WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION:
THE UNSHARED REFERENTS OF BUSH'S RHETORIC[1]

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Abstract

The polemics of political rhetoric encourage the implementation of presupposed referents as though they were assumed and shared. This paper examines the presupposed referents employed by the White House, concerning the urgency of invading Iraq, and countered by the political left. Details indicate that the White House was endeavoring to build an undeniable argument for invasion. Consequently, they had to employ definite noun phrases as first mentions of previously unshared referents in order to achieve the hidden didactic goal of pre-empting counter arguments. The Democrats, the liberals, and the media had to endeavor to overcome such presuppositions and explain that addressees neither shared nor identified the assumed referents. Appeals to fear and epistemological assessment are also examined. Insights from the analysis suggest that, given the conducive political temperament of the country prior to the November 2002 mid-term elections, forestalling argumentation by implementing definite noun phrases as if they were previously shared referents is highly efficacious.

Keywords: Articles, Definiteness, Epistemology, Fear induction, Political language, Presupposition, Shared Social Reality, Superlatives, Unshared referents

1. Introduction

The realm of literature permits poets and novelists to refer to obscure or unfamiliar objects as if they are already shared by using definite noun phrases. These definite noun phrases are an invitation to the addressee to adopt the perspective of the writer. Protagonist-oriented identifiability (Chafe 1994) and audience acquiescence allow the artist to create a world. Less commonly known but just as effective and perhaps even more powerful is argumentation across the political spectrum employing definite noun phrases for the initial mention of referents previously unshared. Lakoff (2001) argues that the not-so-obvious manipulativeness of the language of those in power becomes more transparent once we examine the connection between the forms used and the functions performed (p. 310). The eerie effectiveness of the employment of hitherto

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[1] Linguists writing about political discourse often reveal their own political bias, "but as long as this is either made clear, or explicitly accepted as a possibility, then this seems acceptable" (Wilson 2003: 399). With that noted, let me admit freely that even if this paper were to result in American politics swinging to the left and my being able to celebrate in riotous joy with the rest of the world, I am mostly only interested in how language works.

unshared referents by an authority, such as the commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States, is examined in subsequent sections of this paper.

Definiteness has been presented in previous research as containing a referent that is both unique and presupposed. Lyons (1999) contends that the use of the definite noun phrase implies that both the speaker and the addressee are aware of the referent (pp. 02-03). Laury (2001) submits that definiteness is often contrasted from indefiniteness by identifiability (p. 402) but that speakers can employ the use of definite phrases to construct reference and make changes in context (p. 403). In fact, the polemics of political rhetoric encourage the implementation of presupposed referents as though they were assumed and shared. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the presupposed referents used by the president and the conservatives in Congress, concerning the urgency of invading Iraq, and countered by the political left. The scripts of the president's speech to the United Nations and his speech delivered in Cincinnati are examined. Additionally, excerpts from the transcripts of various Democratic members of Congress and written reactions are analyzed. I argue that the White House was endeavoring to build an undeniable argument for invasion. As a result, they had to employ definite noun phrases as first mentions of previously unshared referents in order to create an illusion of shared social reality, thereby achieving the hidden didactic goal of pre-empting counter arguments. The impact of fear induction and epistemological stance are discussed as well. The Democrats and liberals in general had to endeavor to overcome such presuppositions and explain that addressees neither share nor identify the assumed referents. Insights from this analysis will demonstrate that forestalling argumentation by implementing definite noun phrases as if they were previously shared referents is, given the right political climate, highly efficacious.

2. Data

In the main, the data to be discussed here are excerpts from political speeches delivered during the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of the eleventh of September (9/ll) of 2001. In particular, the excerpts from George W. Bush are from his two speeches: one delivered to the U.N on 12 September 2002, covertly targeting Americans, the other to the American public, and furtively to Iraqis, on 06 October 2002 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Some of the data are culled from online newspaper columns and are cited as such. Other incidental data are cited parenthetically as they appear.

The goal is to look at how definiteness can be manipulated in order to make unshared referents appear to be shared. In this sense, the Bush argument for an invasion of Iraq is a sort of case study of how to employ definiteness in English to persuade. There is no attempt to make this analysis a quantitative study of definite and indefinite noun phrases. It is already a well-established fact that in naturally occuring English texts nearly half of the definite descriptions introduce novel discourse entities with unfamiliar referents (Gundel et al, 1993; and Poesio and Vieira 1998). Abbot (1999) found that written texts generally employ more definite noun phrases with unshared referents than do spoken texts and attributes the difference to processing time needed by the addressee. Written and spoken language certainly differ, and the language of political speeches is unique in that it somehow fits into both catergories (i.e. though scripted, it is scripted to sound spoken). However, the important issue for the present

paper is explaining how the use of definite descriptions presupposes unfamiliar referents and creates the illusion of commonality.

3. Definiteness

Definiteness is a concept ostensibly easily recognized in English because the article *a* and the article *the* are lexical items whose principal tasks are to signal whether noun phrases are indefinite or definite respectively. Lyons (1999) labels noun phrases that fit these two categories as "simple indefinites" and "simple definites". It should be noted that noun phrases containing these articles are, of course, not the only ways to show indefiniteness (e.g., *some serious issues*) and definiteness (e.g., *this most serious issue*). Consequently, this paper like the work of Lyons (1999) avoids the other possible ways of indicating definiteness by focusing on simple indefinites and simple definites, containing the identifiable lexical articles. A couple of examples from the argument for war against Iraq that Bush was building elucidate the simple uses.

