UC Riverside
Issues in Applied Linguistics

Title
Rhetorical Strategies of McCain and Obama in the Third 2008 Presidential Debate: Functional Theory from a Linguistic Perspective

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/24v8v8wm

Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 19(0)

ISSN
1050-4273

Authors
Loughery, Jessica
Ewald, Jennifer D.

Publication Date
2013

DOI
10.5070/L4190005301

Copyright Information
Copyright 2013 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at https://escholarship.org/terms

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Rhetorical Strategies of McCain and Obama in the Third 2008 Presidential Debate: Functional Theory From a Linguistic Perspective

Jessica Loughery Basta and Jennifer D. Ewald
Saint Joseph's University

This study analyzes the rhetorical strategies employed by candidates Barack Obama and John McCain in the third presidential debate of 2008. Particular attention is given to candidates' use of acclaims, attacks and defenses, as defined by functional theory. The analysis also recognizes the presence and important role of candidates' "nonfunctional" statements and overlapping function units, two linguistic occurrences unexplored in previous studies. This research confirms the value of functional theory for investigating interaction in the context of political debate and also points to the need to include other aspects of linguistic theory in future investigations.

Introduction[1]

Throughout the 2008 presidential election, pundits and politicians alike commented on the candidates' aggressiveness (Begala, 2008; Curry, 2008). During the primaries and caucuses, harsh words frequently flew between candidates for party nomination, and in the weeks before the general election character attacks were common. For example, talking about Obama's background, McCain stated, "My opponent's touchiness every time he is questioned about his record should make us only more concerned" (Bentley, 2008). Similarly, Obama stated, "[I]t's great that [McCain] now wants to talk about putting corporate lobbyists in their place. But he needs to explain why he put seven of them in charge of his campaign" (Tapper & Miller, 2008).

Polls indicated that voters were acutely aware of the negative tone of the candidates' language. A poll published in The New York Times on October 14, 2008 (Cooper & Thee, 2008), found that 61% of registered voters thought that John McCain was spending more time attacking his opponent than explaining his opinions; in contrast, 27% of registered voters thought Barack Obama spent more time attacking than explaining. Polling reveals only voters' impressions, however, and it is unlikely that most voters collect empirical data to support their perceptions (Benoit & Airne, 2005). Rather, their perspectives are likely based on the well-publicized reports and frequent advertisements put forth by political analysts and campaign strategists. As will be shown in this study, a more accurate representation of the candidates' actual rhetorical strategies can be gleaned from an organized analysis of one of the presidential debates.

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
© 2013 Jessica Loughery Basta and Jennifer D. Ewald
Vol. 19, 63-84

This study is an empirical investigation of McCain and Obama's campaign speech in the 2008 presidential election, an analysis focused specifically on the transcript of the third presidential debate. The "functional theory" (Benoit, 1999, 2007a) of political campaign discourse provided the theoretical framework for the present analysis of the interactional rhetoric of the debaters.

Interactional rhetoric

In the context of a political debate, candidates interact and speak in a style very different from that found in everyday conversation. One reason for this difference is that debate style is essentially rhetorical; that is, what candidates say is directed as much to their audience as to their opponent. Bilmes defines rhetoric as "the art of influencing the thought and conduct of one's hearers by means of persuasive language" (1999: 233) and points out that most research on rhetorical strategies is one-dimensional in that it focuses on a single speaker's words, arrangement, style, and delivery, among other elements, even though rhetoric in most cases is fundamentally interactional. That is, the persuasive success of rhetoric depends not only on the speaker but also on the interaction between debaters. Especially in the case of presidential debates, analysis of a speaker's rhetorical style is inextricably linked to the way in which that speaker receives, processes, and deals with an opponent's rhetorical style and vice versa. In this sense, debate speakers are more aptly referred to as interlocutors whose utterances directly impact those of their opponent as each states his own positive qualities and plans, attacks the other and defends himself.

Function in campaign debates

Hinck and Hinck claim that on the stage of a political debate, participants are assumed to be equal in power, "so that the deciding difference is measured in terms of one's arguments, not wealth, title, or prestige" (2002: 235). Judgments that are based on debate interactions depend, at least in part, on a candidate's argumentative style showcased within the agreed-upon format and rules. In this context, "The risk of arguing and disagreeing naturally calls into question interactants' competence as advocates" (Hinck & Hinck, 2002: 235).

Much of the research on political debate speech is grounded in the field of communication studies rather than linguistics. However, one interesting study (Dailey, Hinck, & Hinck, 2005) applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to debate data to examine debate audiences' perceptions of candidates' politeness and advocacy skills. The complex pragmatic notion of face, including face-saving and face-threatening verbal messages, was found to be an important influence on the audiences' evaluation of candidates.

According to functional theory (Benoit, 1999, 2007a), the speech produced by political candidates can be assigned to three specific categories: acclaims, attacks and defenses. Each of these functions plays a unique role in making a candidate's case (Benoit, 2003). According to Benoit, "Although these three functions may not

be equally common in discourse, they are three options that every candidate has available for use" (2007a: 40). In previous research, these three categories have been regarded as mutually exclusive (i.e., non-overlapping) in nature. Focusing on self praise, a candidate can support his or her case with an acclaim, or a statement of personal strengths or plans. For example, in the third 2008 presidential debate with John McCain, Barack Obama stated, "Now, from the start of this campaign, I've identified this [reducing U.S. dependence on foreign oil] as one of my top priorities and here is what I think we have to do." In an attack, a candidate criticizes his opponent, indirectly bolstering his own case. For instance, McCain stated, "And it's a matter of fact that Senator Obama has spent more money on negative ads than any political campaign in history." Finally, in a defense, a candidate responds to and attempts to refute an opponent's attack, as when Obama stated, "Now I just want to make one last point because Senator McCain mentioned NAFTA and the issue of trade and that actually bears on this issue. I believe in free trade."

According to functional theory, a voter weighs the occurrence of each of these utterance types when judging a candidate: "These three functions work together as an informal form of cost-benefit analysis: acclaims increase benefits, attacks increase an opponent's costs, and defenses reduce a candidate's alleged costs" (Benoit & Airne, 2005: 226). Benoit and Airne's (2005) use of the word "informal" is the key; they explain that voters do not actually add and subtract calculated points for candidates based on acclaims, attacks, and defenses but rather that, overall, acclaims usually make a candidate appear more desirable, attacks make the opponent less desirable, and defenses help to regain ground that has been lost to an opponent's attack.

