope your mom isn’t watching this” which he also repeats once, and finally also the line “Out of respect for your father” which is repeated twice and finally a third time as he concludes the interview.

Both these patterns show a typical O’Reilly feature, namely an unwillingness to confront an opposing opinion. I will talk about how he typically characterizes these opposing
opinions when he is confronted with them in the following excerpt, but for now I would like to focus on one particular utterance at the end of the interview, namely “I'm not going to dress you down anymore”. This implies both that O’Reilly is right and Glick is wrong, and that he has been dressing Glick down throughout the interview and therefore has been winning the arguments and shaming Glick. Once again, what Verschueren said about ideology bubbles to the surface: if one debates someone who knows he is right and has all the facts, just debating against that is debating against truth. The question can of course be asked whether O’Reilly truly believes he is right, or whether he is just afraid of debating someone who is smarter than him and who disagrees with him. That question, while interesting, would stray into the area of psychologizing O'Reilly's behaviour and is not relevant to this thesis.

4.7 Bill O’Reilly: Second excerpt

4.7.1 Context of specific excerpt

This excerpt comes from another traditional segment of the O’Reilly show, namely one in which he responds to mails and questions about statements and remarks he had made in previous shows.

Aside from the pattern which shows itself in all the excerpts, I found this one also particularly noteworthy because this segment is placed against a background of a very new influential development in the political discourse in the United States, namely that of the internet and of political blogging. It has become increasingly obvious that some journalists, especially conservative ones, have been rather disconcerted by the rise of the influence and reach of the political blogs to such an extent that they have become afraid and therefore very offensive against them. Many feel their privileged role as reporters of the news threatened by what they regard as ‘amateur journalists’, and are not comfortable with their role as media watchdog. Bill O’Reilly is a perfect example of such a journalist, who repeatedly railed against the blogs in the manner that we see in this excerpt.

This excerpt is dated February the 28th 2008.
4.7.2 References

The Huffington Post is specifically mentioned, but when O’Reilly talks about the Net it can be understood that he means more than just this. Among the biggest of the ‘hate blogs’ for Bill O’Reilly are DailyKos and MoveOn.org. These three sites have huge fame and support and are considered leading voices on the progressive political blogosphere.

The Huffington Post (often referred to on the Internet as HuffPo or HuffPost) is a left-leaning news website and aggregated weblog founded by Arianna Huffington and Kenneth Lerer, featuring hyperlinks to various news sources and columnists. The site covers a wide-range of topics, including sections devoted to politics, entertainment, media, living, business, and the green movement.

Nancy Davis Reagan is the widow of former United States President Ronald Reagan and served as an influential First Lady of the United States from 1981 to 1989.

4.7.3 Presuppositions

4.7.3.1 Existential presuppositions

First of all, people voice their political opinions on blogs. The Huffington Post is a blog. Secondly, the Nazi’s used all sorts of media to demonize the Jews. Thirdly, the Nazi’s killed millions of Jews.

4.7.3.2 Entailments

First of all, the tactics the Nazi’s used to demonize the Jews in order to kill millions of people is morally unacceptable. If the Huffington Post and like-minded blogs are using the same tactics as the Nazi’s did, then the means they use to attain a political goal is just as morally reprehensible. As O’Reilly says: “… the Nazis used vile propaganda to demonize Jews and others in the eyes of the German people. They used newspapers, radio, leaflets, and rallies to build up enormous hatred towards your family. Today, we are seeing the same thing on the Net here in America. There’s no difference.” (my emphasis). Secondly, not only the means, but also the content is reprehensible. Consider O’Reilly’s remark: “If you look back at what happened in Germany, you cannot escape the similarities between what Hitler and his
cutthroats did back then and the hate-filled blogs, what they’re doing now.” (my emphasis). Hate is meant to imply an irrational, unjustified feeling, against which one cannot argue. Thirdly, the Nazi’s had a very big societal influence, and therefore O’Reilly must assume that at a certain level the Huffington Post and other blogs also have some societal influence. It can be accepted that O’Reilly did not intend this comparison to be completely valid in this respect; yet it would be meaningless if the Huffington Post would not at least have some audience. By drawing the comparison with the Nazi’s, O’Reilly could be implying that despite the fact that a certain ideology has a big following, that does not necessarily mean that it has a factual and moral basis. This is O’Reilly’s way of dealing with the unpopularity of the current President, his policies and also Republicans in general and is therefore not unique to this specific occasion.

4.7.4 Ideology

One of the most typical characteristics of rhetoric like O’Reilly’s is his characterization of an opposing political opinion in order to dismiss it. I have already repeatedly illustrated Hanks’ definition, namely that media figures structure other people’s opinion irrespective of whether they really meant it the way it is characterized, to make them seem weak, traitorous, stupid and many other things. O’Reilly goes further however. He characterizes opposing opinions as hate, and makes this point very often. What this does is deny his opponent any claim to reason or factual argument. In other words, for O’Reilly hate is blinding someone’s reason and therefore he has no obligation to argue with his opponents. By invoking Nazi-Germany, O’Reilly hopes to accentuate the extent of the hatred his opponents have and thereby giving him even further justification of not having to argue. After all, arguing against the Nazi ideology would have been just as ineffectual.

