

# The Use and Effect of Coherence Markers in Presidential Debates

Suzan Vrieze, s4764609  
Supervised by: Dr. J. Hoek  
International Business Communication, Faculty of Arts  
Radboud University  
June, 2020

## **Abstract**

Presidential debates can be pivotal to the outcome of the presidential election in the USA. For candidates a good performance calls for sound argumentation and coherent speech in order to persuade the audience. Coherence can be created and supported by the use of connectives. Very few studies have analysed the role of coherence markers, or connectives in political debates. This study investigates whether individual politicians differ in their use of connectives and whether there is a relation between the outcome of the debate and connective use. A corpus of six (vice-)presidential debates was compiled from the years 2004, 2012 and 2016. 12 speakers were analysed. Results revealed individual differences in connective use between speakers. Specifically, Barack Obama and Dick Cheney used significantly more connectives than some of the other speakers, but not all. The distribution of connective types showed that Paul Ryan used relatively less *conjunction* connectives (*and, also, as well*) and relatively more *cause* (*because, so, for*) and *synchronous* connectives (*as, before, then*). However, no significant differences were found between winners and losers of the debates. In conclusion, some politicians can differ in connective use, but no relation was found between winning a debate and connective use.

## Introduction

The United States has over 300 million inhabitants and every four years the citizens of the country elect a president. During the election process, the politicians who run for office use as many tactics as they possibly can in order to persuade the American people to vote for them. Leading up to election day, three key debates between the Democrat and the Republican candidate are held, as well as one debate between the vice-presidential candidates. Viewers can use these debates to see in what way candidates differ in ideas and ideals. Undecided voters may be persuaded to vote for one of the candidates.

Presidential debates play an essential role in the campaign strategies of politicians. Pfau (2002) argues that televised debates are “a communication staple in contemporary presidential campaigns”. The presidential debates always take place close to the elections and are usually the last big events in a candidate’s campaign, as other activities slow down for the media to focus on the debates. These debates can play a key part in the end results of the elections. Schill and Kirk (2014) found that undecided voters’ impressions of the candidates were influenced by watching presidential debates, based on the candidate’s performance. The participants scored their opinion of the presidential candidates on a scale from 1 (negative) to 100 (positive) during the debates. The study showed that viewers’ perceptions improved significantly, especially for Mitt Romney, after the first debate. His score went up from a 51 to a 62. The candidates also showed significant changes in character trait perceptions. For example, John McCain was considered more sincere after the first debate than before.

Televised political debates are a unique form of communication. For this reason, the format has gained attention from researchers from various disciplines since the first general election debate was televised back in 1960 (Hinck et al., 2018; Pfau, 2002; Rowland, 2018; Schill & Kirk, 2017; van Dijk, 1997). Debates feature naturally spoken discourse, while the topics that are discussed are highly prepared by the candidates. Also, the format is not that of a natural conversation, but more that of a structured interview where each candidate gets a turn to speak. The speakers also do not directly address each other. They address the moderator. Below an example is shown of how John Kerry addresses moderator Jim Lehrer in the first presidential debate of 2004:

“Jim, the president just said something extraordinarily revealing and frankly very important in this debate”. John Kerry (September 30, 2004 Debate Transcript, 2004).

Political communication features argumentation that is not found in other domains of communication. Zarefsky (2008) argues that although political argumentation is not officially

considered a separate field of argumentation, there are numerous recurring patterns and characteristics. Political communication is limited by a number of constraints, including time limits, the lack of terminology for the key characteristics, heterogeneous audiences, and the assumption that politicians deal with people of all intellectual levels. Despite all these limitations, politicians should communicate clearly and find a way to use these constraints to their advantage.

Political discourse and argumentation in presidential debates are complex and have, for this reason, been researched on numerous topics such as: the use of face threats (Hinck et al., 2018), racially divisive appeals (Brown, 2016) and appeals to values (Gordon & Miller, 2004). Each of these elements play a part in how the presidential candidates are viewed by their potential voters. Although coherence is an essential part of argumentation, it seems that the topic of coherence relations has been largely overlooked within the setting of political argumentation.

This thesis will analyse the use of connectives in a political communication setting. “Connectives are text devices that explicitly mark the relation between adjacent text units” (Murray, 1997, p. 227). Connectives assist speakers with structuring their discourse. There are many different types of connectives and each has its own function. Examples of frequently used connectives are *but*, *because* and *also*. To date, hardly any research has looked into the use of connectives in political debate discourse and the effect this might have on the debate’s outcome for the individual speaker. Previous research has found that connectives can influence text persuasion (Kamalski, Lentz, Sanders, & Zwaan, 2008). Insights into coherence in political debate context could provide a broader understanding of what tools are used to attempt to persuade the voters.

It is unclear whether individual politicians make use of connectives differently and if so, *how* they differ. To discover individual differences and trends, research needs to go beyond individual examples and connective use should be studied on a larger scale. Below, two examples of unrelated excerpts from the first presidential election debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are given. At first glance it can be seen that there are both similarities (the use of the words *but* and *because*) and differences (Trump’s use of *and* and Clinton’s use of *also*) in connective use. In these examples, Clinton and Trump use different connectives to achieve the same result: *and* and *also* are both *conjunction* connectives. This means that the connective shows that the second part of the excerpt somehow adds new, additional information to the first part of the excerpt (Prasad et al., 2007).

“**But** it’s **because** I see this—we need to have strong growth, fair growth, sustained growth. We **also** have to look at how we help families balance the responsibilities at home and the responsibilities at business”. Hillary Clinton (September 26, 2016 Debate Transcript, 2016).

“**But** we need—Lester, we need law and order. **And** we need law and order in the inner cities, **because** the people that are most affected by what’s happening are African-American and Hispanic people. **And** it’s very unfair to them what our politicians are allowing to happen”. Donald Trump (September 26, 2016 Debate Transcript, 2016).