Previous findings

Earlier studies based on functional theory have extensively evaluated the use of acclaims, attacks, and defenses in a wide range of political communication, including television advertising (Benoit, 1999), nominating convention acceptance speeches (Benoit, Wells, Pier, & Blaney, 1999), and primary election (Benoit, Pier, McHale, Brazeal, Klyukovski, & Airne, 2002) and general election (Benoit & Brazeal, 2002; Benoit & Harthcock, 1999) debates. Other more recent studies have focused on debates for elected offices at other levels of government (Airne & Benoit, 2005) as well as political debates outside the United States (Benoit, 2007a; Benoit & Henson, 2007). Overall, acclaims were found to be more common than attacks and attacks more common than defenses (Benoit, 2007a; 2003).

Supporting this conclusion, Benoit and Harthcock (1999) report that in the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates, acclaims accounted for 49% of utterances, attacks for 39% and defenses for 12%. Later, in the 1988 Bush-Dukakis debates, Benoit and Brazeal (2002) found that acclaims were the most frequent, comprising 59% of argument "themes" used by both candidates. These were followed by attacks at 33% and defenses at 8%.

Notably, Benoit and Harthcock (1999) did not mention or account for utterances that do not fit within these three functional categories. Benoit and Brazeal did note that some utterances did not fit this classification scheme and dismissed them: "While most utterances in these debates served one of these functions, other (nonfunctional) utterances were not analyzed. For example, a few statements pertain to current or past events without crediting the candidate or blaming the opponent" (2002: 224). Thus, neither study included the "nonfunctional" utterances in the final quantitative analysis.

Though Benoit has made some data available on his website (Benoit, 2009), to date, no published research has applied functional theory to the 2008 presidential election. This study undertakes that process and extends the bounds of previous research by posing the following three research questions:

1. With what frequency did Barack Obama and John McCain incorporate the three recognized functions into their rhetorical strategy during the third presidential debate?

2. What was the frequency and role of "nonfunctional" statements?

3. What can a linguistic approach to these data, especially given previous findings within the fields of pragmatics and discourse analysis, add to functional theory?

Context of Data Collection

The third general election debate of the 2008 presidential election took place at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, on October 15, 2008. This third debate was selected for analysis because of its late timing in the election and relatively open format that fostered interaction between the candidates[2]. The debate lasted 1.5 hours and was moderated by Bob Schieffer of CBS News. Each candidate, seated at a table with the moderator, was permitted to respond to the moderator's questions in two-minute time slots, after which the candidates openly discussed the issue raised by the question. Candidates were permitted to pose follow-up questions to each other.

Method of Data Analysis

For this study, a transcript of the debate was obtained from the website of the Commission on Presidential Debates. Transitional statements (such as "All right. Let's go to another topic." or "We're going to move to another question.") made by the debate moderator were used to divide the transcript into nine sections, each focused on a different topic: the Economy; Deficit/Budget; Campaign Etiquette; Vice Presidential Candidates; Energy and Climate Control; Health Care; Roe v. Wade/Judge Appointments; Education; and Closing Statements. Previous analyses based on functional theory use these categories to analyze further the related acclaims, attacks and defenses. The present study did not adopt this practice because this type of information did not contribute significantly to addressing the research questions above.

The candidates' individual statements were then divided into "themes," each which, according to Benoit, can be thought of as an "idea unit, argument, claim, [or] assertion" (2007a: 56) or as "the smallest unit of discourse that is capable of expressing a complete idea" (2000: 280). Given the relative popularity of the word "theme" and, in turn, the likelihood of its misinterpretation in the context of this study, the present analysis employs the term "idea unit." It should be pointed out that from a linguistic perspective it can be argued that a single lexical entry such as "Ha!" or even a small morpheme such as the "-ed" on the word "Played." (uttered, for example, in an argument about when a speaker carried out the action) used in a discourse context can actually comprise the "smallest unit of discourse that is capable of expressing a complete idea". Nevertheless, for the sake of analysis, but very aware of the inherent subjectivity involved in defining an "idea unit", the present study adopted Benoit's working definition that an idea unit may consist of a single phrase to one or more full sentences that together focus on one theme and express a complete idea. For example, each of the following passages (#1 and #2) comprises one idea unit, although the second passage is much longer and more detailed than the first:

> *Passage 1:* Now, Senator Obama talks about the very, very rich. (McCain)

> *Passage 2:* Who—why would you want to increase anybody's taxes right now? Why would you want to do that, anyone, anyone in America, when we have such a tough time, when these small business people, like Joe the plumber, are going to create jobs, unless you take that money from him and spread the wealth around? (McCain)

One or more idea units make up a candidate's turn, "turn" being used in this study to refer to any length of time during which either candidate maintains the "speech floor" without having to yield it to either the opposing candidate or the moderator. One idea unit might run simultaneously with the idea unit of the opponent during the initiation of the opposing candidate's turn as in the case of an interruption.

After dividing the transcript into topical segments and then each segment into multiple idea units, each idea unit was coded for the three rhetorical utterance types identified in previous research (see Benoit, 1999, 2007a and Rill & Benoit, 2009 among others). That is, each idea unit was categorized as an acclaim, attack or defense; this study also included an additional coding category, that of the "non-functional unit (i.e., any idea unit not categorized as an acclaim, attack or defense)".

Two coders analyzed the entire transcript independently and then compared their analyses. Many previous studies have placed a great deal of importance on intercoder reliability and, in turn, the reliability of their statistical analyses depends upon this particular computation. Though perhaps a limitation of the present study, intercoder reliability was not recorded. Upon recognizing the high degree of subjectivity involved in interpreting and, in turn, coding the units, the researchers made

no attempt to establish any formalized level of intercoder reliability; nevertheless, upon comparison, their coding decisions were frequently identical. In cases in which particular idea units had been interpreted differently, the coders discussed their reasoning and reconciled the differences by coming to a coding agreement based on both the definitions of the functional categories themselves and the coders' shared understanding of the candidates' statements. Both coders recognized the positive influence that this high level of collaboration had on their understanding and coding of the data. Any coding of discourse is, at best, subjective, but the coders' high degree of collaborative effort in this analysis is believed to have fostered as high a level of reliability in the coding of these data as possible. Nevertheless, given the nature of language and the complex processes used to identify idea units and to interpret utterances by all speakers and listeners of any given language, readers will likely interpret examples used in this analysis differently, a fact that underscores one of the findings to be discussed later.