> (1) Today we turn to **the urgent duty** of protecting other lives.
>
> (Bush 2002a: 2)

> (2) and we have **an urgent duty** to prevent the worst from occurring.
>
> (Bush 2002b: 5)

Traditionally, *the* differs from *a* or *an* in that it refers not just to any *urgent duty* but to a particular or definite *urgent duty*. Further, it could be argued that the indefinite article in *an urgent duty* is a signal that the addressee is likely not as aware of the referent as the speaker whereas the definite article in *the urgent duty* is a reference that is known by both. It is generally held that the indefinite is employed upon first utterance and then the definite with each subsequent mention. However, Bush delivered the noun phrase in (1) in his address to the United Nations before the noun phrase in (2), which was spoken later in Cincinnati. Noteworthy as well are the gerund (i.e., *protecting*) in the first, which denotes a sense of actualized doing, and the infinitive (i.e., *to prevent*) in the second example, which gives a hypothetical feeling to the phrase. Obviously, there is more to the use of the indefinite and definite articles than simply noting familiarity and identification, and more will be explicated below (i.e., categorization and prominence). Regardless of the weakness of the familiarity hypothesis (Lyons 1999: 3), the concept of sharedness is an intuitive aspect of definiteness. We can argue that both the referents in (1) and (2) are new, even though it is admitted that *an urgent duty* is more likely previously unknown to the hearers than *the urgent duty*. The referent in (1) is included in our encyclopedic knowledge; namely, there is always *a duty* to protect the lives of others. What makes them both new is the fact that neither had been previously mentioned in the contexts of their respective speeches. They were both first mentions in two separate Bush discourses. Chronologically, and perhaps surprisingly, the definite phrase in the first example occurred approximately a month before the indefinite phrase in the second excerpt. A referent's being known or unknown is crucial to whether addressees can identify it. Bush may have presumed that the Cincinnati audience did not share the idea of *an*

urgent duty in (2) while he may have presumed that the United Nations General Assembly did share the idea of *the urgent duty*.[2] Prince (1981: 236) calls these sorts of unshared referents "brand-new" entities and these types of shared referents "unused" entities. If the ideas in (1) and (2) are new, why does Prince argue that only unshared ideas are new? Chafe (1994: 98) holds that the definite article indicates a noun phrase that shows an identifiable referent, but the definite article in (1) is neither evidentially nor necessarily shared by the audience that had never been addressed by Bush before. Perchance the expression *the urgent duty* in (1) is both new and unshared.

4. Multifunctional articles

Example (1) above provides a reason to question the idea that the definite article is only employed referentially, that is to refer to only a shared entity. Epstein (1994: 61) contends that though the referential function of articles is significant, articles are basically multifunctional and have an inherent expressive function. While the referential mode allows for familiarity and identifiability, the expressive mode provides for the manifestation of prominence.

The expressive function explains the ability of a speaker (or speechwriter) to choose a definite article where an indefinite might normally be expected. In the first paragraph of his address to the UN, Bush uses the definite article in example (1). A first mention would normally require an indefinite article as in (3a).[3] Although it might be argued that "the urgent duty" was merely a result of an assumed prior mention, it could be interpreted as a ploy to bring prominence to the noun phrase that would play a role in the entire speech.

(3)   (a)   //Today, we turn to **an urgent duty.**\\
        (b)   //**The urgent duty** is of protecting other lives**.**\\
        (c)   Today, we turn to **the urgent duty** of protecting other lives.

It may be that the presupposition in (3c) was the result of economic concerns to save space by conflating (3a) and (3b) and thereby saying more in less space, but it is also a possibility that the speechwriter wanted to induce the audience into accepting the referent *duty* as not just any duty but the task at the top of the president's list of priorities, namely effecting a regime change in Iraq.

A second look at the indefinite article in (2) and (4) reveals another instance in which the personal attitude of the speaker seems to motivate the choice of definite or indefinite.

(4)   (a)   Understanding the threats of our time, knowing the designs and

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[2] Though many of the addressees in the General Assembly would have heard Bush's speech in translation, the purpose of the speechwriter and, hence, of the speaker remained manipulative albeit subtle in English.

[3] Double slash marks (// and \\) enclose an alternate phrasing that did not actually occur in the original text. For example, the wording in (3c) is the original whereas the wording in (3a) and (3b) is not. They are presented to illuminate how the wording in (3c) may have come about.

deceptions of the Iraqi regime, we have every reason to assume the worst, and

(b)   we have **an urgent duty** to prevent the worst from occurring.

(Bush 2002b)

(c)   //we have **the urgent duty** of preventing the worst from occurring.\\

Even though this is a first mention, the referent of *urgent duty* is uniquely identifiable as a result of the fact that it is complemented by the reduced adjectival clause *to prevent the worst from occurring*. The speechwriter purposely selected the indefinite clause to generalize the *duty*. A hypothetical situation was being stated. The sentence with the indefinite (4b) makes a clear implication that there is more than one urgent task in the war on terrorism to choose from, and the president had simply identified one of a number of duties. There was an actual, specific task at hand.

5. The indefinite article

Other examples of the indefinite article being used for expressive purposes are readily available, but the example in (5) is the one on which Bush's whole argument for the invasion of Iraq hinged.

(5)   (a)   **The conduct of the Iraqi regime** is a threat to the authority of the United Nations, and a threat to peace. Iraq has answered a decade of demands with a decade of defiance.

(b)   All the world now faces **a test**, and the United Nations a difficult and defining moment.   (Bush 2002a)

The indefinite noun phrase *a test* does not refer to any challenge that the world might face, rather it appertains to the results of the previously cited *conduct* of the regime of Iraq. This second article is indefinite but insinuating. It acts to de-emphasize the specific source of the challenge while concurrently categorizing it. The effect of the expressive function of this type of indefinite is not to implicate a specific entity but to produce a sense of generalization (Epstein 1994). The resulting effect is the explicit emphasis of the magnitude of threat presented to the world by one country, one regime. Similarly, one might argue for this effect in (4) because the referent identifies a specific and identifiable entity, once again the regime of Iraq.

Near the end of his speech to the UN, the president made dramatic use of the expressive mode of articles to achieve his rhetorical purpose.