Individual differences between the speakers are highly likely, since the politicians come from different backgrounds. One of the politicians that will be featured in the present study is president Donald Trump. Trump has attracted attention from many linguists who characterise his speech as rambling and more conversational than is generally expected from politicians (Wang & Liu, 2018). Research indicates that Trump’s communicative style is significantly different from his competitors. It seems that in general Trump uses less diverse vocabulary and simpler sentences in comparison to other politicians. In addition, Trump’s language level is lower than any of the candidates he was compared to (Kayam, 2018; Wang & Liu, 2018).

Presidential debates are a staple in the American elections and good performance is of the utmost importance to the candidates. Politicians have to attempt to reach people from all backgrounds with their message. Coherence in this performance is arguably one of the most crucial elements, as politicians want to ensure that their message comes across. Connectives are a tool that can build coherence relations between elements of speech. If speakers are more coherent, perhaps speakers can reach a wider audience. The present study aims to analyse the connective use of different politicians in order to examine if there is a relation between winning a debate and connective use.

## **Literature review**

### *Political communication*

In the United States, presidential debates are the final step in the presidential campaign process that takes presidential candidates around the country for many months. The candidates attempt to persuade people to vote for them through many different forms of communication, such television advertisements, online advertising, speeches and events (Benoit, 2007; Hart & Jarvis, 1997).

Presidential debates provide a unique form of campaign communication. Debates allow each candidate to make a case for themselves to a diverse audience of supporters, opponents, and undecided voters and thereby overcome selective exposure. Since both sides have equal time to make their case, debates provide the most balanced information voters receive over the course of a campaign (Warner & McKinney, 2013).

Hart and Jarvis (1997) investigated the role of the presidential debates within the context of the political campaigns of 1996. They described the debates as a tool to ground the campaigns. Whereas advertisements and speeches during the respective campaigns of each candidate seemed to attract overstatements and, on some topics, the differences between the candidates were not always clear. The presidential debates “cut through some of the campaign baloney” (Kenski & Jamieson, 2011, p.307) by making the candidates more introspective and showing off their opposing views in one setting.

Thus, it can be said that presidential debates are of meaningful importance to the outcome of the elections. There seems to be a relation between viewing a presidential campaign debate and increasing political polarisation (Warner & McKinney, 2013). This finding was based on an experiment in which (vice-)presidential general election debates were viewed from the years 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. The findings showed that viewers changed their opinions to a more ‘extreme’ version of this opinion. Since two parties from a binary system go head to head in a debate, polarising views come with the territory. However, the effect it has on viewers seems to show that they are influenced by viewing the debate.

### *Connectives*

Based on the findings by Schill and Kirk (2014) that were discussed earlier, it can be argued that performing well in the presidential debates could lead to overall victory for a candidate. It is therefore pivotal that a candidate speaks in a convincing and coherent manner. The present study aims to analyse the use of connectives in political debates. Connectives can be defined as “devices that explicitly mark the relation between adjacent text units” (Murray, 1997, p. 227). Connectives can be seen as cement holding the building blocks of text together. By means of connectives, a speaker can mark coherence relations between two text units or ideas.

Since the main objective of presidential candidates during a debate is to convince viewers to vote for them, it is important that these viewers understand what is being said. Connectives play a key role in understanding a discourse. Sanders, Spooen and Noordman (1992) define understanding discourse as creating a mental representation of the information. This mental representation can be considered successful if it is coherent, meaning that all

parts of the discourse are connected and represented (Kamalski, Sanders, & Lentz, 2008).

Building on Sanders, Spooren and Noordman (1992), Cevasco (2009) conducted research on the role of the connective *but* in the context of causal relations and in the integration of two succeeding statements. Interestingly, *but* is not generally considered a *cause* connective, but more of a *contrast* connective. To illustrate, the following example is given: the statement ‘she was allergic to horsehair, horse sweat, but she wouldn’t quit riding them’ is used to convey the statement along the lines of ‘she loved horses’. In this case *but* is a *cause* connective as opposed to a *contrast* connective. The results of the study revealed that the connective that linked the two statements helped participants in creating and deciding on the presence of causal connections. The results seemed to show that there is a difference in the mental representation of two isolated statements and a pair of statements conjoined by a connective. Thus, if used correctly, adding connectives to one’s discourse could have a positive effect on one’s audience.

The use of connectives also seems to improve text comprehension. Sanders, Land, & Mulder (2007) investigated the relation between the use of coherence markers and text comprehension. The coherence markers seemed to assist readers to form a coherent mental organisation into a cognitive structure. Kamalski, Sanders, and Lentz (2008) found that readers who had little previous knowledge on the subject of the text benefited from the use of connectives most. These results suggest that the use of connectives can have a positive effect on text comprehension. For the present study, this could mean that effective use of connectives could give a presidential candidate a way to reach more people by producing comprehensive discourse.

This thesis will add to an analysis by Wang and Guo (2018), who analysed the use of discourse markers in the first 2016 U.S. presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Although discourse markers are not necessarily connectives and their categories were labelled differently, they do report on frequent connectives such as *and*, *but* and *because*. Their finding that *and* was the most frequent connective, suggest that it is likely *conjunction* connectives will be the most frequent in the present study. The analysis showed some striking differences between the two politicians. For instance, Trump used the word *but* 74 times, whereas Hillary only used it 40 times. For the present study, this could mean that Trump could be found to use more *contrast* connectives than Clinton and perhaps other politicians.

Wang and Guo (2018) argue that effective use of discourse markers in debates can be an effective tool within the debate context. However, the results of the study are very limited

and, arguably, the researchers could have done a lot more with their research. They only report descriptive statistics on the results per category and fail to present a clear distinction in discourse marker use between speakers. The present study will focus on individual connective use and compare this to whether the outcome of the debate was successful or not for the speaker.