An idea unit was identified as an acclaim only if it pointed directly to a specific past deed showing expertise or ability, a current strength, or a future plan. For example, relatively late in the debate McCain stated:

> I have a record of reform, and taking on my party, the other party, the special interests, whether it be an HMO Patients' Bill of Rights, or trying to clean up the campaign finance system in -- in this country, or whether it be establishment of a 9/11 Commission, I have a long record of it. (McCain)

Direct and indirect criticisms were both identified as attacks. In the following example, McCain attacked Obama directly:

> By the way, when Senator Obama said he would unilaterally renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Canadians said, "Yes, and we'll sell our oil to China." You don't tell countries you're going to unilaterally renegotiate agreements with them. (McCain)

Like direct attacks, indirect attacks also suggested that the opposing candidate's solution, practice or belief was wrong or ill-advised, but the attack was delivered less explicitly. For example, in the following statement, Obama attacked McCain on statements that Republican Vice-Presidential Candidate Sarah Palin had made in the preceding weeks about Obama's relationship with William Ayers.

> But when people suggest that I pal around with terrorists, then we're not talking about the issues. (Obama)

This issue had not yet been addressed in the debate; moreover, Palin's publicized comments about Ayers had not yet been explicitly linked to McCain. Thus, while it is possible to interpret Obama's comments as a kind of "deferred defense" sparked by Palin's comments, it also serves as Obama's indirect attack on McCain (i.e., McCain is not talking about the issues) because of McCain's connection to Pa-

lin and, in turn, her comments. (The possibility that this attack, along with other idea units, might simultaneously function as a defense is explored in a future section.)

Finally, defenses occurred usually after an attack had been made by the opposing candidate and specifically responded to the issue at hand. For example, in response to McCain's direct attack cited above, Obama responded in the following manner.

> Now I just want to make one last point because Senator McCain mentioned NAFTA and the issue of trade and that actually bears on this issue. I believe in free trade. (Obama)

Attacks and defenses were relatively easy to identify in the data especially since the categorization of defenses was limited to those that were stated directly. Though acclaims and defenses can both be indirectly communicated, these instances were unaccounted for in this analysis. The most common discrepancies in the coding process arose in determining if a given idea unit was an acclaim or a "nonfunctional" unit, a term used by Benoit and Brazeal (2002). Both candidates often expressed their views, explicitly or implicitly on various issues, without reference to their own particular strengths, experience or plans; that is, they made statements about current or past situations without crediting themselves or blaming the other candidate, a finding acknowledged previously by Benoit and Brazeal (2002). For example:

> Now, the last thing I think we have to focus on is a little bit of history, just so that we understand what we're doing going forward. When President Bush came into office, we had a budget surplus and the national debt was a little over $5 trillion. It has doubled over the last eight years. And we are now looking at a deficit of well over half a trillion dollars. (Obama)

Here, Obama states that, as a nation, we have to understand past history before going forward, without making any claim as to why he is particularly qualified to lead the country in this direction or offering any specifics on how he would do it. With this statement, Obama does not make an acclaim, cast blame (at least directly) on McCain or defend himself either explicitly or implicitly. Though, as noted by one anonymous reviewer, Obama's statement could be identified as an attack on the "status quo" (Cho & Benoit 2005), the present study limits the definition of attacks to statements referring directly to the opposing candidate. Thus, such idea units were not counted as acclaims, attacks or defenses.

Idea units that did not fit into any of the three categories were initially categorized as "nonfunctional"; that is, with these idea units the candidates did not praise or defend themselves or fault their opponent. Nevertheless, additional analysis revealed various roles played by these units that did indeed fulfill other important pragmatic functions, a finding of the present study that clearly calls into question the use of the label "nonfunctional." For example, these idea units often

provided information regarding the *status* of the nation in regard to particular issues. Sometimes they were *expressions of gratitude* or were of *personal relevance* to the candidates; for example, Obama offered congratulations to then Arizona Senator McCain who had just noted that the Arizona Cardinal football team had defeated the Dallas Cowboys the previous Sunday. Other "nonfunctional" idea units included *belief* statements that were so general that they could not be appropriately categorized as acclaims or they consisted of comments addressed to the *debate moderator*. Given the potential of these kinds of statements to influence, even subconsciously, voters' impressions of a candidate (i.e., voters might conclude that a candidate seems friendly, caring, or loyal because of a particular statement), the pragmatic functions of providing information, expressing gratitude, offering congratulations, stating one's belief and so on were found in this analysis to be worthy of research attention.

Finally, in the process of analyzing these data, the two coders recognized the complexity of determining if a given idea unit could be appropriately categorized as fulfilling only one of the three functions. For example, though indirect, Obama's attack cited above ("*But when people suggest that I pal around with terrorists, then we're not talking about the issues.")* clearly charges that McCain and/or his campaign were not "talking about the issues" and was thus accurately coded as an attack; however, with this same statement, Obama simultaneously implied that he did not associate with terrorists thus offering, in the same idea unit, a defense to that charge. Therefore, the need to categorize some idea units as more than one type of function became apparent in this analysis, an issue that is well-documented in research on pragmatics, particularly in the areas of indirect speech acts (Searle, 1975) and inference (Levinson, 1983).

After completing the coding process, each candidate's acclaims, attacks, defenses, overlapping function units (attack/defenses; acclaim/defenses; acclaim/attacks; acclaim/attack/defenses), and "nonfunctional" idea units were counted. The results of the present investigation were then compared with findings of previous studies of other debates.

Results

According to the present analysis, a total of 357 idea units were uttered by the candidates in this debate between McCain (190) and Obama (167). Consistent with the findings of previous research, both of these candidates uttered more acclaims than attacks and more attacks than defenses. Notably, a considerable number (78) of these idea units were "nonfunctional", accounting for 22% of all idea units; such units comprised 20% of McCain's speech and 24% of Obama's speech. Finally, other units were coded as "overlapping function units", a category that will be discussed at length in the following analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1.
*Functions of the 2008 Third Presidential Debate**

	McCain	Obama	Totals
Acclaims	67 (35%)	56 (34%)	123 (35%)
Attacks	47 (25%)	28 (17%)	75 (21%)
Defenses	11 (6%)	18 (11%)	29 (8%)
"Nonfunctional" Units	38 (20%)	40 (24%)	78 (22%)
Overlapping Function Units	27 (14%)	25 (15%)	52 (15%)
Totals	190	167	357

Note. *All percentages +/- 1% due to rounding.