(6)   If we meet our responsibilities, if we overcome this danger,

(a)   we can arrive at **a very different future**.

(b)   **//the future** can be very different.\\
The people of Iraq can shake off their captivity. They can

one day join a democratic Afghanistan and a democratic Palestine,
inspiring reforms throughout the Muslim world. These nations can
show by their example that honest government, and respect for
women, and the great Islamic tradition of learning can triumph
in the Middle East and beyond.

(d)   And we will show that **the promise of the United Nations**
         can be fulfilled in our time.   (Bush 2002b)
(e)   //And we will show that **a promise of the United Nations**
         can be fulfilled in our time.\\

It might be arguable whether the articles in the instances in (6) can possibly be
alternated. Nevertheless, the definite noun phrase in (6b) demonstrates that there is no
constraint allowing only the use of the indefinite noun phrase. By using the indefinite,
however, the president seems to have been saying that the future is alterable, implying
that it depended on the UN's actions. Characterizing the future fate of the whole world
as dependent on the decision of the Security Council was a brilliant rhetorical use. Less
debatable is the possibility of definiteness alternation in (6d). Both are uniquely
identifiable, but *the promise of the United Nations* emphasizes that one promise was
better, more prominent, more important than the others in the category. Here again the
selection had the expressive function and rhetorical purpose of portraying a preference
and convincing the audience.

6. The definite article

When the role of the definite noun phrase is prominent because of its relation with the
rest of the discourse, it is said to have syntagmatic importance (Epstein 1994: 68). The
best known illustration of syntagmatic importance is the definite noun phrase employed
at the beginning of narratives to invite the reader to accept the writer's perspective by
presupposing that unshared referents are actually shared. Laury (2001: 406) provides an
example from *Big-Hearted River* by Hemingway:

(7)   (a)   **The train** went up the track out of sight,
                 around one of **the hills** of burnt timber.
                 Nick sat down…
        (b)   //**A train** went up the track out of sight,
                 around **some hills** of burnt timber.
                 Nick sat down…\\

No debate is allowed by this structure because what is presented is only
identifiable to the protagonist Nick. The definite phrases *the train* and *the hills* are from
the viewpoint of the main character. If readers wish to participate in the story, they have
to adopt the world as presented. The employment of *a train* and *some hills* would not
have the same effect because they tend to generalize. We would lose the sense that *the
train* and *the hills* are objects belonging to Nick and his world. The definite articles
force the reader to focus on the perspective of the protagonist.

Choosing the definite article over indefinite plurals is manipulative and controlling, an endeavor to persuade the addressees to accept an ideology or worldview that they might not previously have shared. The following excerpt (8) shows there is only one view of history, logic, facts and evidence.

(8)   We know that Saddam Hussein pursued
        weapons of mass murder even when
        inspectors were in his country. Are we to
        assume that he stopped when they left?

(a)   **The history, the logic, and the facts**
        lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein's
        regime is a grave and gathering danger.
        To suggest otherwise is to hope against
        the evidence.   (Bush 2002a)

(b)   **//History, logic, and facts** lead to one conclusion:
        Saddam Hussein's regime is a grave and gathering danger.
        To suggest otherwise is to hope against **evidence**.\\

Eliminating the definite articles illuminates how expressive the *the* truly is. Without the definite noun phrases, the excerpt in (8b) has to allow many viewpoints and the whole of human history, in which the conduct of the Iraqi regime plays a much less significant part. That is, the definite articles in (8a) have a perspicuous syntagmatic purpose in that they elucidate the prominence of *this history*, *this logic*, *these facts*, and *this evidence* in the general construct and context of Bush's argument to the United Nations. Arguably, this repeated definite noun phrase construction represents the very same unidentified referent; in other words, the history, the logic, and the facts are the evidence. Such redundant implementation indicates to the audience that the as-yet-unidentifiable referent will be topical and prominent in the discourse that follows. In fact, this is precisely how the speech proceeds in the following paragraph when Bush discusses sanctions, oil for food, coalition military strikes (13a) and in the paragraph subsequent to that when he contends that "Iraq has answered a decade of U.N. demands with a decade of defiance," providing another instance of *the* being employed as an expressive marker of syntagmatic significance. Furthermore, the selection of the NP *the evidence* in (8a) when that evidence has not been explicitly mentioned may be alerting the hearers of the important and preventative part that the evidence should play in the future, thus making prominent the connection between this novel referent (i.e., the evidence) and the horror that we could prevent from occuring in the future (9). Interesting also is that this implementation not only raises the dramatic effect of the speech but also foreshadows *the final proof* to be proffered in Ohio (11).

(9)   **The first time we may be completely certain he has a**
        —nuclear weapons is when, God forbids, he uses one.
        We owe it to all our citizens to do everything in our power
        to prevent that day from coming.   (Bush 2002a)

The speechwriter has enabled the president through the use of suspense to sweep away any potential debate and to inform the hearers of the significance of his interpretation of the set of events.   In his speech in Cincinnati (10), Bush elaborated on what this terrible set of definites would build up to.

(10)   Knowing these realities, America must not ignore
(a)   **the threat gathering against us**. (Bush 2002b)
(b)   **//a threat gathering against us.**

(11)   Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for
(a)   **the final proof—the smoking gun—**that could come
in the form of a mushroom cloud. (Bush 2002b)
(b)   **//final proof—a smoking gun—**that could come
in the form of a mushroom cloud.\\

The speech in Cincinnati, Ohio opens with the argument that there is "a grave threat to peace" and that "the threat comes from Iraq" (Bush 2002b). It is argued that Saddam is "a homicidal dictator" and that he ordered chemical attacks not only on Iran but also on his own fellow countrymen, resulting in injuries and deaths exceeding those that occurred at the World Trade Center on the eleventh of September 2001 (9/11). Though Bush endeavors throughout this speech to draw a connection between Iraq and 9/ll, the threat in (10a) is neither familiar nor inferrable (Prince 1981) because there is no evidence to tie the two together. It may be true that there is a gathering threat but that that threat is uniquely gathering from Iraq was not tenable.   Therefore, the indefinite article or null such as used in the alternate constructions (10b) and (11b) should have been used. Nevertheless, the speechwriter selected the definite article as in (10a) and (11a) in an effort to portray the nuance of the threat from Iraq (e.g. the "nuclear mujehedeen," Saddam's nuclear scientists) as being more serious than threats from other potential sources, such as Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia.