So far, the research on the use of connectives in political communication or debate discourse is extremely limited. Wang & Guo (2018) only scratch the surface on the use of discourse markers in presidential debate. If connective use is effective in argumentation, and different politicians use different types of argumentation to make their point, is it actually the case that connective use can have an impact on ‘winning’ a debate? This thesis aims to analyse the use of connectives in political debates and whether there is a relation between the use of connectives and the outcome of the debate for the individual speaker.

The following research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: Within the setting of a presidential debate, in what way do individual speakers differ in the types of connectives they use?

RQ2: Does connective use relate to the outcome of the debate for the individual speakers, and if so how?

This research will add to both the field of political communication, as well as the field of coherence markers. Political communication is unlike other forms of communication, since it is bound by constraints. Debates are a combination of formal, prepared speech and natural conversation. Researching the use of connectives in this context is very new. Therefore, this research will serve as exploratory research into the relation between the use of connectives in political argumentation settings to serve as a basis for research in the future.



## **Methodology**

### *The corpus*

The corpus consisted of six annotated debates. The corpus has been compiled from the database as selected by the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD). This organisation compiles transcripts of the four major election debates in the United States between leading candidates for the offices of president - and vice-president respectively (Debate Transcripts, 2020). The debates included in the corpus are from 2004, 2012 and 2016 (see Appendix A). The presidential debates from 2008 were excluded from the corpus to ensure speaker variation, since president Barack Obama and vice-president Joe Biden participated in both 2008 and 2012. For each of the general election years, the first presidential debate and the vice-presidential debate were included in the corpus. An overview of the debates is included in Table 1.

For the second research question the outcome of the debates was needed. To determine which politician won the debate, poll results were used. To ensure consistent results, all articles used were by CNN (see Appendix B). Since the debates stretch over a 12-year period of time, the formats of the articles differ slightly, but all articles declared either a winner and loser, or a draw.

Table 1. Overview of debates in the corpus with type of debate, date of occurrence, candidates and outcome

Debate	Date	Republican candidate	Democrat candidate	Outcome
General Election Presidential Debate	30 September, 2004	Bush	Kerry	Winner: Kerry
Vice-Presidential Debate	5 October, 2004	Cheney	Edwards	Draw
General Election Presidential Debate	3 October, 2012	Romney	Obama	Winner: Romney
Vice-Presidential Debate	11 October, 2012	Ryan	Biden	Draw
General Election Presidential Debate	26 September, 2016	Trump	Clinton	Winner: Clinton
Vice-Presidential Debate	4 October, 2016	Pence	Kaine	Winner: Pence

### *Procedure*

The corpus was coded by a team of five coders, all students of the bachelor International Business Communication at Radboud University, Nijmegen. Each debate was coded in its entirety. The debates were divided into units (henceforth referred to as *speech units*) by the coders to create structure. The paragraphs of the transcript were used as a guide for when a *speech unit* ended, and another began. Each speaker's turn was divided into paragraphs. Each of these paragraphs will serve as a *speech unit* (see Appendix C). This means that a *speech unit* can range from a phrase such as "Yes, I do." to an utterance that is over one hundred words long.

Each *speech unit* was coded for the following variables:

1. Name of the politician
2. Number of words per *speech unit*
3. Connective
4. Type of connective
5. Number of connectives

The variable *type of connective* was based on categories defined by The Penn Discourse Treebank 2.0 Annotation Manual (Prasad et al., 2007). The categories are shown in Figure 1. For this analysis the second level, or *type* level, was used (e.g. *synchronous*, *contrast*). To form a codebook, a list of connectives and the distribution and counts of the *types* by Prasad et al. was used. Most connectives can be used for different functions. For example, *in fact* can be used as a *conjunction* or a *restatement* connective. For each connective listed, the most frequent type was selected for the codebook. This was done to ensure that coding the connectives could be done fairly systematic. There was a small number of connectives that were appointed two different types and for those, individual decisions were made. The codebooks can be found in the Appendix C and D.

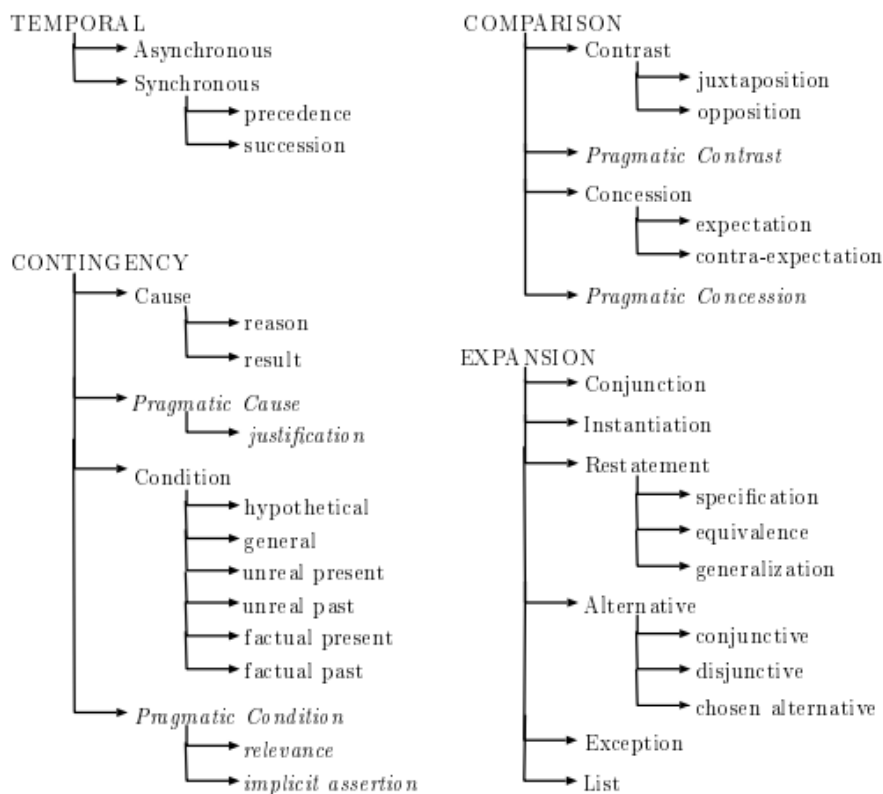


Figure 1. Hierarchy of sense tags from The Penn Discourse Treebank 2.0 (Prasad et al., 2007)

Below a citation was taken from the 2016 vice-presidential debate to illustrate how the different types of connectives were coded.