Though his data have not yet been officially published, Benoit has made his analyses of the 2008 general campaign debates available online (Benoit 2009) and in his unpublished conference paper (Rill & Benoit 2009). According to his website, these data came from the work of two coders who had been trained to follow procedures he used in previous research based on functional theory. They were given examples of these functions in previously published studies as well as a set of rules to practice coding texts in order to reach an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability on a subset of 10% of the texts. In many respects, their findings regarding this debate confirm those of previous research. For example, according to their analysis, the most frequent functions employed by both of these candidates were acclaims, followed by attacks and then defenses. Furthermore, their analysis, like previous ones, suggests that the three functions represent mutually exclusive categories and does not provide any account of the "nonfunctional" utterances, i.e., the candidates' statements that cannot be categorized as acclaims, attacks or defenses. Specifically, Rill and Benoit stated, "Almost all in the texts of the debates in our sample served one of these functions; the very few other (non-functional) utterances that occurred were not analyzed" (2009:8).

Benoit (2009) identified a total of 462 idea units uttered by the candidates McCain (238) and Obama (224) in this third debate. He found the following distribution of acclaims, attacks and defenses (see Table 2 for a comparison of Benoit's findings with those of the present study).

The present investigation was not based on the set of coding rules used by Benoit's coders as these were not published or available on the website. However, the present researchers did refer to previously-published examples of acclaims, attacks and defenses, primarily those from Benoit's investigations, in order to apply functional theory to the present data. Nevertheless, the specific findings of the present investigation, though similar in some respects, vary considerably from those of Benoit.

First, the number of occurrences of each of the three functions is quite different (Benoit's numbers are consistently higher, an expected finding given that

the overall number of idea units in his analysis is considerably higher), but the distribution of each of the functions is relatively similar. That is, both analyses found that acclaims were the most frequent, followed by attacks and finally defenses. Furthermore, both analyses found more defenses from Obama than McCain, whose idea units were attacks more often than Obama's.

Table 2.
*Comparison of Functions of the 2008 Third Presidential Debate**

	McCain		Obama		Totals	
	Present Study	Benoit Website	Present Study	Benoit Website	Present Study	Benoit Website
Acclaims	67 (35%)	128 (54%)	56 (34%)	141 (63%)	123 (35%)	269 (58%)
Attacks	47 (25%)	96 (40%)	28 (17%)	53 (24%)	75 (21%)	149 (32%)
Defenses	11 (6%)	14 (6%)	18 (10%)	30 (13%)	29 (8%)	44 (10%)
Totals	125 (66%)	238 (100%)	102 (61%)	224 (100%)	227 (64%)	462 (100%)

Note. **All percentages +/- 1% due to rounding*.

Another point of contrast between the two studies relates to the acclaim category. Specifically, this analysis found that McCain (67) acclaimed more often than did Obama (56), though Benoit identified more acclaims from Obama (141) than McCain (128).

Additionally, the total percentages from Benoit (bottom of Table 2) add up to 100%, reflecting a mutually exclusive application of the three functional categories to all the debate statements and the exclusion of what Rill and Benoit (2009:8) refer to as "the very few other (non-functional) utterances" in the overall analysis. The percentages of acclaims, attacks and defenses provided in the present analysis do not add up to 100% and reflect a different approach to the application of functional theory to these same data (i.e., the inclusion of "nonfunctional" idea units as well as overlapping idea units that completed more than one function at a time).

McCain and Obama included a total of 78 "nonfunctional" idea units. These "nonfunctional units" followed certain patterns and can be categorized according to function type; thus, for the sake of consistency with other studies based on functional theory that include only the three previously-identified functions, though the present study continues to use the term "nonfunctional", it does so with a particular, albeit ironic, definition of that term (i.e., an idea unit that is not an acclaim, attack or a defense but does fulfill a function).

As mentioned previously, more than half (55%) of these units included general remarks about the status of various issues; several were addressed to the

debate moderator; some were statements that reflected general beliefs regarding a particular topic; a small number reflected personal interactions between the candidates themselves or between a candidate and a known person (e.g., good wishes to Nancy Reagan who was in the hospital at the time); and a handful were expressions of gratitude to the moderator, the debate venue, etc. (see Table 3).

Table 3.
*"Nonfunctional" Units**

"Nonfunctional" Units	McCain	Obama	Totals
Status Statement	19 (10%)	24 (14%)	43 (55%)
To Debate Moderator	11 (6%)	8 (5%)	19 (24%)
General Belief	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	6 (8%)
Personal Interaction	4 (2%)	1 (1%)	5 (6%)
Expression of Gratitude	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	5 (6%)
Totals	38 (20%)	40 (24%)	78 (22%)

Note. **All percentages +/- 1% due to rounding*.

In addition to recognizing "nonfunctional units", this investigation also identified 52 idea units that functioned simultaneously in at least two of the categories included in previous studies based on functional theory. Specifically, these overlapping utterances functioned as both an attack and a defense, an acclaim and a defense, an acclaim and an attack, and even an acclaim, attack and a defense all at the same time (see Table 4).

Table 4.
*Overlapping Function Units**

	McCain	Obama	Totals
Acclaim/Defenses	5 (3%)	11 (7%)	16 (5%)
Attack/Defenses	6 (3%)	9 (5%)	15 (4%)
Acclaim/Attacks	10 (5%)	5 (3%)	15 (4%)
Acclaim/Attack/ Defenses	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	6 (2%)
Totals	27 (14%)	25 (15%)	52 (15%)

Note. **All percentages +/- 1% due to rounding*.

The inclusion of the above findings regarding "nonfunctional" units and overlapping function units provide for a completed record of the data (see Table 5 for a revised Table 2 that includes these categories).