4.8 John Gibson

4.8.1 General context

John David Gibson was born in 1946. He is a conservative radio talk show host, and also formerly the co-host of the weekday edition of The Big Story on the Fox News Television, from which my excerpt is taken. The Big Story debuted in 2001. It was a news program hosted by John Gibson on weekdays. It was placed on indefinite hiatus in March
2008, replaced with an hour of news related to the 2008 Presidential elections. No announcement regarding the show’s status has been made by Fox News.

Even though Gibson is not the most popular or well-known names from Fox News, I found it interesting to include him in this overview. The way he phrased his question in this particular interview is rife with interesting linguistic strategies and shows the typical framing of issues that has pervaded the national discourse. It is also not because I have thus far selected highly popular and influential conservative voices (e.g. Bill O’Reilly, Michael Savage, Rush Limbaugh, etc.), that those not quite as popular do not wield a great influence themselves.

This excerpt is dated November the 19th 2007.

4.8.2 References

This interview is with Fran Townsend. She is the former Homeland Security Advisor to United States President George W. Bush and she was appointed to this position by President Bush on May 28, 2004. Her resignation was announced November 19, 2007. She chaired the Homeland Security Council and reported to the President on homeland security policy and counterterrorism policy.

Townsend refers to the Maliki-government, which is the current Iraqi government. Nouri Kamel Mohammed Hassan al-Maliki is the Prime Minister of Iraq and the secretary-general of the Islamic Dawa Party. Al-Maliki and his government succeeded the Iraqi Transitional Government. His 37-member Cabinet was approved by the National Assembly and sworn in on May 20, 2006.

4.8.3 Presuppositions

4.8.3.1 Existential presuppositions

I detect the following existential presuppositions in this fragment. There is a war in Iraq, and there is a difference in opinion in how this war should be prosecuted. The Democrats in Congress want to stop the war in Iraq. The war is going better at the moment of speaking compared to any moment in the past. The US has not been attacked by terrorists.
4.8.3.2 Entailments

The entailments in this excerpt are rather bizarre, but come down to the often-heard argument that the war in Iraq is making the US safer. This is clearly evident in Gibson’s sentence: “We can’t help but notice that we haven’t been attacked, and yet we see…” (my emphasis). On the structural level of this sentence it is evident that the proposed policy by the Democrats in Congress conflicts with reality. The reality would be that the US has not been attacked, which obviously requires a connection between the war in Iraq and the safety of the United States. A second, perhaps even more conflicting and bizarre entailment, is contained within the sentence “the Democrats have vowed more failure” (my emphasis). I will talk more about this sentence in the following section, but now I want to focus on the word ‘more’. This has to pertain directly to policy, because ‘failure’ implies a situation which is already the result of policy. The problem is that Republicans had been completely in control of policy, both in Congress and the White House at the point of speaking (this was before the 2006 midterm elections). So this can only entail that the Democrats have vowed to proceed with the failed policies of the Republicans. However, considering that it was the Republicans who vowed to proceed with their policies during the elections (consider the famous Republican slogan of that time, ‘stay the course’), and the Democrats proposing a different course, the word ‘more’ seems completely backwards and out of place here. This is especially true because Gibson is a conservative on Fox News Channel, and is interviewing a long-time former Bush Administration official Fran Townsend. It is rather unlikely and even inconceivable that they would imply failure on the Republican side. As Gibson himself explains, the Democratic policy would be to ‘stop the war’. It is exactly this phrase that Gibson connects with ‘failure’ and ‘surrender’. The point I would like to make here, is that not only as we have seen with the example of Michael Savage, do some of these media figures often have no control over their own referents, sometimes they do not really know what they are implying about other people and what those implications actually mean.

4.8.4 Ideology

In terms of ideology for this excerpt, I want to highlight two important points. The first is what Hanks gave us in his definition, namely that ideology allows one to structure other people’s thoughts and actions. Secondly, I made the point about words being used to provoke an emotional reaction. Consider the sentence “the Democrats have vowed more
failure”. Firstly, this sentence judges the Democratic policy as weak and insufficient, i.e. a ‘failure’. Secondly, it also condemns them for actively pursuing this policy, i.e. they ‘vowed’ it. Obviously, the Democrats do not describe their own policy as such, or no one would even think of voting for them. Therefore, logically, it is someone else who is judging their policy.

This mode of questioning is very illuminating about the tone of public discourse at times. If the interviewer has already outlined the expected and preferred answer quite clearly through his question, any rebuttal or even resistance against the framing of the question can later be characterized by the interviewer as defending ‘failure’ and ‘surrender’, and can persist in the minds of the viewer as such. The characterization of someone’s answers or even their character can therefore become more important than the actual answers given in an interview. Even though it is not the case here, what I just described was a very frequent occurrence in debates, and this tactic is especially noticeable on Fox News.