“**But** there’s a — there’s a reason why people question the trustworthiness of Hillary Clinton. **And** that’s **because** they’re paying attention. I mean, the reality is, **when** she was secretary of state, Senator, come on. She had a Clinton Foundation accepting contributions from foreign governments”. Mike Pence (October 4, 2016 Debate Transcript, 2016).

From this citation four connectives were coded. *But* was coded as a *contrast* connective, *and* as a *conjunction* connective, *because* as a *cause* connective and *when* as a *synchronous* connective.

#### *Statistical treatment*

The first research question was whether individual speakers differ in their use of connectives. To standardise the number of connectives used, a new variable was computed. The variable *connectives per 100 words* was created by dividing the number of connectives by the number of words, times 100. This way, a number was created for each *speech unit*.

$$\text{connectives per 100 words} = (\text{number of connectives} / \text{number of words}) * 100$$

The first statistical test conducted was a descriptive analysis for ‘Connectives per 100 words’. The SPSS file was split for the variable *speaker*. The analysis showed the mean number of connectives per 100 words per speaker.

Next, a one-way analysis of variance with Bonferroni correction was conducted to determine whether there was a difference between the number of connectives used per speaker. The variable *connectives per 100 words* was the dependent variable and the speaker was the factor.

Next, the distribution of the types of connectives used per speaker was analysed qualitatively. Connectives were analysed on the *type* level (level 2 in the hierarchy of sense tags, see Figure 1). The absolute numbers were converted to percentages, to show a standardised distribution.

$$\text{Percentage of Type X} = (\text{number of connectives in type X} / \text{total number of connectives}) * 100$$

The second research question was whether there is a relation between winning a debate and connective use. To analyse this a new variable was computed. The candidates were divided into two groups: winners and losers. The candidates that neither won, nor lost were excluded from this. For the variable *winner/loser*, Kerry, Romney, Clinton and Pence were coded as

‘winner’ and Bush, Obama, Trump and Kaine were coded as ‘loser’. An independent samples t-test with Bonferroni correction was conducted between *winner*s and *loser*s for the number of connectives.

To determine whether there was a difference between *winner*s and *loser*s in the types of connectives used, a Chi-square test was carried out. The Chi-square test showed the expected and actual count for each type of connective.

## Results

### *Number of connectives*

The first research question asks whether individual speakers differ in the types and number of connectives they use. Figure 2 shows the average number of connectives per 100 words for each speaker. It revealed that the overall average number of connectives is 4.48 per 100 words. Pence used the fewest connectives ( $M = 3.35$ ) and Obama the most ( $M = 6.40$ ). Figure 2 shows the average number of connectives per 100 words for each candidate.

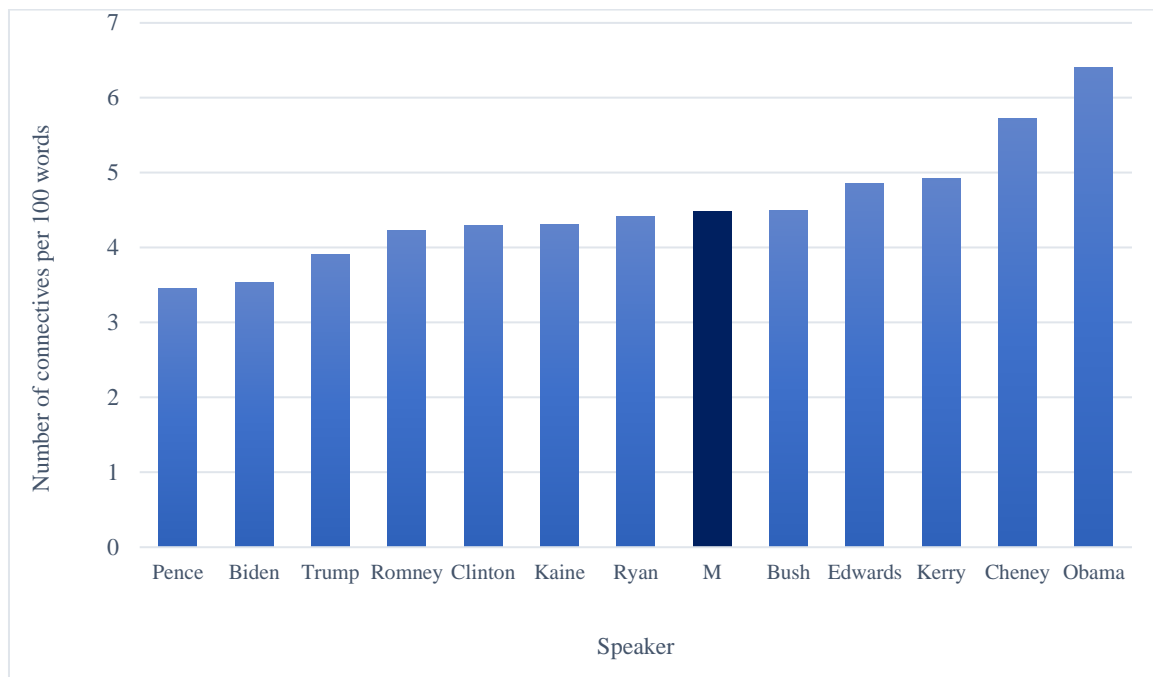


Figure 2. Average number of connectives per 100 words per speaker and total mean number of connectives per 100 words of all candidates