Now that we have seen the significance of syntagmatic relations to the Bush argument, let's see how well he wields paradigmatic relations. The best known expressive use of the definite article *the* is one of paradigmatic importance. Generally this use consists of the emphatic or stressed definite article and denotes "the X par excellence" (Epstein 1994, p. 64). Excerpt (12) provides an illustration from Bush's case against the Iraqi regime.

(12)   In the attacks on America a year ago, we saw
the destructive intentions of our enemies.
(Bush 2002a)

All the other intentions of the people responsible for the attacks on the World Trade Center on the eleventh of September were completely unmentioned and unworthy of mentioning. *The destructive intentions of our enemies* showed that destruction was a particularly prominent desire of the perpetrators. It should be noted that the definite article here though emphatic is not unique or presupposing. Not surprisingly, the most prominent action of the category of the enemies' actions is the referent but the other

actions are not denied. It is henceforth a simple matter of juxtaposing the actions of Al Qaeda with those of Iraq's dictator and letting associations of their intentions be drawn by the audience.

In (13) we see that the definite article can mark prominence even when it is not emphatic and not phonologically stressed. Both instances are well-known cliches that are often used with indefinite noun phrases, but the speechwriter implements the definite article to indicate that these examples are particularly noteworthy.

(13)   (a)   Delegates to the General Assembly, we have
been more than patient. We've tried
the carrot of oil for food, and
the stick of coalition military strikes.
But Saddam has defied all these efforts and
continues to develop weapons of mass destruction.

(Bush 2002a)

(b)   The U.S. should use a moratorium on SDI development as
a carrot to bring an acceptable offensive arms limitation"
(C. Peter Gall as cited at dictionary.com).

(c)   Roosevelt liked to repeat an old African saying: "Speak softly, and carry **a big stick**. You will go far." In Panama, Teddy proved to the world that he was willing to use his big navy as a stick to further American interests.
(http://www.smplanet.com/imperialism/joining.html)

The carrot and stick is a well-known allusion in America and in Western culture in general to a reward and punishment technique of motivation. Proverbially, an obstinate mule needs to be motivated by its owner. A carrot is dangled just out of reach but in front of the mule, and the mule will work and continue to work hard to get the reward. He will never reach the carrot though. If the mule becomes disillusioned, a stick can then be used as a threat and a motivator. Because these uses of the expressions "a carrot" and "a stick" are such a part of our common, shared social reality, Bush could refer to a specific oil for food program as "the carrot" and particular instances of coalition military strikes as "the stick". There is a point far more noteworthy and ironic here, however. As (13c) reveals, Bush's "big stick" comment may have not only alluded to the words of Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt but also to the expansionist policy of the twenty-sixth president of the United States (1901-1909)[4], who promoted a "revolution" on November 03, 1903 that allowed the then northern province of Colombia to become the sovereign state of Panama in order that a canal might be built. Roosevelt, enraged that the Colombian senate had rejected an offer (i.e., the Hay-Herran

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[4] Teddy was an imperialist. He was president at the height of what has been called America's Age of Empire, during which time Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Philippines became American territory. The comparison is fitting because Bush's government is filled with neo-imperialists, the so called neo-conservatives or neocons, who believe the only way to make America safe is to make it an empire (Boot 2001).

Agreement) for a ten-mile-wide strip of Panamanian land on which to construct a canal, used the U.S. Navy to prevent Colombian troops from squashing the uprising. "Roosevelt," writes U.S. Navy Commander Henry J. Hendrix II, "raged that the 'jack rabbits' in Bogota must not be allowed to unilaterally 'bar one of the future highways of civilization'" (p. 46).   As for the opinion of the American   public, Roosevelt audaciously admitted, "I did not 'divine' what the people were going to think. I simply made up my mind what they ought to think and then did my best to get them to think it" (Kegley, Jr. and Wittkopf 1987: 305-306).

7. Shared social reality

Speakers claim shared social reality with their audience when they employ a definite noun phrase. The definite article can introduce unknown referents and presuppose that the audience has familiarity with them and that they can readily identify them. The definite article indicates to the addressee that this entity should be considered prominent, causing the addressee not to protest an introduction but to wait for subsequent elaboration. For the purposes of having an unassailable argument, a speaker may employ an unidentifiable referent under the guise of a shared referent in order to persuade an audience to accept a particular perspective on an issue.

The identifiability of the referents in example (7) is not determined by the reader/audience. On the contrary, the identifiability of the referents of *the train* and *the hills* is from the perspective of Nick, the main character in Hemingway's fiction. It is my contention that speechwriters and politicians can also employ protagonist-oriented identifiability (Chafe 1994) to manipulate definiteness to convey a particular perspective as shared social reality. The speechgiver is the protagonist in this case and he/she may employ definite noun phrases in order to assert that his/her referents are not only indentified by but are also shared with the addressees. Speeches are similar to works of written fiction in that the reader, or the addressee, is invited into a worldview. Though it is true that if the audience objects to this perspective they are free to switch off the radio/television, it is likely they will remain captive until the speech is finished being delivered, especially if the deliverer is of significant social status. Politicians, such as the president of the United States, hold such a position and are granted a high level of credibility.   In fact, politicians will likely not be elected if they cannot successfully market themselves as having trustworthiness and expertise. The president, being the only politician elected by voters from all across the country, albeit via the electoral college, has the people's trust and support, notwithstanding the interference from the Supreme Court following the last election.[5] The American public, then, tends to look to the White House for solutions in times of crisis. The attacks of 9/ll engendered in Americans a sort of post-traumatic stress, a general sense of fear, helplessness and doubt.