### 4.9 Brit Hume

#### 4.9.1 General context

Alexander Britton "Brit" Hume Sr., born 1943, is the pre-eminent political anchor of Fox News. He hosts the Special Report with Brit Hume and is an integral part of Fox’s 6pm to 11pm schedule, which features him along with Bill O’Reilly, Sean Hannity and other media figures I have not discussed in this paper. The consistency in the Fox schedule for the past decade is perhaps one of the reasons for the dominance of Fox News in terms of ratings.

He is also a regular panellist on Fox News Sunday, and the excerpt I have selected comes from this show. It is a public affairs show on Fox News, aired on Sunday mornings and repeated later in the day (i.e. 2pm and 6pm). The show consists of two parts: the first part is the headlines of the past week, followed by host Chris Wallace interviewing several newsmakers. The second part is the panel discussion from which this excerpt is taken. When aired in the morning, the show is not very popular, but its 6pm replay often wins the time slot among cable news outlets.

This excerpt is dated November the 18th 2007.
4.9.2 References

I do not believe anything is referred to that is not entirely clear in this excerpt. The host, Chris Wallace, explains exactly what legislation is referred to and what it was supposed to do. The other referents, such as Democrats, the House and the Senate have been mentioned before, so I do not see the point of explaining these referents again.

Perhaps it is worth noting that the Pentagon refers to the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense, and is often used metonymically to refer to the Department of Defense rather than the building itself as is the case here.

4.9.3 Presuppositions

4.9.3.1 Existential presuppositions

There is a legislative difference of opinion about the way to go forward with respect to the Iraq war, and the Democrats are pushing for a withdrawal of US troops through the legislative process. More specifically, since Congress controls the money, they are trying to connect the funding of the war with withdrawal of US troops. The situation on the ground does not correspond to this proposal. Secondly, the Democrats have also lost touch with what the American people want, despite their common dislike of the Iraq war.

4.9.3.2 Entailments

If the legislation the Democrats are pushing for does not meet the reality on the ground, then, as representatives of the people, they are not doing their job very well. This means they are not listening to the experts, they are not informed and even ‘oblivious’ to certain developments, and still they try to make the decisions. Therefore, these decisions are solely based on political expediency, and their interests conflict with the interests of the American people: the war in Iraq is not popular, and the Democrats are trying to exploit that. Because of that, the Democrats become ‘invested in our losing’, as Hume puts it. If the Democrats are invested in losing the war in Iraq, then they do not support the American troops, the cause they are fighting for and in essence they betray their country. And since the war in Iraq is a part of the war on terror, and the Democrats are invested in losing this war,
they support the terrorists’ cause. The terrorist methods are morally reprehensible and any support for them is therefore equally reprehensible, and therefore the Democrats are throwing their support behind a cause that is completely immoral, stupid and traitorous.

4.9.4 Ideology

Even though Hume is not as straightforward and clear as, for example Rush Limbaugh and John Gibson, what he says is in essence very similar to them. The Democrats and the terrorists have common interests to defend. Hume appeals to certain negative emotions of the viewer (e.g. “rooting to lose”), but generally speaking, Hume’s rhetoric is not as inflammatory as for example Rush Limbaugh. Here, the Democrats seem just to be factually wrong, and that fact is a political inconvenience for them. One can, however, very clearly see the mechanism that he is entirely sure that he has his facts right and therefore the Democrats are denying truth and reality, which I remarked upon when discussing Verschueren’s definition. This is clearly visible in the following quotes: “they keep talking about events in Iraq that do not comport with the reality on the ground over there” and “the things they say are happening are not and the things they say are not happening are.” Hume has the facts, and what contradicts his facts necessarily also contradicts reality.

4.10 George W. Bush

4.10.1 General context

For my final excerpt, I have consciously not chosen a media figure, but a quote from the President of the United States himself. I have several reasons for doing this, but the most obvious and straightforward one is to once again draw attention to the fact that the excerpts analyzed above are not the deranged ravings of marginal people in US society. Their tone, their language and their strategies are echoed by the President himself. The quote has, of course, been widely criticized, but also vehemently defended by some the media figures discussed above, and even by Republican Presidential candidate John McCain. A sitting President should not, under any circumstances, make political remarks about a political opponent while visiting a foreign country. The transgression by this President is further
amplified by the highly charged circumstances and content of the comments, about which I will talk in the following section.

The excerpt is dated May the 15\textsuperscript{th} 2008.

4.10.2 References

In private, Bush aides have acknowledged that the people referred to in the sentence “\textit{some} seem to believe we should negotiate with terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along” (my emphasis) refer to Democratic Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama, and other Democrats who call for talks with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad.

The term ‘appeasement’ is generally used to refer to the policy of accepting the imposed conditions of an aggressor instead of armed resistance and means giving in to demands of an aggressor in order to avoid war.

4.10.3 Presuppositions

4.10.3.1 Existential presuppositions

There are radicals and terrorists, who are fighting on the wrong side. Some people believe in talking to them in the hope of stopping them. This approach is appeasement, many have tried it in the past and it has been discredited. Hitler and the Nazi’s were wrong, and they were either radicals, terrorists or both.