A one-way analysis of variance showed that some of the speakers differed significantly in their connective use per 100 words ( $F(11, 2649) = 5.00, p < .001$ ). Obama's connective use ( $M = 6.40, SD = 8.51$ ) was significantly higher (Bonferroni correction, all  $p$ 's  $< .030$ ) than that of seven of the other speakers: Romney ( $M = 4.23, SD = 3.41$ ), Ryan ( $M = 4.42, SD = 4.85$ ), Biden ( $M = 3.54, SD = 5.07$ ), Trump ( $M = 3.91, SD = 4.19$ ), Clinton ( $M = 4.30, SD = 4.10$ ), Pence ( $M = 3.45, SD = 6.20$ ) and Kaine ( $M = 4.31, SD = 5.38$ ). No significant difference was found between Obama and Bush, Kerry, Cheney or Edwards (Bonferroni correction; all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ).

The number of connectives used per 100 words by Cheney ( $M = 5.72, SD = 4.43$ ) was significantly higher (Bonferroni correction, all  $p$ 's  $< .021$ ) than that of three of the other

speakers: Biden ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 5.07$ ), Trump ( $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = 4.19$ ), Pence ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 6.20$ ). No significant difference was found between Cheney and the other eight speakers (Bonferroni correction; all  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ).

### *Connective use per category*

Table 2 shows the relative distribution of connective types per politician, compared to the mean score of all politicians. As apparent in Table 2, it seems noteworthy that for the three most frequent categories, Ryan's scores are vastly different compared to his fellow politicians. Ryan seems to use less *conjunction* connectives (26.7%), compared to the average (43.8%), and more *cause* (28.7%) and *synchronous* connectives (22.8%) compared to the average scores (17.1% and 14.6% respectively).

The *contrast* connectives show two outliers. Cheney's connective use only features 4.1% *contrast* connectives, whereas Trump's connective use features more than a fifth *contrast* connectives (20.9%).

Table 2. Relative connective use per type of connective in percentages per speaker and total mean scores

Type	<i>M</i> %	Bush %	Kerry %	Cheney %	Edwards %	Romney %	Obama %	Ryan %	Biden %	Trump %	Clinton %	Pence %	Kaine %
<b>Conjunction</b>	43.8	46.1	51.2	43.3	43.3	49.5	43.8	<b>26.7</b>	34.0	43.3	47.7	47.8	48.9
<b>Cause</b>	17.1	12.9	8.4	22.4	27.1	12.0	17.9	<b>28.7</b>	18.0	15.9	18.7	12.0	11.4
<b>Synchronous</b>	14.6	13.2	12.7	17.4	10.9	9.1	11.7	<b>22.8</b>	17.0	15.9	13.4	16.2	14.3
<b>Contrast</b>	12.2	10.5	12.7	4.1	10.4	14.7	13.6	8.6	9.2	<b>20.9</b>	14.1	14.1	13.0
<b>Condition</b>	5.6	8.1	3.7	4.6	2.9	8.0	7.9	6.4	9.2	1.7	2.8	4.8	6.5
<b>Exception</b>	2.5	3.1	2.5	0.9	0.7	3.5	2.2	4.2	6.2	1.5	1.1	2.4	2.4
<b>Temporal</b>	1.3	5.4	5.3	1.1	1.7	1.1	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.5
<b>Comparison</b>	0.8	0.3	2.2	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.5	<b>1.7</b>	1.0	0.0	1.1	1.4	1.4
<b>Restatement</b>	0.7	0.0	0.0	3.9	1.0	0.3	0.7	0.0	2.0	0.5	0.4	0.0	0.0
<b>Instantiation</b>	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>List</b>	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
<b>Concession</b>	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
<b>Expansion</b>	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Contingency</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0
<b>Pragmatic Cause</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

*Outcome of the debate and connective use*

The second research question was whether there is a relation between winning a debate and connective use. An independent t-test showed no significant difference between *winner*s ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 5.68$ ) and *loser*s ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ) with regard to the number of connectives used per 100 words ( $t(1691.58) = 1.60$ ,  $p = .11$ ). *Winner*s and *loser*s use almost the same number of connectives per 100 words.

A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between type of connective and winning or losing a debate ( $\chi^2(15) = 22.76$ ,  $p = .089$ ). *Winner*s did not use one type of connective significantly more or less than *loser*s of the debates.



## Discussion

This thesis set out to investigate the different uses of connectives in political debate context (RQ1) and whether there is a relation between the use of connectives and the outcome of the debate for the individual speaker (RQ2). Findings indicate that some politicians do differ in their use of connectives during presidential debates.

For the first research question, the number of connectives used differed between politicians. Specifically, Obama used significantly more connectives than seven of the other politicians. It seems noteworthy that the politicians that showed no significant difference in connective use compared to Obama were the four politicians from 2004 elections. Perhaps the proportion of connectives relative to other words has diminished slightly over time. Since the debates of 2008 were not included in this analysis, this is difficult to determine.

Based on the findings in Table 2, it can be concluded that Ryan performs differently compared to the other politicians regarding the average distribution of connective types. For the three most different connective types, Ryan's scores differ from the other speakers. As Figure 3 shows, Ryan seems to have used substantially fewer *conjunction* connectives than the other politicians. A possible explanation for the finding that Ryan uses relatively less *conjunction* connectives compared to the other politicians analysed, is that *conjunction* connectives can be excluded in spoken language, especially in every-day conversation (Nielsen, 1996). In cases where a speaker leaves out a *conjunction* connective, he/she leaves it to the listener to create coherence in the discourse by inference. Below, an utterance by Ryan illustrates how he might have left out a *conjunction* connective (marked as [also]).