"In times of stress," write Merari and Friedland (1985), "individuals' dependence on authorities is enhanced, and authorities' performance in dealing with terrrorism becomes a yardstick by which the public assesses the likelihood that there

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[5] The 2000 presidential election was close. Al Gore won the popular vote, and George W. Bush won the electoral vote. However, there was a controversy over the ballots in Florida. A recount was sought but the Supreme Court refused, thus giving the presidency to Bush.

will be an end to the ordeal" (p. 201). The Oval Office was hence able to effectively exploit this fear by arguing that terrorism was the source, that the Iraqi regime supported terrorism and that regime change was the solution. That this solution was backed by moral certitude and, more importantly, by a plan of action is emphasized by the president's use of definiteness, especially strategic superlatives.

"Superlativeness," writes Lyons (1999: 247), "means having some property to an extent to which no other objects have it." For example, we can say *the scariest weapon* but not **a scariest weapon.*[6] Though it may be true that English, or any language which marks definiteness, is certain to use that marking with its superlative structures, it is not so clear that all superlative forms necessarily have a superlative sense, as the examples in (14) illustrate.

(14)   (a)   There's **a very scary weapon** in Baghdad.
       (b)   There's **the scariest weapon** in Baghdad,
       (c)   and there's **an even scarier weapon** in Pyongyang.

The comparative superlative *the scariest weapon* in (14b) has two possible readings. One reading is that there is no weapon scarier than the weapon in Baghdad. The other reading is that a remarkably frightening weapon exists in Iraq but an even more frightening weapon exists elsewhere, such as in North Korea. In other words, *the scariest weapon* could be interpreted as being either the exteme of a continuum or a stressed version of the expression in (14a). The point is not to address the definiteness effect in existential sentences; for that see Lyons (1999) and Rando and Napoli (1978) among others. The idea here is simply to demonstrate that the superlative noun phrase, though grammatically definite because of the definite article and most/-est, is not necessarily semantically or pragmatically definite, unless that is the intent of the communicator. With this in mind, the intent of the speechwriter, and thus of Bush, in the Cinncinati speech seems to have been to show grammatical, semantic and pragmatic definiteness with the superlatives in examples (15) through (18). These superlatives are strategic in the sense that they are implemented to demonstrate the vital importance that an invasion of Iraq has in the war on terrorism.

In (15a) *the most serious dangers of our age* had not been mentioned before, and they are not mentioned in the current text either. The presumption is that there was shared cultural knowledge about what dangers are the most serious of our time. If *some serious dangers of our age* of (15b) had been employed instead, the illusion of sharedness found in storytelling and fiction would have been lost. It is a given that the superlative structure gets its definiteness by default (i.e., the grammar requires it), but it is also true that the seriousness of the dangers would be lessened by the use of *some* because that statement generalizes too much. To illustrate, consider *some serious dangers are in Iraq whereas others are in North Korea*. Without the superlative, the power of the argument is lost to the addressees.

(15)   While there are many dangers in the world, the threat
       from Iraq stands alone - because it gathers

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[6] Exceptions exist. Hawkins (as cited in Lyons 1999: 247) provides for non-inclusive superlatives, such as "a best buy" and "a first course in German."

    (a)   **the most serious dangers of our age** in one place. (Bush 2002b)

    (b)   **//some serious dangers of our age** in one place.\\

The only certain means of removing a great danger to our nation in (16a) does not put the issue up for debate. It simply makes the statement, allows no challenging of it and expects agreement with it. More important is the feeling of a specific, identifiably-correct course of action. Without the definite article (16b), we cannot recognize why regime change is more advantageous than other "certain means". Like the phrase "the scariest" in (14b), "the only certain" phrase provides a sense of a point located at the end of some scale. That is, one method of safeguarding the nation is more prominent and more important than all the others in the catergory. The fact that this statement also draws an affinity between the current and erstwhile administrations makes it appear more shared by and thereby more palatable to the audience.

    (16)   …two administrations - mine and President Clinton's - have stated
              that regime change in Iraq is

    (a)   **the only certain means of removing a great danger to our nation**.

                                                    (Bush 2002b)

    (b)   **//a certain means of removing a great danger to our nation**.\\

Waiting is labeled *the riskiest option* in (17a). This definite superlative noun phrase induces fear. It appeals to our sense of fear of a traumatic event like those of 9/ll ever occuring again. It is as if the president is asking the addressees whether they would like to allow even a remote chance of experiencing that again. The ability to evoke a shared sense of danger in the future is why appeals to fear work so well in advertising. The audience easily remembers the mental picture of airplanes crashing into the World Trade Center, readily agrees that action needs to be taken now, and patently resolves to do anything to prevent a repeat in the future. Because human beings share a desire for self-preservation for themselves and their posterity, advertisers and rhetoricians can tap this common fear, especially when the threat looms large (Beaudoin 2002: Henthorne et al., 1993: And Rogers and Mewborn 1976). The implication here is that if the audience makes the president wait, Saddam will empower the terrorists to strike again. However, if pre-emptive, preventative action is taken immediately, the listeners are assured of their personal survival. This appeal to shared social circumstance may be illusory (e.g. the other options admitted by the indefinite article in 17b may be as effective) but it is overpowering.

    (17)   There is no easy or risk-free course of action. Some
              have argued we should wait - and that is an option. *In*
              my view, it is

    (a)   **the riskiest of all options -** the longer we
              wait, the bolder Saddam Hussein will become. (Bush 2002b)

    (b)   **//a risky option -** the longer we wait, the bolder Saddam
              Hussein will become.\\

And there is no room in (18a) for any other benefit to be *the first and greatest* result. This excerpt from the Ohio speech appears to indirectly address the people of Iraq, those soon to be invaded.

