

# The Use of “Purr” and “Snarl” Words as a Means of Manipulation in the American Presidential Debates

Mgr. Pavel Reich  
Masaryk University  
Brno, Czech Republic

# Outline

- “Purr” and “snarl” words as a form of doublespeak
- Presidential debates
- Results of the analysis

# Definition of Doublespeak

- Doublespeak is language that pretends to communicate but really doesn't. It is language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least tolerable. Doublespeak is language that avoids or shifts responsibility, language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language which conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it. (Lutz 1990: 1)

# Hidden Bias

Words can imply a positive or a negative attitude and evaluate reality in a particular way, and thus manipulate people's perception of reality (Bolinger 1980: 76)

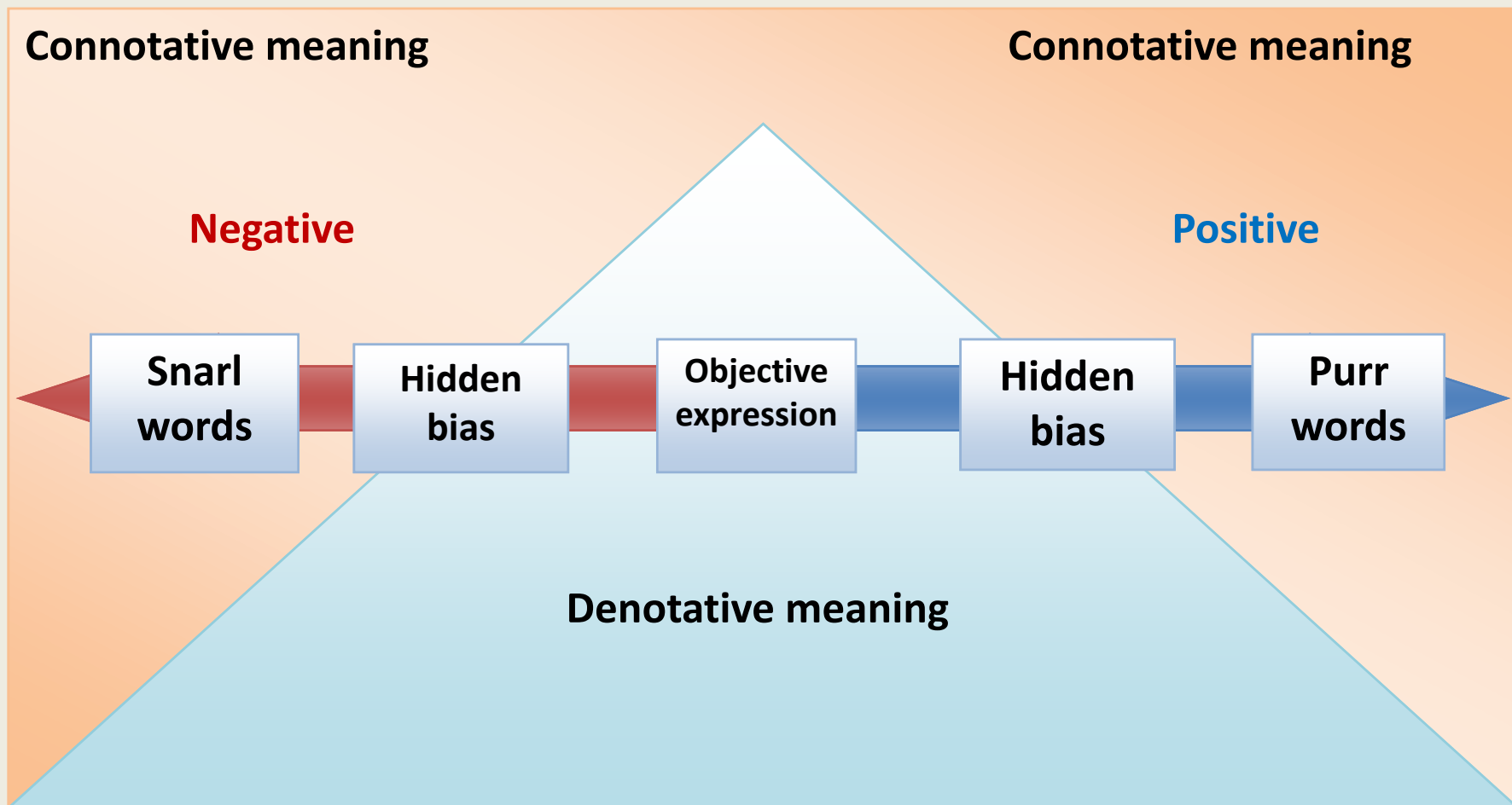
- **Adjectives** – *Young (and handsome, attractive, inexperienced), Extreme (absurd, dangerous)*
- **Nouns** – *Reformer (progressive, efficient), Dictator (brutal, ruthless, cruel)*
- **Verbs** – succeed x fail, win x lose, build x destroy

