

METAPHORICAL SCENARIOS IN THE 2004 AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR PERSUASION

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Abstract

Metaphorical scenarios used in American political speeches to frame particular subjects have been the topic of several papers (Lakoff 1992; Musolff 1995; Cienki 2005) which attempted to uncover their underlying meaning and their manipulative or persuasive force. My paper analyses the way in which G. W. Bush and John Kerry made use of these scenarios during the 2004 Presidential Debates in their attempt to promote their own programmes and to dismantle that of their opponent, with the obvious aim to persuade the American citizens.

The analysis has revealed that the two candidates made recurrent use of these scenarios to frame various topics, particularly those under hot debate, such as the War in Iraq or the War on Terror. The main purpose of my analysis, however, has been to identify a potential reason why candidates make appeal to such metaphorical scenarios in the first place. One answer may be that these scenarios contribute to the relevance of their message, which in turn may contribute to persuasion, the main intention behind what politicians say and do. The theoretical framework underlying my analysis combines elements from relevance theory with aspects of framing and verbalisation, and proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon of persuasion.

Key words: Relevance theory; Metaphorical scenarios; Framing; Persuasion.

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