(18)   America is a friend to the people of Iraq. Our demands are
        directed only at the regime that enslaves them and threatens
        us. When these demands are met,

(a)   **the first and greatest benefit** will come to Iraqi men,
        women and children.   (Bush 2002b)

(b)   **//a first and great benefit** will come to Iraqi men, women
        and children.\\

In tone, the wording emanates the magnanimity of an emperor about to liberate an oppressed race. Indeed the language echoes the propaganda (19) employed by Napoleon Bonaparte during his Egyptian campaign in 1798.

(19)   Too long have the Mameluke beys who govern Egypt insulted
        the French nation, and loaded her merchants with vexations;
        the hour of their chastisement is arrived. Too long has this
        horde of slaves, purchased from the Caucasus and Georgia,

(a)   tyrannized over **the fairest part of the world**;
        but God, upon whom everthing depends, has ordered its
        empire to end. People of Egypt! You will be told that I
        come to destroy your religion. Do not believe it. Reply
        that I come to restore your rights and punish

(b)   **the usurpers**…   (Moorehead 1962: 59-60)

Here it should be noted that though this excerpt from the proclamation is in English, it would have originally been written in French and then translated into Arabic. Nevertheless, all three languages mark definiteness and that definiteness is exploited to feign a shared social reality. The superlative NP in (19a) is an appeal to the vanity of the Egyptians. Who does not like to consider their homeland as *the fairest part of the world*? Not only is the superlative disarming, it is a technique, enabling the speaker to establish himself as a friend to the addressee. In (19b) *the usurpers* is a presupposed commonality as well. Little evidence exists to support that the Egyptians under the Mamelukes were interested in revolution and liberty (Moorehead 1962: 98-99), and hindsight tells us that perhaps Napoleon and the French were not so concerned about the subjugated Egyptian either.   Now the ordinal and the superlative structures in (18a) are generally understood to be definite by default; although employment of *a first and great benefit* (18b) is felicitous, it does not deny the existence of other benefits that could be just as beneficial. Therefore, the choice of the superlative is indicative of the one benefit (i.e. removal of Saddam's regime) that is the most prominent to the liberator and presupposed to be shared by those to be liberated. By the same token as the Egyptians in the time of Napoleon, there is little indication that the Iraqi people in the time of Bush welcomed the idea of regime change, especially considering how uprisings

in the country following the Gulf War were not supported by the liberating American army. At any rate, it seems chicanery is the art of political rhetoric.

All in all, the definites shown in this section are presuppositions but are not just simple assertions. These referents try to force the addressee to accept them unquestioningly because they limit the options of the potential responders. Alternate indefinite forms could be used but they would lessen the illusion of shared social reality.

8. The response

In this section, I will look at how the political left countered or rather tried to respond to the unshared referents of President Bush. To that end, we must first discuss the milieu of American politics at that time. Bush's first official argument for invasion of Iraq was his speech to the UN, delivered in September of 2002; his speech at Cinncinati, Ohio in October, 2002, addressed to the whole of the American people, was a fifth and much-revised draft, synthesizing the case against the Iraqi dictator and the imminence of the threat (Fournier 2002). The president was ostensibly travelling around the country drumming up support for his attempt to get congressional authorization to wage war (i.e. Senate Joint Resolution 46), but he was also endeavoring to lengthen his coattails. Presidential coattails refer to the favorable effect a president may have on midterm congressional elections. Every two years a third of the Senate and the whole of the House of Representatives must stand for election. The electorate sometimes cast their ballots for congressional candidates of the same political party as the president because these candidates have supported or will support the president. At other times, in fact at most other times, the president's party loses seats in the legislature. What is more is that these midterm congressional elections often serve as a referendum on the sitting president's performance and his handling of the nation's economy.

Prior to the the terrorist attacks of the eleventh of September, Bush was considered by many in the electorate to be neither a legitimate nor a competent president. His approval ratings rocketed afterwards because he had become a leader in a time of crisis. And the eventual favorable coattail effect that occurred during the midterm elections was "the undeniable, if unintended, gift of Osama bin Laden" (Jacobson, 2003). The argument I would like to make here is that after 9/ll, the political tables were being turned, making midterm elections referenda on the performances of the then sitting members of congress. The president had a rather strong dual motivation for wanting the resolution brought before the congress before the November elections. One, the more the time that was taken to examine the evidence, the less the likelihood of the invasion ever materializing. Two, any lawmaker not siding with the president would undoubtedly be labeled as being against the war on terrorism.[7] As we shall see, legislators who did not show proper support for the president's plan of action against terrorism were portrayed in a most unfavorable light.

Looking at the political climate immediately preceding the November 2002 midterm elections, we see that the political viability of the president and the Republicans was crutched on what Merari and Friedland (1985) call "the public's

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[7] "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" is the rather black-and-white statement that Bush uttered to the world on 20 September 2001 (Krugman 2004).

confidence that 'something can be done' and its hope that 'there is light at the end of the tunnel'" (p. 201). The Bush administration then had taken a clear, consistent and decisive stance on how to counter terrorism. War. Senator Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia was one of the first and loudest to attempt a response. In excerpt (20), the Constitution of the United States is used as a prop to emphasize the senator's point. Though the Constitution in Article II, Section 2 makes the president commander in chief of the army and navy, it gives the sole power to declare war and call forth the militia to the Congress in Article I, Section 8. However, even though the wording is clear, interpretation is a perenial source of obfuscation.

(20)   Nowhere, nowhere in this Constitution which I hold in my hand, nowhere in the Constitution is it written that the president has

(a)   **the authority to call forth the militia to pre-empt a perceived threat**.