4.10.3.2 Entailments

Bush calls talking to Hitler appeasement. Apart from the factual error in that statement (appeasement is not talking to the enemy, it is, as I have noted, giving concessions to an aggressor to avoid war), it is a highly charged comment. Invoking this issue in the Israeli parliament (the Knesset) during the celebration of its 60th birthday should not be done lightly. The fact that this was done in order to score a political point against a political opponent in a
foreign country makes this comment even more shocking and inappropriate, both towards his political opponents and the host country, Israel.

By using the comparison with Hitler, it must follow that the danger posed by the current terrorists and radicals must be similar in some way to the danger posed by the Nazi’s. Talking and reasoning with these radicals would be just as ineffective as talking to Hitler would have been.

Secondly, those who insist on talking to the radicals do not learn their lesson from history and are therefore endangering not only their own country, but the entire world and world peace as a result. Their reasoning is also very naïve, as Bush illustrates: “as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along”. Therefore, those who do insist on talking are under the ‘false comfort of appeasement’, which if we compare to history, was also the politically easy and expedient approach. In other words, Bush accuses his opponents of taking the easy way out in confronting the dangers of the present world.

4.10.4 Ideology

When one looks at Bush' rhetoric, whether it is this particular piece of talk, or his attitude in the presidential debates, or in other speeches about the attitude of his political opponents, the prevalent attitude one can detect is his and mischaracterization and following simplification of the opponent’s position. The mischaracterization often consists of emotionally charged words that evoke a strong negative response with the audience. This is especially clear here. As I have already noted, his use of the word appeasement is wrong in the context in which he uses it, yet it has exactly this effect, especially considering he is delivering this speech to the Knesset. Bush seems not to care about using this term in a mutually comprehensible way, but only about provoking an emotional response. This is strange, considering the format of this piece of talk, namely a speech by a President to the Parliament of a foreign country. One would expect him to be as clear as possible about the issues he talks about.

5. Conclusions

This paper was data-oriented, with the object of applying theoretical concepts to practical data. I have proceeded with a strict methodology, approaching and analyzing all the
data in the same way, yet placing the focus on different elements for different excerpts. A very distinctive pattern returns each time throughout the analysis of the different excerpts, irrespective of the format in which the talk took place.

What linguistic devices do speakers have at their disposal to 'shape perceptions' and 'manipulate cognitions'? This was the question I asked in my introduction. To answer that question, I considered the theoretical concepts of context, reference, presupposition and ideology, and used them to help me analyze the different excerpts, in order to have a clearer insight into how these pieces of talk were structured.

The question of context was a very difficult one, even though I did not spend a lot of time on it in the course of this paper. I did remark upon the problem of delineating context in my introductory example (i.e. Yves Leterme), and concluded that there are layers in understanding context. Throughout the analysis of the excerpts, context has remained 'loose', or like a shadow, as Hanks put it so aptly. It pervades everything, like a spider web, which connects and sustains the data. However, except for a brief situation of each excerpt and media figure, context remained on the background, elusive but ever present. The practical way forward to dealing with the data was then, as Thomas said, to assign sense in a context (i.e. what do words mean in a context) and to assign reference in a context. Assigning sense is easy, as everyone understanding English can understand what the uttered words mean.

Assigning reference in a context, however, is accomplished interactively. Most of the times this process did not pose a lot of problems, as it was fairly clear and unambiguous what and to whom certain words referred to. Yet it also became clear that, as Verschueren pointed out, using referents in a mutually comprehensible way can sometimes be more difficult. Here we already see a linguistic strategy of propaganda coming to the surface. As I pointed out when discussing Michael Savage, not making sure that referents are understood can be vital in order to seem coherent and persuasive. This is also applicable to the speech by President Bush. If Bush was forced to explain what appeasement really means, he would either be ignorant of what it refers to, or if he did know he would undermine his own rhetoric. Yet these referents are used by Savage and Bush in a certain way, and their audience is receptive to it. This means the audience not only shares a context, but also a set of presuppositions with the speakers.
I distinguished two separate kinds of presuppositions. The first and most basic were the existential presuppositions. The principle behind this presupposition is that in order for something to be true, that thing needs to exist or more simply put, the existence of what one is talking about is presupposed. This in itself is merely a stepping stone for the more interesting kinds of presuppositions, namely entailments. At this point, I came to the closer analysis of exactly what the media figures were implying in their piece of talk. It is here that a clear pattern showed itself. The liberals, the radical left, the Democrats or broadly speaking the political opponents of the media figures, are betraying and destroying their own country. They either actively support the terrorists and their causes because they hate their own country, they passively support the terrorists because they support the cause for which the terrorists are fighting, or they unknowingly support the terrorists because they are too stupid or ignorant to know what exactly they are saying and doing. Furthermore, they either copy the Nazi’s and their tactics, like Glenn Beck and Bill O’Reilly claimed, or they approach the current threats in the world the same politically expedient way the appeasers did to the Nazi’s, like Bush claimed. Whatever the case, the radical left, the liberals, the Democrats do not have the country’s best interests at heart.