“After my dad died, my mom and I got Social Security survivors’ benefits, helped me pay for college, it [also] helped her go back to college in her 50s where she started a small business because of the new skills she got”. Paul Ryan (October 11, 2012 Debate Transcript, 2012).

As mentioned before, political debates form a curious genre, because a mix of prepared speech and naturally spoken discourse is uttered. If connectives are left out more in every-day discourse (Nielsen, 1996), and debates are partly naturally spoken discourse, perhaps Ryan's speech style is more similar to every-day conversation, than some of the other speakers.

As is also shown in Figure 2, Ryan uses vastly more *cause* and *synchronous* connectives than the average. Based on the findings in table 2, it can be seen that he uses relatively the most *cause* and *synchronous* connectives of all speakers. A possible explanation for this is the fact that many *conjunction* connectives are very general and can be left out,

whereas, *cause* and *synchronous* connectives (among others) can be used to enrich one's language (Asr & Demberg, 2012; Spooren, 1997).

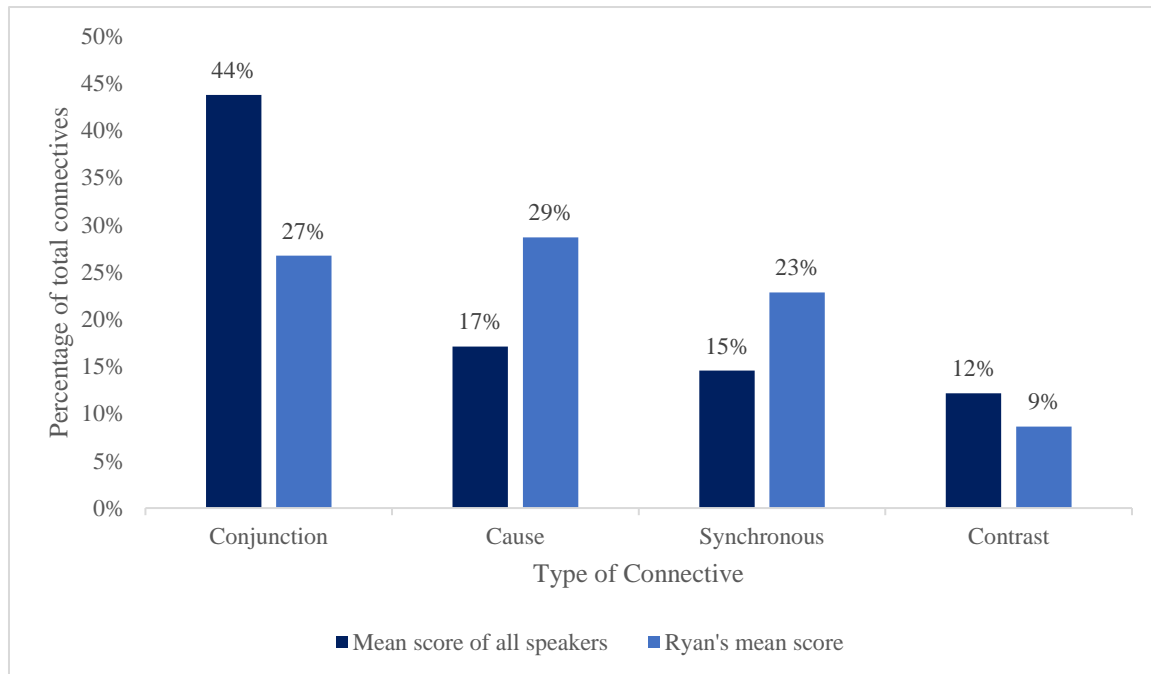


Figure 3 Relative Distribution of *conjunction*, *cause*, *synchronous* and *contrast* connectives: total mean scores and mean scores for Ryan

In previous research, Trump's language use has been described as simple, rambling and conversational. Trump's communication seemed to be different from his competitors (Wang & Liu, 2018). This does not seem to be reflected in his use of connectives. His average number of connectives used was close to the overall mean. The one thing that stands out is the finding that Trump uses by far the most *contrast* connectives. This is in line with previous research found by Wang & Guo (2018), who found that Trump uses almost twice as many *but*'s compared to his opponent Hillary Clinton.

Findings with respect to connective use and debate outcome showed no significant results. There seems to be no relation between connective use and winning or losing a debate. In addition, no relations were found between winning a debate and using more or fewer connectives of a certain category.

The present study is one of few studies that have investigated the use of connectives in political debate context. A corpus analysis of six presidential debates has shown that some differences between speakers occur regarding the relative number of connectives used, as well as differences in distribution of connective types. As of yet, no relation has been found

between connective use and the outcome of the debate.

Findings of the current study are limited by the number of debates: only one debate was analysed per speaker. Since most debates deal with different subject matter, it could be that connective use was influenced by this. It is also possible that the politician did not perform to their usual capabilities of standards, as it would appear that all but one of the debate outcomes coincided with the outcome of the elections.

The present study served as exploratory research of the use of connectives in political debate context. A corpus analysis has revealed that differences in connective use between participants of presidential debates occur. Both the relative number of connectives uttered, and the distribution of connective types showed individual differences in communication style between some speakers. To shed more light on this relatively new field of study, similar analyses with larger corpora should be conducted to gain more insights in connective use in political settings. Furthermore, since previous research has established that watching presidential debates can have significant effects on viewers' impressions of candidates (Schill & Kirk, 2014), it could be interesting to analyse the effect connectives have on viewers by means of an experiment. Overall, this study has served as a basis for future studies in coherence relations in political discourse. It has demonstrated that politicians do indeed make different use of connectives.