Discussion

The difference in the overall number of idea units between Benoit's unpublished analysis (Benoit, 2009) and the present one do not reflect major differences in the candidates' use of the three rhetorical functions. In both of these analyses, McCain and Obama employed rhetorical strategies at rates similar to those of other debates (Benoit & Harthcock, 1999; Benoit & Brazeal, 2002). These trends also suggest that these debaters' use of rhetoric was conscious in that they were acutely aware of the cost-benefit structure described by Benoit and Airne (2005) in which they could use acclaims to increase their own value in the voters' evaluation, attacks to diminish the opponent's value, and defenses to offset the costs introduced by their opponent.

Table 5.
*Functions of the 2008 Third Presidential Debate**

	McCain		Obama		Totals	
	Present Study	Benoit Website	Present Study	Benoit Website	Present Study	Benoit Website
Acclaims	67 (35%)	128 (54%)	56 (34%)	141 (63%)	123 (35%)	269 (58%)
Attacks	47 (25%)	96 (40%)	28 (17%)	53 (24%)	75 (21%)	149 (32%)
Defenses	11 (6%)	14 (6%)	18 (10%)	30 (13%)	29 (8%)	44 (10%)
"Nonfunctional"	38 (20%)	N/A	40 (24%)	N/A	78 (22%)	N/A
Overlapping	27 (14%)	N/A	25 (15%)	N/A	52 (15%)	N/A
Totals	190 (100%)	238 (100%)	167 (100%)	224 (100%)	357 (100%)	462 (100%)

Note. **All percentages +/- 1% due to rounding*.

Candidates' rhetorical styles: The 3 functions

McCain and Obama did differ slightly in their individual rhetorical styles in that McCain attacked more than Obama, and Obama defended more than McCain. The higher number of McCain attacks probably accounts, at least in part, for the higher number of Obama defenses (a pattern previously documented by Benoit, 2007b). Moreover, the way in which Obama organized his responses during the debate is a likely factor as well. That is, both McCain and Obama appeared to take notes on their opponents' points, but Obama was much more likely to organize his immediate or future turns following McCain's attack(s) around a system of defend-

ing points, thus resulting in several defense idea units. For example, during one debate turn McCain quickly attacked Obama on five separate counts: for accusing McCain of wanting to pursue former President Bush's economic policies; for being in favor of increasing taxes on individuals making $42,000 a year; for voting for large budgets "full of goodies"; for having negative records with two separate watchdog organizations; and for neglecting to stand up against Democratic Party leaders on issues. McCain's turn ended with the following statement:

> You have to tell me one time when you have stood up with the leaders of your party on one single major issue. (McCain) [Attack]

Interestingly, in spite of the small lexical error made by McCain above, Obama recognized McCain's statement as the attack McCain intended. McCain had challenged Obama to point to one time when he "stood up with" the leaders of his party on a single major issue. Nevertheless, McCain's remarks were correctly understood by Obama as a challenge to point to a time when he "stood up to" the leaders of his party and the defense he provided constituted his first rebuttal. Obama answered the moderator, "Well, there's a lot of stuff that was put out there, so let me try to address it." He then went on to organize his turn around six idea units, four separate defense idea units (including one defense/attack) and two counterattacks:

> First of all, in terms of standing up to the leaders of my party, the first major bill that I voted on in the Senate was in support of tort reform, which wasn't very popular with trial lawyers, a major constituency in the Democratic Party. I support… (Obama) [Defense]

At this point, McCain interrupted with another attack, "An overwhelming vote..," which Obama ignored, continuing on with a series of defenses to identify issues over which he had stood against members of his party:

> I support charter schools and pay for performance for teachers. Doesn't make me popular with the teachers union. (Obama) [Defense]
>
> I support clean coal technology. Doesn't make me popular with environmentalists. So I've got a history of reaching across the aisle. (Obama) [Defense]
>
> Now with respect to a couple of things Senator McCain said, the notion that I voted for a tax increase for people making $42,000 a year has been disputed by everybody who has looked at this claim that Senator McCain keeps on making. Even FOX News disputes it, and that doesn't happen very often when it comes to accusations about me. (Obama) [Defense/Attack]

By appealing to FOX News and others who had "looked at this claim", Obama defended himself against the attack in which McCain had argued that Obama's financial plan called for taxing citizens who earned $42,000 a year. In addition,

his comment accused McCain of continuing to make a false claim that had been "disputed by everybody", and implied that McCain's attack was unfounded, an attack of his own. This particular idea unit is an example of an overlapping function unit, an issue to be discussed at length in the next section.

Finally, instead of explicitly defending himself for having accused McCain of wanting to pursue former President Bush's economic policies, the first attack made by McCain in his previous turn, Obama again attacks on this same point with two separate idea units:

> So the fact of the matter is that if I occasionally have mistaken your policies for George Bush's policies, it's because on the core economic issues that matter to the American people, on tax policy, on energy policy, on spending priorities, you have been a vigorous supporter of President Bush. (Obama) [Attack]

> Now, you've shown independence — commendable independence, on some key issues like torture, for example, and I give you enormous credit for that. But when it comes to economic policies, essentially what you're proposing is eight more years of the same thing. And it hasn't worked. And I think the American people understand it hasn't worked. We need to move in a new direction. (Obama) [Attack]

The fact that Obama kept track of and responded to McCain's attacks individually affected the analysis of function units. The overall effect of this tactic seemed to be a much higher number of defenses on the part of Obama and a higher number of attacks from McCain.

As mentioned earlier, one difference between these two data analyses is in the number of acclaims from each candidate. Benoit (2009) identified more acclaims from Obama than from McCain while the present investigation identified more acclaims from McCain than Obama. This difference might be explained in several ways.

First, if one looks at the percentage of idea units coded as acclaims rather than at the number of acclaims themselves, the present investigation identified 35% of acclaims for McCain and 34% of acclaims for Obama in comparison with Benoit's (2009) 54% and 63%, respectively. Thus, though Benoit (2009) found a higher percentage of acclaims in Obama's idea units, there is a percentage difference of only 9%. The present analysis found only a 1% higher rate of acclaims for McCain's idea units. In other words, the percentage difference is not as great as the raw numbers imply.