When talking about reference I remarked that the media figures sometimes do not understand what or whom they are referring to. A similar remark can be made here, as I illustrated with John Gibson's example. Sometimes, without realizing it, what exactly the media figures are implying can be completely contradictory to what they meant to say. Gibson had seemingly no control over his own implications.

This does not mean, however, that Gibson’s beliefs and ideas about reality (i.e. his ideology) are somehow contradictory. In this paper, I have approached the concept of ideology as a mechanism which allows these people to talk in this particular way, using both Verschueren’s and Hanks’ approach. It is at this level that several very interesting linguistic strategies of political propaganda come to the surface. I highlighted that media figures use words with highly charged meanings without establishing or sometimes even knowing what these words refer to. They are merely used to create a strong emotional reaction, often one of moral abhorrence, towards political opponents. It is in this way that Gibson’s remarks can be characterized. This stems from what Verschueren called the commonsense nature of someone’s beliefs and ideas, which is manifested in the fact that they are not, or rarely, questioned. Any kind of disagreement or rebuttal to these beliefs, by their very nature, are 0i rebutting truth and reality.
A second key mechanism of ideology is structuring and evaluating the opponent’s point of view (i.e., his language and communicative activities, to use Hanks’ terminology), irrespective of whether the opponent truly intended the particular meaning ascribed to him. This allows the media figures to do two things: first of all, the specific opinion is structured in a particular way, given a label and then shot down. Then the media figures ascribe different motives to the opponent's point of view. It can be hatred, as O’Reilly often claims, or it can be ignorance and stupidity as, like Hume and Savage claim, or it can simply be political expediency, as Limbaugh and Gibson claim. The effect is the same each time: the opponent is denied any claim to reality, reason or morality and therefore no serious argument or rebuttal is required from the other side.

At this stage, we notice something about ideology. In both common parlance and scholarly discourse, ideology is often identified with a set of beliefs: ‘Marxist ideology’, ‘Bourgeois ideology’, ‘conservative or liberal ideology’ and, even, ‘scientistic ideology’. However, such identification is not without problems: there seems to be no difference between a set of theories and an ideology. Often, when truth-values are coupled with ideologies implying that an ideology is a set of false beliefs, the problem gets compounded: any and every theory that someone considers false becomes an ideology. Such a generous use is of no scientific interest.

I would like to suggest that ideology is principally an ability (taking the form of an overarching attitude or stance) that enables people to do something intellectually. In our case, it allows people to create ‘pseudo-contexts’ and ‘pseudo-referents’ in a communicative situation while maintaining the facade of creating contexts and referents. However, the contexts and the referents constructed by an ideology only partially overlap with those that a consistent linguistic discourse demands. However, the lacuna is revealed only when an analysis takes place; until such time, prima facie, it looks as though a communication driven by an ideology fully conforms to a rational and linguistically coherent discourse.

If we look at ideology in this manner, i.e., as an expression of an ability to use linguistic units to create apparently rational discourses that are not linguistically so, then we can have a partial solution to the problems we have noted above. However, whether this suggestion survives a critical investigation is something that only further research can reveal.
6. Transcripts of the Data

Excerpt 1: Michael Savage (http://mediamatters.org/items/200707060002)

SAVAGE: Now, I know many of you are on vacation time. I understand that as well. Most of the country is in this kind of dozy, lazy, sleepy business as usual. I don’t blame you. I don’t blame you for wanting to pretend America is what it was when your father was in this country. No, it’s not your father’s America. It is not your father’s America at all. The radical Islamists are amongst us. They are in cahoots with the radical leftists. They are vigilant and they work 24/7. The radical left, the homosexual mafia, and the Islamists are all working together to undermine talk radio to begin with.

Now, you have to ask yourself, "Why would the homosexual mafia, in the form of Media Matters, and the Islamists agree that conservative talk radio should be picked off and taken off the air?" You have to answer that question yourself because a) you know that liberalism is a mental disorder. We know that what Islamists will do should they win anywhere. They’ll kill homosexuals. They’ll take away all of the freedoms of women. They’ll impose Shariah law, which means no law whatsoever; it’s gangsterism.

And yet here’s homosexuals at Media Matters. You want to talk about the gay mafia, you don’t have to look any further than Media Matters. That’s what it is. That’s why they continuously try to catch me in saying something they don’t agree with. And yet, what they don’t understand is I’m actually trying to save them from destruction. Since I can’t save them from self-destruction, maybe I can save them from destruction by the Islamists. But I could care less about them. That’s their problem. This must be something their mother drank. I don’t know what it is.

Excerpt 2: Sean Hannity (http://mediamatters.org/items/200704250009?f=s_search)

KAREN HANRETTY (Republican strategist): Harry Reid -- Harry Reid has a responsibility legislatively that these other men do not. They have not been elected to office. He has a responsibility for ushering through a bill that is either going to provide funding or not provide funding. And that is the sole distinction --

JANE FLEMING (Democratic strategist): We’re providing funding, Karen.

HANNITY: Hang on. Let me -- let me explain.

HANRETTY: But why? Why, Jane? Why are you providing funding if the war is lost?

HANNITY: Hang on a second.