(b)   **//authority to call forth the militia to pre-empt a perceived threat.** And yet the resolution which will be before the Senate avers that the president "has authority under the Constitution to take action in order to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism against the United States as Congress recognized in the joint resolution, on authorization for use of military force following the Sept. 11 terrorist attack."

(c)   What **a cynical twisting of words**. What **a cynical twisting of words**.   (Byrd 2002a)

(d)   **//**What ***the cynical twisting of words**. What ***the cynical twisting of words.**

(e)   **//The cynical twisting of words** in this resolution is preposterous!****

"I took the canal zone," said Teddy Roosevelt matter-of-factly, "and let Congress debate it and while the debate goes on the canal does too" (Bishop 1920: 308). Other presidents took warlike actions as well. Harry Truman chose where and when to drop the atomic bomb. Lyndon Johnson chose bombing targets in North Vietnam. Richard Nixon invaded Cambodia. In spite of the fact that resistance has at times been mounted by Congress, such as by passing the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which gave the legislature a veto to end fighting begun by a president, the executive branch has effectively ignored it. Ronald Reagan invaded Grenada and bombed Libya; and George Bush Senior invaded Panama in 1989. As a consequence, it should be no surprise that George Bush Junior would exert his perogative as commander in chief as well. He had the full support of Congress to invade Afghanistan. Yet now Bush Junior did not simply want to wage war to defend the nation, he wanted the power to wage war based on conjecture. He wanted Congress to agree that the Constitution gave the president "inherent authority" to wage pre-emptive war on any sovereign nation perceived as a possible threat.

Senator Byrd endeavors to exploit the expressive use of the indefinite article in (20). The indefinite *a cynical twisting of words* (20c) is not a reference to an arbitrary turn of phrase; it is an allusion to the type of underhanded wording that was being employed by the president and his supporters in the Congress. Byrd purposefully de-emphasizes the identity of the authors while simultaneously typecasting people who

would commit such an egregious act. The audience knew full well the implication of who authored the wording while at the same time they sensed how outraged the speaker was that supporters of constitutional law could subvert the Constitution. I submit that the magnitude of the expressive use of the indefinite article in this excerpt should have been as effective as that found in *a test* of example (5b). This *a cynical twisting of words* functions expressively because the indefinite article creates a sense of generalization (Epstein, 1994), a generalization, along with a grammaticality, that impedes employment of the definite article as in (20d). In (20e), we see that the senator could have made his exclamation with a definite article, but the categorization would have been lost. The definiteness makes the "cynical twisting" appear as a one time occurrence, not the habit of unscrupulous politicians. So Byrd's implication is that no one who could stoop to that sort of behavior could possibly be part of a government of democratic laws. The definite article in (20a), as opposed to the also felicitous null article in (20b), emphasizes that there is one "authority" that the Constitution does not give the executive branch that is more important and more prominent than some others it does not give and that that is *the authority to call forth the militia to pre-empt a perceived threat*.

In the same speech, Byrd tries his hand at exploiting the common, shared reality of Americans. He employs a quotation, excerpt (21), from an icon of American idealism, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States and is consistently ranked by the public as the best president America has ever had.[8] More than just a historical figure, Honest Abe is an American legend. He was a war-time president, and significantly the war during which he served was the war between the states, the Civil War. Not only did he sign the Emancipation Proclamation, setting the American slave free[9], he kept the Union whole. Hardly a better way to establish a feeling of shared social reality exists than to quote a much revered American statesman, not to mention the implicit reference to a quotation from Lincoln that Bush made during his acceptance speech at the end of the 2000 presidential election: "Our nation must rise above a house divided." While Lincoln used the house-divided analogy to discuss how he believed that disagreement over the issue of slavery would pull the nation asunder, Bush employed it to encourage the American public to overcome the disagreement over the outcome of the 2000 elections and to reunite for the betterment of the country. Now Byrd's purpose may be to remind Bush of his "unity" mantra (Lakoff, 2001, p. 319) and to imply that the pre-emptive strike issue will divide not only the congress but also the country and estrange us from the United Nations.

> (21)   …kings had always been involving and impoverishing
>   their people in wars pretending generally if not always
>   that the good of the people was the object. This our
>   convention understood to be

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[8] Lincoln was voted number one in the 1948 Arthur Schlesinger poll for *Life* magazine, the 1962 Arthur Schlesinger poll of the *New York Times* magazine, and the 1982 Tribune poll of the *Chicago Tribune* magazine (Kenney and Rice 1988). His is one of only two presidential birthdays officially celebrated (both on the third Monday of February); the other is George Washington's.

[9] This action actually only set the slaves free in the Confederacy, but it led to the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery in the Union.

(a)   **the most oppressive of all kingly oppressions**.

(Byrd 2002a)

(b)   **//*a most oppressive of all kingly oppressions**.\\

The definite article in (21a) is a presupposed referent. It is granted that the grammar requires the definite article, as (21b) demonstrates, but it should be evident also that the utilization of the superlative here is intended to remind Lincoln's addressee[10] of why the American Revolution was fought and Byrd's audience[11] of how ironic it is for the president to ask for dictorial powers to remove a dictator. Byrd does not put the presupposition that there is no inherent constitutional authority for the president to make pre-emptive strikes up for debate, rather he presupposes it and hides behind Lincoln's integrity to avoid challenges. This tactic sometimes works brilliantly and should have put the audience at a disadvantage.