Second, whatever difference exists in the candidates' acclaiming rates is likely accounted for by the inclusion of "nonfunctional" and overlapping function units in the present analysis. In other words, the present analysis applies a somewhat rigid definition of an acclaim; many of the idea units coded as acclaims in Benoit's analysis (2009) were likely considered "nonfunctional" units in the present analysis. Moreover, other acclaims recognized by Benoit (2009) were likely accounted for in this analysis as types of overlapping function units and are therefore not counted

as "simple" acclaim idea units. There were a total of 37 instances of overlapping function units that served, in part, as acclaims from McCain (21) and Obama (16). Thus, the numerical differences in these two analyses are not worthy of additional research attention.

"Nonfunctional" idea units

More interesting in the present analysis was the number of idea units that were not assigned to any of the three function categories. As previously stated, such "nonfunctional" statements were not analyzed in Benoit and Harthcock (1999) or Benoit and Brazeal (2002), perhaps because the authors did not find them significant to the overall cause or because they were not as prevalent and thus did not have a significant impact on the findings. In this study, however, 78 (or 22%) of the candidates 357 total idea units were "nonfunctional", a rate comparable to those of the other categories and thereby important enough to consider in a discussion of the results.

In a poll published in *The Washington Post* on October 11, 2008, 73% of those asked said they disapproved of the way President Bush was doing his job, with 23% approving and 4% offering no comment. Given the then high level of disapproval of the Bush administration, it is possible that candidates in this debate were more likely than those in previous elections to dwell on the current state of the country with statements (i.e., "nonfunctional" status idea units) that were not acclaims, attacks, or defenses, thus increasing the number of "nonfunctional" idea units.

Also, these candidates frequently addressed the moderator, sometimes by including him in a point that was being contested "Well, look, Bob, as I said…" (Obama), at other times by asking him to recognize a bid for the debate floor, e.g., "Bob, I think it's going to be important to just — I'll respond to these two particular allegations that Senator McCain has made and that have gotten a lot of attention." (Obama); or by directing an answer specifically to him, e.g., "Sure I do. Let me tell you...." (McCain).

An analysis of these "nonfunctional" units revealed that the candidates were both very careful to express appreciation to various people involved with the debate as well as to make a few personal comments along the way. Though these final types of idea units were relatively rare in these data, they have previously been unaccounted for in earlier studies based on functional theory. Compared to what has been studied regarding the cost-benefit effects of acclaims, attacks and defenses, relatively little is known about how "nonfunctional" units affect voters. On the positive side, perhaps some serve to make a candidate appear reasonable, friendly, caring, or polite to voters (potential benefits). Or, conversely, some might come across to voters as condescending, manipulative, name-dropping, or even political schmoozing (potential costs). Certainly, like acclaims, attacks and defenses, these "nonfunctional" units do serve pragmatic functions (expressing gratitude, offering congratulations, etc.) that theoretically could influence voters.

Overlapping function units

In addition to recognizing "nonfunctional" idea units, the other main way in which the present study differs from previous studies that examined candidates' use of the three functions involves the identification of overlapping function units such as acclaim/attacks. Put succinctly, as is well-known in other frequently investigated linguistic contexts, a statement is rarely "simple." For example, if a wife positively evaluates her own clothing to her husband by bragging, "My outfit is very nice and quite appropriate for the dinner tonight", given a particular context, her statement might accomplish a task other than that of acclaiming the suitability of her wardrobe choice for the social occasion. In fact, through implication, she might be indirectly attacking her husband with a criticism of his choice of clothing and suggesting that he should have worn something else. As such, her statement functions as an acclaim/attack in a daily life context.

Pragmatics research (see Searle (1975) and Levinson (1983) for a discussion of these issues) has identified this type of statement as an indirect speech act; that is, a statement that accomplishes one speech function indirectly (in this example, criticizing her husband) while on the surface, carrying out another (e.g., bragging). Many statements in real-life contexts serve more than one communicative purpose, and, though unrecognized in previous debate studies based on functional theory, the present data were no exception in that similar linguistic phenomena were observed in the candidates' idea units.

As noted previously, 46 idea units served dual functions as attack/defenses, acclaim/defenses, acclaim/attacks and six idea units even served three functions as acclaim/attack/defenses. For example, the first segment of the debate focused on economic issues. The debate section to be analyzed here is presented in its entirety below (the following nine idea units are separated as paragraphs, and the speaker changes only when noted; additionally, following each idea unit are the function(s) determined in this analysis to be relevant):

> McCain: And I will not have — I will not stand for a tax increase on small business income. Fifty percent of small business income taxes are paid by small businesses. That's 16 million jobs in America. [Acclaim]
>
> And what you want to do to Joe the plumber and millions more like him is have their taxes increased and not be able to realize the American dream of owning their own business. [Attack]
>
> Schieffer: Is that what you want to do? [Unanalyzed Question from Moderator]
>
> McCain: That's what Joe believes. [Attack]
>
> Obama: He has been watching ads of Senator McCain's. [Attack/Defense]
>
> Let me tell you what I'm actually going to do. I think tax policy is a major difference between Senator McCain and myself. And we both want to cut taxes, the difference is who we want to cut taxes for. [Defense/Attack]
>
> Now, Senator McCain, the centerpiece of his economic proposal is to provide $200 billion in additional tax breaks to some of the wealthiest corporations in America. Exxon Mobil, and other oil companies, for example, would get an additional $4 billion in tax breaks. [Attack]

> What I've said is I want to provide a tax cut for 95 percent of working Americans, 95 percent. If you make more — if you make less than a quarter million dollars a year, then you will not see your income tax go up, your capital gains tax go up, your payroll tax. Not one dime. And 95 percent of working families, 95 percent of you out there, will get a tax cut. [Defense/Acclaim]
> In fact, independent studies have looked at our respective plans and have concluded that I provide three times the amount of tax relief to middle-class families than Senator McCain does. [Acclaim/Attack]

After the acclaim (lines 1-3 above) in which McCain stated his plan not to increases taxes on small business income, he attacked Obama (lines 4-6) for what McCain believed Obama's economic plan would do to one particular small businessman (i.e., Joe the plumber). The debate moderator (Schieffer) then directed a question to Obama (line 7), giving him a chance to respond to McCain's attack. However, instead, speaking out of turn, McCain intensified his previous attack by adding the statement in line 8, implying that not only did McCain himself believe that Obama's plan would increase taxes on small businesses, even small businessman "Joe the plumber" held this position against him. There is evidence in Obama's defensive response (line 9) that he did indeed understand line 8 as an additional attack, albeit delivered somewhat through the absent Joe the plumber. Obama's quick defense (line 9) constitutes a linguistically interesting idea unit in that it not only defended himself against the attack on his position on taxing small businesses but it also suggested that Joe the plumber was obtaining his false information from McCain's advertising. In this way, Obama implied that if Joe did indeed believe what McCain claimed he believed, then the reason was that Joe had been watching McCain's campaign advertising, not that Joe's beliefs were accurate. Thus, Obama's idea unit (line 9) must also be understood to be an implied attack on McCain (i.e., that McCain's advertising was communicating a false message according to Obama's view) for this idea unit to make sense in this discourse context; otherwise, Obama's comment could only be understood to be an endorsement of McCain's advertising message, an illogical interpretation. Thus, with one statement (line 9), Obama simultaneously defended himself and attacked McCain, an overlapping function unit.