# Purr and Snarl Words

Words whose conceptual meaning becomes irrelevant because whoever is using them is simply capitalizing on their unfavourable connotations in order to give forceful expression to his own hostility. Terms for extreme political views, such as *communist* or *fascist*, are particularly prone to degenerate into snarl words (Leech 1990: 44).

1. Social groupings, e.g. nationality words or religious sects
2. Words referring to political ideas or movements
3. Emotionally loaded words

# Purr and Snarl Words as Extreme Case of Hidden Bias



# Analysis

- Televised presidential debates before American presidential elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008
- How “purr” and “snarl” words are used and in what contexts
- Comparison of Democratic and Republican candidates

# Purr Words

- **Democracy** – it is endangered and we must fight for it
- **Freedom/Liberty** - something the United States regard highly and is worth spreading around the globe
- **Peace** - The United States should keep the peace in various parts of the world or at least should be active in helping keep the peace
- **American Dream** - owning one's own home, having one's own business and employing people, of having good education and thus having the chance to be successful



# Purr Words

	Republican Candidates				Democratic Candidates			
	2000	2004	2008	Total	2000	2004	2008	Total
<b>Peace</b>	20	10	4	<b>34</b>	2	13	1	<b>16</b>
<b>Democracy</b>	4	6	6	<b>16</b>	8	2	4	<b>14</b>
<b>Freedom</b>	6	19	3	<b>28</b>	3	3	0	<b>6</b>
<b>Liberty</b>	0	9	0	<b>9</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Civil Liberties</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>American Dream</b>	0	0	4	<b>4</b>	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

# Emotionally Loaded Words

## 1. America's future

*But when we can -- when we have an issue that we may hand our children and our grandchildren a damaged planet, I have disagreed strongly with the Bush administration on this issue. (John McCain)*

## 2. American troops in Iraq or Afghanistan

*That means that that mission succeeds, just like those young people who re-enlisted in Baghdad, just like the mother I met at the airport the other day whose son was killed. And they all say to me that we don't want defeat. (John McCain)*

## 3. Candidates' background and private life

*The man loves his wife and I appreciate that a lot. And I love mine. The man loves his family a lot, and I appreciate that, because I love my family. (George W. Bush)*

*In the Senate I was one of only ten Democrats, along with Senator Joe Lieberman, to support Governor Bush's dad in the Persian Gulf War Resolution. (Al Gore)*

## 4. Poor people

*But it's also that his entire life he has never forgotten where he came from, coming from Scranton, fighting on behalf of working families, remembering what it's like to see his father lose his job and go through a downward spiral economically. (Barack Obama)*

# Snarl Words

- Words referring to dictatorships from the past
- Fascism and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War
  - Genocide
  - Ethnic Cleansing
  - Holocaust
- Communism and Cold War
  - Communist
  - Cold War
  - KGB

# Snarl Words

	Republican Candidates				Democratic Candidates			
	2000	2004	2008	Total	2000	2004	2008	Total
<b>Genocide</b>	0	1	4	<b>5</b>	3	2	3	<b>8</b>
<b>Ethnic cleansing</b>	1	0	1	<b>2</b>	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
<b>Holocaust</b>	0	0	3	<b>3</b>	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Communist Communism</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	3	0	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Cold War</b>	0	0	4	<b>4</b>	0	1	1	<b>2</b>
<b>KGB</b>	0	0	3	<b>3</b>	0	1	0	<b>1</b>

# Conclusion

- “Purr” and “snarl” words can be considered as extreme cases of hidden bias
- The use of “purr” words is much more common than the use of “snarl” words
- The most common “purr” words are the words “peace”, “democracy” and “freedom”
- The use of “snarl” words is much less common than the use of “purr” words
- “Purr” words are used much more by Republican candidates, the use of “snarl” words is the same

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