FLEMING: We are providing funding --

HANNITY: No, they’re not.

FLEMING: What we’re saying is that we are providing funding for the troops. We put every dime in there that the president has asked for. What we’re also saying is that we want --

HANRETTY: But why? You don’t believe in the president. You think he’s a liar. You think he’s disingenuous.

HANNITY: All right. Hang on a second, Karen. Let me get in here --

HANRETTY: You’ve always thought that --

FLEMING: I think President Bush hasn’t listened --

HANNITY: Let me explain the difference here, Jane Flem --

HANRETTY: You think he’s a liar --

HANNITY: Let me explain --

HANRETTY: and yet you’re playing politics with him.
HANNITY: Karen, help me out here. Let me explain the difference -- is that Harry Reid is the No. 1 Democrat in the United States Senate, who voted to send these troops into harm’s way. And he’s serving --by saying that America lost while these troops are still fighting here. He’s serving as a propaganda minister for America’s enemies here.

FLEMING: No, he’s not.

HANNITY: -- and Harry Reid should resign for this, for emboldening our enemies in this particular case, for demoralizing the American soldiers there --

FLEMING: Sean, give us some examples of how this is emboldening our enemies.

HANRETTY: Well, maybe -- maybe this --

crosstalk

FLEMING: -- always says that, and you always say in this emboldens the enemy --

HANNITY: That’s right.

FLEMING: -- and it demoralizes our troops.

HANNITY: That’s right.

FLEMING: Give us some concrete examples of that.

HANNITY: If you’re -- imagine -- put aside your liberal talking points for five seconds --

FLEMING: No. You put aside your talking points, Sean. You always say it.

HANNITY: Put aside your liberal talking points --

FLEMING: Just because you say it doesn’t make it true.

Excerpt 3: Glenn Beck (http://mediamatters.org/items/200705010003)

Beck: And I read this one part on global warming about how they got -- what was the first thing they did to get people to exterminate the Jews. Now, I’m not saying that anybody’s going to -- you know Al Gore’s not going to be rounding up Jews and exterminating them. It is the same tactic, however. The goal is different. The goal is globalization. The goal is global carbon tax. The goal is the United Nations running the world. That is the goal. Back in the 1930s, the goal was get rid of all of the Jews and have one global government.

You got to have an enemy to fight. And when you have an enemy to fight, then you can unite the entire world behind you, and you seize power. That was Hitler’s plan. His enemy: the Jew. Al Gore’s enemy, the U.N.’s enemy: global warming.

So, I read this paragraph -- and I must have read it, like, five times because I just kept going, "Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh." And I think I’m in a unique situation because I’ve heard from so many people, you’ve heard from so many people calling in and saying these things on the show.

Here’s how they did it. First thing they did was they found a group of scientists that believed in eugenics, which basically is, "Breed your way to better people! Eugenics! Get rid of the defects, get rid of the races that aren’t so strong. Breed a master race." For as insane, as insidious, and as out-and-out evil as it sounds today, believe it or not, in the 1920s and 1930s, that was cutting-edge science. And they said, "That is the answer. We can breed a master race." That’s were the master race comes from: science and scientists. It was called eugenics.

Excerpt 4: Rush Limbaugh (http://mediamatters.org/items/200806240009?f=s_search)

Let me make one of my own [prediction]. Precisely because every time I hear Ahmadinejad speak, every time I hear a tape from Ayman al Zawahiri or a so-called dispatch from bin Laden, whenever I hear from any of these Middle East Al Qaeda terrorists, I think I’m hearing Democrat Party talking points. I will guaran-damn-tee you there will not be a terrorist attack before the election. And you know why there won’t be one? Because they want Obama elected. They wanted John Kerry elected. They wanted the Democrats elected in the 2006 midterms.
Am I politically incorrect for saying this? We all know it to be true. Just listen -- they’ve said as much. We hear stories -- we read stories in the drive-by media about how some of these despots like [President Hugo] Chavez in Venezuela, others, are looking forward to the election of Obama. Hamas has endorsed Obama. Hamas has endorsed Obama. Do you think they’re going to do anything to upset the apple cart of Obama’s election? Why do you think they’ve endorsed Obama? Because they want a very strong ally for Israel in the White House?


LIMBAUGH: I mean, there’s almost a mathematical formula to this that I have detected. To the extent that we make progress, the Democrats’ political hopes are diminished. Now, what kind of political leaders position themselves that way so that they only win when their country loses? And what kind of brains do they have to position themselves in such a way so that when we make progress, their political aspirations are diminished?

They’re the ones that created this situation. They have aligned themselves with the enemy. They continue to align themselves with the enemy. They won’t admit it, obviously. The enemy kills more soldiers, their spokesmen here in the U.S. are the Democrats. When we kill more of the enemy, the Democrats are silent and they say nothing. But when we have reports of, you know, another IED, or pictures of a car on fire -- then the Democrats assume the role of media PR spokespeople for Al Qaeda.