It should also be noted that with this same statement (line 9) addressed to no one in particular (i.e., not to McCain, Schieffer or the audience), Obama also spoke to all the "Joe the plumbers" who were listening, implying that they should listen to Obama and form their own opinion of his economic plan. Obama's subsequent idea units make this suggestion more explicit. In lines 10-12, Obama asks that the listener let him explain what he is "actually going to do", simultaneously implying that McCain and his advertising have been misrepresenting his plan and that he will explain it clearly himself. In the same idea unit, Obama points out that tax policy is a major difference between the two candidates and claims that they both want to cut taxes. This idea unit ends with the statement "the difference is who we want to cut taxes for" which defended Obama against the attack that he would tax

small businesses and attacked McCain for his economic plan (lines 13-16) which, according to Obama, would give tax breaks to wealthy corporations. Still defending himself against what he believed was a misrepresentation of his ideas, Obama continued, "What I've said is I want to provide a tax cut…"; then, in the same idea unit, Obama explained some of the details of his plan (lines 17-21), offering an acclaim about the tax cuts he would give to families with particular incomes.

Finally, in lines 22-24, Obama drew on the authority of "independent studies" as evidence that he would "provide three times the amount of tax relief to middle-class families than Senator McCain" would. With this statement, he provided a specific acclaim (he will provide tax relief) and an attack on McCain (i.e., Obama's tax relief would be greater than McCain's).

Like Obama, McCain also used overlapping function units. The percentage of overlapping function units in his overall idea units was very similar to that of Obama; in fact, McCain included six statements that completed all three functions simultaneously. For example, after lengthy interaction over various issues in the Deficit/Budget debate section, McCain stated the following:

> Senator Obama, I am not President Bush. If you wanted to run against President Bush, you should have run four years ago. I'm going to give a new direction to this economy in this country. (McCain)

This idea unit served to defend himself against Obama's previous direct and indirect attacks that he and his policies were like those of his Republican predecessor, to attack Obama for pursuing a line of debate that, in McCain's estimation, was invalid, and to make a claim regarding his future plans for the economy (i.e., an acclaim). Thus, this one idea unit, composed of three distinct sentences, fulfilled three functions simultaneously.

Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

The findings of this analysis reflect the content of one presidential debate and may not apply to the other two in the series, nor do they necessarily apply to these candidates' advertising and campaign speeches. Therefore, no broad conclusions regarding these or other candidates and debates should be drawn.

However, in the context of a presidential election widely described in the media as rougher than those preceding it, it is notable that these candidates acclaimed more than they attacked each other during their final debate, a finding contrary to popular opinion at the time. Thus, rather than relying on subjective understandings of rhetorical strategies, future linguistic studies should examine the rates of these functions in the other two McCain-Obama debates, as well as in the candidates' advertising and campaign speeches, to provide further insight into the reality of the tone of the respective campaigns. Additionally, future research might also seek to qualitatively assess the extent to which attacks in other debates, advertising, and campaign speeches might have been more personal in nature (i.e., regarding issues

of integrity, patriotism, etc.) than those of previous elections, and these campaigns therefore might aptly be described as nastier, qualitatively rather than quantitatively, than those of previous elections. Another area for future investigation is that of the potential of an idea unit to serve as an indirect acclaim or an indirect defense since some "nonfunctional" units might actually be serving in this role.

The goal of this study was not to fault the findings of previous studies or discredit functional theory. In fact, to date, the results of applying functional theory to political debate data have been very useful. The cost-benefit structure recognized by Benoit and Airne (2005) seems to explain candidates' use of the three functions quite well and, by implication, candidates' understanding that voters evaluate acclaims, attacks and defenses in the debate context.

Furthermore, the present study does not seek to debate the differing quantitative findings of this analysis and that of Benoit (2009) in terms of the overall number of idea units or particular functions in these data. The task of dividing a debate transcript into idea units and then coding those units is certainly a complicated one at best and the resulting decisions made, no matter how rigid the category definitions or how carefully they are applied, remain subjective in nature, a clear limitation of this kind of analysis. Indeed, additional analyses of these same data by different researchers would mostly likely result in yet another set of quantitative findings. Given the complex nature of language, its ambiguity at both syntactic and semantic levels, as well as expected differences in listeners' (or readers') interpretations, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to establish and follow a set of rules for dividing any large grouping of statements into idea units and coding the three functions in such a way that researchers will all independently agree on all specific findings. Thus, though not reporting a rate of intercoder reliability might be judged a limitation of this study, the high degree of collaboration between the coders must also be viewed as a strength. Finally, readers may also evaluate the lack of extensive statistical analyses as a limitation of this study; but, they are encouraged to keep in mind that this investigation's research questions aimed only at accounting for raw occurrences of the three functions, not at extensively comparing their respective frequencies internally or judging them against the findings of other studies based on the same data.

In sum, several trends can be clearly seen in these data. First, the candidates' idea units included, in order of frequency from highest to lowest, acclaims, attacks and defenses, a finding that mirrors those of previous studies. Second, in the specific context of this debate, McCain attacked more than Obama, and Obama defended more than McCain, a finding also affirmed by Benoit (2009). In contrast to Benoit (2009), the present study found that McCain acclaimed more than Obama, but percentage-wise, given the other types of "nonfunctional" and overlapping function units included in the present analysis, the difference is relatively minimal.