## References

- Asr, F., & Demberg, V. (2012). Measuring the strength of linguistic cues for discourse relations. *24th International Conference on ...*, (Mmci), 33–42. Retrieved from <http://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W/W12/W12-47.pdf#page=41>
- Benoit, W. L. (2007). Communication in political campaigns. In *Psychology Applied to Work: An Introduction to Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Tenth Edition Paul* (pp. VII–IX). Peter Lang Publishing Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Brown, J. A. (2016). Running on Fear: Immigration, Race and Crime Framings in Contemporary GOP Presidential Debate Discourse. *Critical Criminology*, 24(3), 315–331. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-016-9317-8>
- Cevasco, J. (2009). The Role of Connectives in the Comprehension of Spontaneous Spoken Discourse. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology Copyright*, 12(1), 56–65.
- Debate Transcripts. (2020). Retrieved March 6, 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/>
- Gordon, A., & Miller, J. L. (2004). Values and Persuasion During the First Bush-Gore Presidential Debate. *Political Communication*, 21(1), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600490273272>
- Hart, R. P. ., & Jarvis, S. E. (1997). Political Debate. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40(8), 1095–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764297040008010>
- Hinck, S. S., Hinck, E. A., Dailey, W. O., Hinck, R. S., Hansen, E., & Madsen, B. (2018). A tale of two parties: comparing the intensity of face threats in the democratic and republican primary debates of 2012 and 2016. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 54(1–2), 104–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2018.1446865>
- Kamalski, J., Lentz, L., Sanders, T., & Zwaan, R. A. (2008). The forewarning effect of coherence markers in persuasive discourse: Evidence from persuasion and processing. *Discourse Processes*, 45(6), 545–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638530802069983>
- Kamalski, J., Sanders, T., & Lentz, L. (2008). Coherence marking, prior knowledge, and comprehension of informative and persuasive texts: Sorting things out. *Discourse Processes*, 45(4–5), 323–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638530802145486>

- Kayam, O. (2018). The Readability and Simplicity of Donald Trump's Language. *Political Studies Review*, 16(1), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917706844>
- Kenski, K., & Jamieson, K. H. (2011). Presidential and vice presidential debates in 2008: A profile of audience composition. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55(3), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764210392166>
- Murray, J. D. (1997). Connectives and narrative text: The role of continuity. *Memory and Cognition*, 25(2), 227–236. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03201114>
- Nielsen, A. E. (1996). The Argumentative Impact of Causal Relations - An Exemplary Analysis of the Free Predicate in the Promotional Discourse. *Argumentation*, 10, 329–345.
- Pfau, M. (2002). The Subtle Nature of Presidential Debate Influence. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 38(4), 251–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2002.11821571>
- Prasad, R., Miltsakaki, E., Dinesh, N., Lee, A., Joshi, A., Prasad, R. ;, ... Webber, B. L. (2007). The Penn Discourse Treebank 2.0 Annotation Manual. *IRCS Technical Reports Series*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.331.7518.689>
- Rowland, R. C. (2018). Implicit standards of public argument in presidential debates: what the 2016 debates reveal about public deliberation. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 54(1–2), 76–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2018.1446830>
- Sanders, T. J. M., Spooren, W. P. M., & Noordman, L. G. M. (1992). Toward a Taxonomy of Coherence Relations. *Discourse Processes*, 15(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638539209544800>
- Sanders, T., Land, J., & Mulder, G. (2007). Linguistics markers of coherence improve text comprehension in functional contexts. *Information Design Journal*, 15(3), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.1075/idj.15.3.04san>
- Schill, D., & Kirk, R. (2014). Courting the Swing Voter: “Real Time” Insights Into the 2008 and 2012 U.S. Presidential Debates. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(4), 536–555. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213506204>
- Schill, D., & Kirk, R. (2017). Angry, Passionate, and Divided: Undecided Voters and the 2016 Presidential Election. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(9), 1056–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217709040>

- Spooren, W. (1997). The processing of underspecified coherence relations. *Discourse Processes*, 24(1), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638539709545010>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1997). What is Political Discourse Analysis? *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 11, 11–52. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bjl.11.03dij>
- Wang, S., & Guo, Y. (2018). An Analysis on Discourse Markers in First 2016 U.S. Presidential Debate. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 213, 453–457. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ichssr-18.2018.85>
- Wang, Y., & Liu, H. (2018). Is Trump always rambling like a fourth-grade student? An analysis of stylistic features of Donald Trump’s political discourse during the 2016 election. *Discourse and Society*, 29(3), 299–323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926517734659>
- Warner, B. R., & McKinney, M. S. (2013). To Unite and Divide: The Polarizing Effect of Presidential Debates. *Communication Studies*, 64(5), 508–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.832341>
- Zarefsky, D. (2008). Strategic maneuvering in political argumentation. *Argumentation*, 22(3), 317–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-008-9096-9>

## **Appendix A. Overview of Debate Transcripts**

### **Debate 1: Bush vs. Kerry**

*September 30, 2004 Debate Transcript.* Debates.org. (2004). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/september-30-2004-debate-transcript/>.

### **Debate 2: Cheney vs. Edwards**

*October 5, 2004 Transcript.* Debates.org. (2004). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-5-2004-transcript/>.

### **Debate 3: Romney vs. Obama**

*October 3, 2012 Debate Transcript.* Debates.org. (2012). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-3-2012-debate-transcript/>.

### **Debate 4: Ryan vs. Biden**

*October 11, 2012 Debate Transcript.* Debates.org. (2012). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-11-2012-the-biden-romney-vice-presidential-debate/>.

### **Debate 5: Trump vs. Clinton**

*September 26, 2016 Debate Transcript.* Debates.org. (2016). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/september-26-2016-debate-transcript/>.