Excerpt 6: Bill O’Reilly: excerpt 1

O’REILLY: In the "Personal Stories" segment tonight, we were surprised to find out than an American who lost his father in the World Trade Center attack had signed an anti-war advertisement that accused the USA itself of terrorism. The offending passage read, "We too watched with shock the horrific events of September 11... we too mourned the thousands of innocent dead and shook our heads at the terrible scenes of carnage -- even as we recalled similar scenes in Baghdad, Panama City, and a generation ago, Vietnam." With us now is Jeremy Glick, whose father, Barry, was a Port Authority worker at the Trade Center. Mr. Glick is a co-author of the book "Another World is Possible." I’m surprised you signed this. You were the only one of all of the families who signed...

JEREMY GLICK: Well, actually, that’s not true.

O’REILLY: Who signed the advertisement?

GLICK: Peaceful Tomorrow, which represents 9/11 families, were also involved.

O’REILLY: Hold it, hold it, hold it, Jeremy. You were the only one. I was surprised, and the reason I was surprised is that this ad equates the United States with the terrorists. And I was offended by that.

GLICK: As an individual.

O’REILLY: Yes, as -- with your name. You were the only one. I was surprised, and the reason I was surprised is that this ad equates the United States with the terrorists. And I was offended by that.

GLICK: Well, you say -- I remember earlier you said it was a moral equivalency, and it’s actually a material equivalency. And just to back up for a second about your surprise, I’m actually shocked that you’re surprised. If you think about it, our current president, who I feel and many feel is in this position illegitimately by neglecting the voices of Afro-Americans in the Florida coup, which, actually, somebody got impeached for during the Reconstruction period -- Our current president now inherited a legacy from his father and inherited a political legacy that’s responsible for training militarily, economically, and situating geopolitically the
parties involved in the alleged assassination and the murder of my father and countless of thousands of others. So I don’t see why it’s surprising...
O’REILLY: All right. Now let me stop you here. So...
GLICK: ... for you to think that I would come back and want to support...
O’REILLY: It is surprising, and I’ll tell you why. I’ll tell you why it’s surprising.
GLICK: ... escalating...
O’REILLY: You are mouthing a far left position that is a marginal position in this society, which you’re entitled to.
GLICK: It’s marginal -- right.
O’REILLY: You’re entitled to it, all right, but you’re -- you see, even -- I’m sure your beliefs are sincere, but what upsets me is I don’t think your father would be approving of this.
GLICK: Well, actually, my father thought that Bush’s presidency was illegitimate.
O’REILLY: Maybe he did, but...
GLICK: I also didn’t think that Bush...
O’REILLY: ... I don’t think he’d be equating this country as a terrorist nation as you are.
GLICK: Well, I wasn’t saying that it was necessarily like that.
O’REILLY: Yes, you are. You signed...
GLICK: What I’m saying is...
O’REILLY: ... this, and that absolutely said that.
GLICK: ... is that in -- six months before the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, starting in the Carter administration and continuing and escalating while Bush’s father was head of the CIA, we recruited a hundred thousand radical mujahadeens to combat a democratic government in Afghanistan, the Turaki government.
O’REILLY: All right. I don’t want to...
GLICK: Maybe...
O’REILLY: I don’t want to debate world politics with you.
GLICK: Well, why not? This is about world politics.
O’REILLY: Because, No. 1, I don’t really care what you think.
GLICK: Well, OK.
O’REILLY: You’re -- I want to...
GLICK: But you do care because you...
O’REILLY: No, no. Look...
GLICK: The reason why you care is because you evoke 9/11...
O’REILLY: Here’s why I care.
GLICK: ... to rationalize...
O’REILLY: Here’s why I care...
GLICK: Let me finish. You evoke 9/11 to rationalize everything from domestic plunder to imperialistic aggression worldwide.
O’REILLY: OK. That’s a bunch...
GLICK: You evoke sympathy with the 9/11 families.
O’REILLY: That’s a bunch of crap. I’ve done more for the 9/11 families by their own admission -- I’ve done more for them than you will ever hope to do.
GLICK: OK.
O’REILLY: So you keep your mouth shut when you sit here exploiting those people.
GLICK: Well, you’re not representing me. You’re not representing me.
O’REILLY: And I’d never represent you. You know why?
GLICK: Why?
O’REILLY: Because you have a warped view of this world and a warped view of this country.
GLICK: Well, explain that. Let me give you an example of a parallel...
O’REILLY: No, I’m not going to debate this with you, all right.
GLICK: Well, let me give you an example of parallel experience. On September 14...
O’REILLY: No, no. Here’s -- here’s the...
GLICK: On September 14...
O’REILLY: Here’s the record.
GLICK: OK.
O’REILLY: All right. You didn’t support the action against Afghanistan to remove the Taliban. You were against it, OK.
GLICK: Why would I want to brutalize and further punish the people in Afghanistan...
O’REILLY: Who killed your father!
GLICK: The people in Afghanistan...
O’REILLY: Who killed your father.
GLICK: ... didn’t kill my father.
O’REILLY: Sure they did. The al Qaeda people were trained there.
GLICK: The al Qaeda people? What about the Afghan people?
O’REILLY: See, I’m more angry about it than you are!
GLICK: So what about George Bush?
O’REILLY: What about George Bush? He had nothing to do with it.
GLICK: The director -- senior as director of the CIA.
O’REILLY: He had nothing to do with it.
GLICK: So the people that trained a hundred thousand Mujahadeen who were...
O’REILLY: Man, I hope your mom isn’t watching this.
GLICK: Well, I hope she is.
O’REILLY: I hope your mother is not watching this because you -- that’s it. I’m not going to say anymore.
GLICK: OK.
O’REILLY: In respect for your father...
GLICK: On September 14, do you want to know what I’m doing?
O’REILLY: Shut up. Shut up.
GLICK: Oh, please don’t tell me to shut up.
O’REILLY: As respect -- as respect -- in respect for your father, who was a Port Authority worker, a fine American, who got killed unnecessarily by barbarians...
GLICK: By radical extremists who were trained by this government...
O’REILLY: Out of respect for him...
GLICK: ... not the people of America.
O’REILLY: ... I’m not going to...
GLICK: ... The people of the ruling class, the small minority.
O’REILLY: Cut his mic. I’m not going to dress you down anymore, out of respect for your father. We will be back in a moment with more of THE FACTOR.
GLICK: That means we’re done?
O’REILLY: We’re done.