In recognizing the idea unit as the coding unit, rather than an entire debate segment organized by topic, functional theory is much more aligned with aspects of discourse analysis than one might expect. In fact, in discussing functional theory

as applied to campaign advertising, Benoit pointed out that "many television spots contain multiple utterances which may perform different functions, so each theme in an ad is categorized separately" (2007a: 57). The present analysis adds that many debate segments contain different functions and recognizes that many debate idea units perform different functions simultaneously, thus suggesting that coders in future studies be open to the probable existence of overlapping function units and that future coding schemes be developed to account for these overlapping units.

Finally, Benoit (2007a) has emphasized the importance of the acclaims, attacks and defenses in voters' evaluations of candidates. He claimed, "A complete understanding of political campaign communication should consider all three functions" (2007a: 40). Though functional theory provides a solid basis on which to explain candidates' debate utterances, more than these three functions must be taken into account to completely understand candidates' discourse. By not recognizing that these functions at times work in tandem, functional theory fails to offer insight into the more subtle but frequent ways in which speakers communicate in this and other linguistic contexts. That is, until now, though functional theory has recognized indirect speech acts (e.g., an attack that is implied but not explicitly stated in an idea unit), it has not recognized overlapping function units in which a candidate, for example, simultaneously attacks his opponent and defends himself with one or more statements. Finally, since nothing is currently known about how voters understand or evaluate these significant "nonfunctional" or overlapping function units, this constitutes an area that certainly deserves further research attention from those who are stakeholders in political debates.

Notes

[1] Rill and Benoit (2009) presented a paper on "A Functional Analysis of 2008 General Election Debates" at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association. An unpublished manuscript is available online through EBSCO host. Some references are made to that work in this manuscript.

[2] One anonymous reviewer noted that many previous studies examined the first debate in a particular series on the grounds that it has been found to have the most influence on voters. The present authors' choice to examine the last debate in this series was an attempt to explore related topics in a debate scheduled closer to the elections.

References

Airne, D., & Benoit, W. L. (2005). 2004 Illinois U.S. Senate debates. American Behavioral Scientist, 49(3), 343-352.

Begala, P. (2008). McCain puts Obama on the spot in final debate. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/15/presidential.debate/index.html#cnnSTCOther1.

Benoit, W. L. (1999). Seeing spots: A functional analysis of presidential television advertisements from 1952-1996. New York: Praeger.

Benoit, W. L. (2000). A functional analysis of political advertising across media, 1998. Communication Studies, 51, 274-295.

Benoit, W. L. (2003). Topic of presidential campaign discourse and election outcome. Western Journal of Communication, 67(1), 97.

Benoit, W. L. (2007a). The functional theory of political campaign discourse. In W.L. Benoit (Ed.), Communication in Political Campaigns (p. 32-63). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Benoit, W. L. (2007b). Determinants of Defense in Presidential Debates. Communication Research Reports, 24(4), 319-325.

Benoit, W. L. (2009). Functions of 2008 general campaign debates. Retrieved from http://presidentialcampaign2004.coas.missouri.edu/08PresCampaign/08DebateFunctions.html.

Rill, L., & Benoit, W. (2009). A Functional Analysis of 2008 General Election Debates. Conference Papers -- National Communication Association, 1. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Benoit, W. L., & Airne, D. (2005). A functional analysis of American vice presidential debates. Argumentation & Advocacy, 41(4), 225-236.

Benoit, W. L., & Brazeal, L. M. (2002). A functional analysis of the 1988 Bush-Dukakis presidential debates. Argumentation and Advocacy, 38, 219-233.

Benoit, W. L., & Harthcock, A. (1999). Functions of the great debates: Acclaims, attacks, and defenses in the 1960 presidential debates. Communication Monographs, 66(4), 341.

Benoit, W. L., & Henson J. R. (2007). A functional analysis of the 2006 Canadian and 2007 Australian Election Debates. Argumentation and Advocacy, 44(Summer), 36-48.

Benoit, W. L., Pier, P. M., Brazeal, L. M., McHale, J. P., Klyukovksi, A., & Airne, D. (2002). The primary decision: A functional analysis of debates in presidential primaries. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Benoit, W. L., Wells, W. T., Pier, P. M., & Blaney, J. R. (1999). Acclaiming, attacking, and defending in nominating convention acceptance addresses. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 85, 247-267.

Bentley, J. (2008). McCain Unloads on Obama's Character, Record. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2008/10/06/politics/fromtheroad/entry4504641.shtml.

Bilmes, J. (1999). Questions, answers, and the organization of talk in the 1992 vice presidential debate: Fundamental considerations. Research on Language & Social Interaction, 32(3), 213-242.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S.C. (1987). Politeness: Some universals in language use. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cho, S., & Benoit, W. (2005). Primary presidential election campaign messages in 2004: A functional analysis of candidates' news releases. Public Relations Review, 31, 175-183.

Commission on Presidential Debates. Retrieved from http://www.debates.org/.
Cooper, M., & Thee, M. (2008, October 14). Poll says McCain is hurting his bid by using attacks. New York Times.
Curry, T. (2008). Final debate a lagging indicator of reality. Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27202973/ns/politics-the_debates/.
Dailey, W.O., Hinck, E.A., & Hinck, S.S. (2005). Audience perceptions of politeness and advocacy skills in the 2000 and 2004 presidential debates. Argumentation and Advocacy, 41(Spring), 196-210.
Hinck, E. A., & Hinck, S. S. (2002). Politeness strategies in the 1992 vice presidential and presidential debates. Argumentation & Advocacy, 38(4), 234-250.
The Washington Post Company. (2008, October 11). President Bush's approval ratings. The Washington Post.
Levinson, S. C. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Rill, L. & Benoit, W., 2009-11-11 "A Functional Analysis of 2008 General Election Debates" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 95th Annual Convention, Chicago Hilton & Towers, Chicago, IL.
Searle, J. R. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In Cole & Morgan (Eds.), Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts (59-82). New York: Academic Press.
Tapper, J. & Millller, S. (2008). Obama attacks McCain as an economic risk. In Political Punch. Retrieved from http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2008/09/obama-attacks-m.html.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jessica Loughery Basta, M.S.Ed., is an English Language Arts teacher at the secondary level in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. This is her first published article in the area of linguistics.

Dr. Jennifer D. Ewald is an Associate Professor of Spanish and Linguistics at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, PA where she teaches undergraduate courses at all levels of instruction. She has published in the areas of applied linguistics, pragmatics and second language pedagogy.