### **Debate 6: Pence vs. Kaine**

*October 4, 2016 Debate Transcript.* Debates.org. (2016). Retrieved 1 March 2020, from <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-4-2016-debate-transcript/>.

## **Appendix B. Overview of Debate Outcome Sources**

### **Debate 1: Bush vs. Kerry**

*Polls: Kerry won debate.* CNN. (2004). Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/10/03/election.poll/index.html>.

### **Debate 2: Cheney vs. Edwards**

Mercurio, J. (2004). *The seeing-red debate.* CNN. Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/10/06/wed/>.

### **Debate 3: Romney vs. Obama**

Cohen, T. (2012). *Romney takes debate to Obama over economy, health care.* CNN. Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/03/politics/debate-main/index.html>.

### **Debate 4: Ryan vs. Biden**

Cohen, T. (2012). *Biden, Ryan in combative exchange, but call it a draw.* CNN. Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/11/politics/vp-debate/index.html>.

### **Debate 5: Trump vs. Clinton**

Agiesta, J. (2016). *Post-debate poll: Hillary Clinton takes round one.* CNN. Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/27/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-debate-poll/index.html>.

### **Debate 6: Pence vs. Kaine**

Agiesta, J. (2016). *Pence edges Kaine in VP debate instant poll.* CNN. Retrieved 28 March 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/05/politics/mike-pence-tim-kaine-vp-debate-poll/index.html>.



## **Appendix C. Codebook**

### **Speaker**

- Mediator = 0
- Bush = 1
- Kerry = 2
- Cheney = 3
- Edwards = 4
- Romney = 5
- Obama = 6
- Ryan = 7
- Biden = 8
- Trump = 9
- Clinton = 10
- Pence = 11
- Kaine = 12

### **Speech unit**

→ Speech that is marked as a paragraph in the transcript

Example:

Kerry:

1. Yes, I do.
2. But before I answer further, let me thank you for moderating. I want to thank the University of Miami for hosting us. And I know the president will join me in welcoming all of Florida to this debate. You've been through the roughest weeks anybody could imagine. Our hearts go out to you. And we admire your pluck and perseverance.
3. I can make American safer than President Bush has made us.

### **Number of words**

→ using automatic word count formula

### **Connective**

e.g. 'because'

**Type of connective**

e.g. cause → code as 21

**Number of connectives**

Total number of connectives per speech unit.

**Appendix D. Codebook connectives and type of connectives**

<b>connective</b>	<b>code as:</b>
accordingly	cause = 21
additionally	conjunction = 41
after	synchronous = 12
afterward	synchronous = 12
also	conjunction = 41
alternatively	alternative = 44
although	- contrast = 31 - concession = 33
and	conjunction = 41
as	synchronous = 12
as a result	cause = 21
as an alternative	alternative = 44
as if	expansion = 4
as long as	- condition = 23 - synchronous = 12
as soon as	synchronous = 12
as though	- comparison = 3 - restatement = 43
as well	conjunction = 41
because	cause = 21
before	synchronous = 12

before and after	asynchronous = 11
besides	conjunction = 41
but	contrast = 31
by comparison	contrast = 31
by contrast	contrast = 31
by then	synchronous = 12
consequently	cause = 21
conversely	contrast = 31
earlier	synchronous = 12
either..or	alternative = 44
else	alternative = 44
except	exception = 45
finally	- conjunction = 41 - synchronous = 12
for	cause = 21
for example	instantiation = 42
for instance	instantiation = 42
further	conjunction = 41
furthermore	conjunction = 41
hence	cause = 21
however	contrast = 31
if	condition = 23

if and when	condition = 23
if.. then	condition = 23
in addition	conjunction = 41
in contrast	contrast = 31
in fact	- conjunction = 41 - restatement = 43
in other words	restatement = 43
in particular	- instantiation = 42 - restatement = 43
in short	restatement = 43
in sum	restatement = 43
in the end	expansion = 4
in turn	synchronous = 12
indeed	- conjunction = 41 - restatement = 43
insofar as	cause = 21
instead	alternative = 44
later	synchronous = 12
lest	- alternative = 44 - condition = 23
likewise	conjunction = 41
meantime	synchronous = 12
meanwhile	- conjunction = 41 - synchronous = 12
moreover	conjunction = 41

much as	comparison = 3
neither...nor	expansion = 4
nevertheless	comparison = 3
next	synchronous = 12
nonetheless	comparison = 3
nor	conjunction = 41
now that	cause = 21
on the contrary	contrast = 31
on the one hand...on the other hand	contrast = 31
on the other hand	contrast = 31
once	synchronous = 12
or	alternative = 44
otherwise	alternative = 44
overall	restatement = 43
plus	conjunction = 41
previously	synchronous = 12
rather	- expansion = 4 - contrast = 31
regardless	concession = 33
separately	conjunction = 41
similarly	conjunction = 41
simultaneous	synchronous = 12

since	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cause = 21</li> <li>- synchronous = 12</li> </ul>
so	cause = 21
so that	cause = 21
specifically	restatement = 43
still	comparison = 3
then	synchronous = 12
thereafter	synchronous = 12
thereby	cause = 21
therefore	cause = 21
though	comparison = 3
thus	cause = 21
till	synchronous = 12
ultimately	synchronous = 12
unless	alternative = 44
untill	synchronous = 12
when	temporal = 1
when and if	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- condition = 23</li> <li>- synchronous = 12</li> </ul>
whereas	contrast = 31
while	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contrast = 31</li> <li>- synchronous = 12</li> </ul>
yet	comparison = 3

## Appendix E. Statement of own work

### Appendix A. Statement of own work

Print and sign this *Statement of own work* form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as a hard copy to the first supervisor.

Student name:

Suzan Vrieze

Student number:

s47 646 09

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

#### DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual

(<http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature:

Suzan Vrieze

Place and date:

Ede, 15/06/2020