Excerpt 7: Bill O’Reilly: excerpt 2 (http://mediamatters.org/items/200708010008?f=s_search)

O’REILLY: Now, the letters.

Israel Gopstein, Silver Spring, Maryland: "Mr. O’Reilly, I’m surprised at your lapse of judgment comparing the tactics of the Nazis to The Huffington Post. I lost many members of my family to the Holocaust, and the meaning of their deaths means more than a comparison to a meaningless blog."
Now, first of all, I appreciate your letter very much, sir, and I’ve thought about it. If you look back at what happened in Germany, you cannot escape the similarities between what Hitler and his cutthroats did back then and the hate-filled blogs, what they’re doing now.

From the late 1920s to 1933, when Hitler became chancellor, the Nazis used vile propaganda to demonize Jews and others in the eyes of the German people. They used newspapers, radio, leaflets, and rallies to build up enormous hatred towards your family.

Today, we are seeing the same thing on the Net here in America. There’s no difference. When Arianna Huffington allows people to say that Nancy Reagan should suffer terribly and then die, that is completely unacceptable and no different than what Dr. Joseph Goebbels and others were putting out way back then.

Again, I thank you for your thoughtful letter.

Excerpt 8: John Gibson http://mediamatters.org/items/200711200007?f=s_search

GIBSON: Fran, I know this isn’t exactly in your turf, but we can’t help but notice the news that the war is going better. We can’t help notice that we haven’t been attacked, and yet we see the Democrats in Congress continuing to try to surrender, if you will. The Democrats have vowed more failure. Do you believe that "stop the war" is a winner?

TOWNSEND: It is not a winner. And, in fact, it is a guaranteed loser, as you know. We are seeing the effects of the surge. We know from our generals that attacks are down substantially in Iraq. We see the beginnings of progress on the part of the Maliki government. This would be the worst conceivable time to decide to pull back. We are making progress, we are seeing progress, but it’s fragile. And we have to build on that progress. When I hear people talk about pulling back from the surge, I say, "And what? And what if that -- we don’t -- the progress crumbles? What is your plan?" And I don’t hear the Democrats having a plan.


WALLACE: So, congressional Democrats are trying again to force the president’s hand on Iraq. The House passed but the Senate defeated a $50 billion measure to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but with some strings attached -- linking it to withdrawals of U.S. troops from Iraq. Now, Brit, despite complaints from the Pentagon, the Democrats say they are not going to look at these money bills again until some time next month. When does this actually affect the troops on the front lines, and do you think the Democrats will back off before it does?

HUME: Well, the first question -- the Pentagon makes it sound as if it will happen almost immediately. I don’t think there’s any doubt that the troops on the front lines will have what they need, but there will be some other disruptions if the Pentagon is to be believed on this, and some of them are serious enough that they could cause even some layoffs of contract personnel and so on. So that’s a possibility.

The second thing that needs to be said about this, Chris, is that this whole debate has this aura of unreality about it, at least on the Democratic side, because they keep talking about events in Iraq that do not comport with the reality on the ground over there. You hear it again and again and you hear it in the attitude they have about, you know, they’re going to force troop
withdrawals -- impervious to the fact that troop withdrawals have already begun. It’s happening. That seems to be unknown to them.

And I think there is political peril for them in all of this. The American people don’t like the Iraq war, they probably never will. But they’re not rooting for us to lose; they don’t seem invested in our losing the way the Democrats so often do. The Democrats are talking about -- the things they say are happening are not and the things they say are not happening are. That’s not a good position to be in.

Excerpt 10: George Bush http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/05/15/bush-compares-obama-to-na_n_101859.html

"Some seem to believe we should negotiate with terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along. We have heard this foolish delusion before. As Nazi tanks crossed into Poland in 1939, an American Senator declared: ‘Lord, if only I could have talked to Hitler, all of this might have been avoided.’ We have an obligation to call this what it is -- the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history."
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