Other Democrats were not silent either. At a town-hall meeting in the Jefferson Park Community Center on Beacon Hill, U.S. Representative Jim McDermott, quoted in (22) and (23), responded to Bush's plan to wage war on Iraq:

(22)   And what we are dealing with right now in this country is
         whether we are having
(a)   **a kind of bloodless, silent coup or not**.   (Postman 2002)
(b)   **//*the kind of bloodless, silent coup or not**.\\

(23)   This president is trying to bring himself all the power to become
(a)   **an emperor -** to create Empire America.   (Postman 2002)
(b)   **//the emperor -** to create Empire America.\\

Both of McDermott's uses of the indefinite article (22a and 23a) are expressive uses. Without a relative clause to specify which specific kind of coup, the *the* of (22b) is not felicitous. Addressees cannot identify the referent, but that is not McDermott's purpose. Rather his intention is to categorize the president's behavior, which is what the *a* accomplishes, and to condemn that behavior as undemocratic. Likewise the indefinite NP in (23a) pegs Bush's action as despotic. The Representative is not so much interested in discussing the title of dignitary superior to king as he is in labeling an attitude unbecoming an elected statesman. So though the definite NP in (23b) is grammatical, it is not suitable. McDermott is accomplishing a type identification that was seemingly begun by Byrd in (20). Other liberals joined the attack, but the conservatives were not standing still either.

The debate began to sound like a game of point counterpoint. The banter devolved into a brawl with even respected intellectuals, such as Pulitzer Prize winning commentator and newspaper columnist George F. Will, resorting to name-calling.

(24)   McDermott and Bonior are two specimens of what Lenin,

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[10] This excerpt is from a letter Lincoln wrote to William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, friend and biographer. For the text of the letter, see (Lincoln 1953).

[11] Byrd's speech was delivered in the Senate, so the audience would have been any senator or reporter who happened to be present. Of course, he would have liked it to have been to the general public, but his audience would have been much smaller than those at any of Bush's speeches.

referring to Westerners who denied
(a)   **the existence** of Lenin's police-state terror,
(b)   //**existence** of Lenin's police-state terror,\\
(c)   called "**useful idiots**."
(d)   //called "**the useful idiots**."\\

(Will 2002)

Will's use of the definite article in (24a) is emphatic, and it seems to have been marking the prominence of the need to take action against Saddam (i.e. the existence of WMD) and the prominence of the idiocy of those who did not agree with the state line. Without *the* as in (24b), grammaticality remains but emphasis dissipates. And the plural NP *useful idiots* of (24c) is not definite, rather it is categorical. The definite NP of (24d) is too specific and denies classification - we would expect the referents to be particular individuals whom Lenin considered useful. However, speaking out against our leader, as U.S. Representatives McDermott (Democrat from Michigan) and Bonior (Democrat from Washington) did when they spoke out against the Bush administration on live television during a trip to Iraq in October of 2002, is the sort of behavior that could be considered typical of those who aid the enemy. In fact, many challengers of Bush policy began to be labeled less than patriotic.

(25)   When it comes to foreign policy, Democrats have **a reputation**
        as **credulous stooges** whose reflexive anti-war leanings make
        them **willing dupes** for **murderous dictators**.   …the charge is
        so effective that it doesn't matter whether it's true.

(Sullentrop 2002)

Chris Sullentrop, an MSN *Slate* Magazine columnist, called attention to this categorization of the behavior of Democrats. None of the bold-faced noun phrases in (25) are definite. As a matter of fact, the definite article would render these NPs incapable of producing generalizations that categorize behavior. The implementation of *the* with *reputation*, *credulous stooges*, *willing dupes* and *murderous dictators* in (25) would cause any sense of categorization to evanesce. We would tend to expect there to be specific individual instances. Moreover, if each case is individualized, it is less easy to maintain an us-versus-them mentality. Furthermore, overgeneralization using indefinites does not allow McDermott and Bonior, or any other skeptic, to have other motivations for questioning the president and the government in general. One could neither honestly think that politicians sometimes lie nor actually consider war less preferable to the disarmament of the Iraqi regime. One could not voice an opinion. One might be tempted to speculate how democratic that would be.

Perhaps the Democrats were so eager to typecast the president because they were aware of how effective this expressive use is. They have repeatedly had their referential identities de-focused and their general tendency to challenge presidential authority emphasized as the lack of patriotism (Lacitis 2002). In fact, Democratic fear of this character-bashing prompted *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd to describe their flip-flopping as having reached "ominous new Orwellian heights" (Dowd 2002). Hillary Clinton and other Democrats had been accused of attempting to preserve their "political viability" for the future (Suellentrop 2002) and had given up the fight.

This situation is remarkably resemblant of a "coercive harmony" (Nader 1997: 715). That is, a harmony achieved when those with less power are intimidated and forced by the more powerful to make a show of consensus.

Why the idiocy and apparent lack of patriotism of Democrats should have been considered worse than the Nixon-like[12] "venality, vindictiveness, narcissism, … madness" and "thoughts of dictatorship" of a president[13] (Perlstein 2002) remains a puzzle. Why were the unshared referents of the political right more effective than those of the left? Perhaps the most typecast president in recent history has the answer:

(26)   When people are insecure, they often turn to the right
(a)   Because of **the rhetoric**,
(b)   //Because of **rhetoric**,\\
(c)   because of **the ideological certainty**…

(Clinton 2002: 8)

(d)   //because of **ideological certainty**…\\

Clinton selects *the rhetoric* in (26a) because he wishes to emphasize that during fearful times it is the black and white certitude of the political right that results in the abandonment of the ideas of the political left, which is known for its doubt and uncertainty about gray areas of life. Employment of *rhetoric* in (26b) would work to rhetorically weaken his premise. In other words, the use of the null article would be yet another example of left-wing incertitude. The definite article makes the reason prominent. In (26c) *the ideological certainty* is a recurrence of the notion and again emphasizes the prominence of certitude as the cause. The indefinites, the nulls in (26b) and (26d), would permit the possibility of reasons other than the personal beliefs of the conservatives. It would be tantamount to conceding the possible existence of objective facts.

9. Epistemological considerations

Certitude sells. America is, if nothing else, a marketing society.[14] If politicians wish to win elections, they must market themselves. They must portray certitude when in fact they have no objective evidence. "Political language - and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists - is designed," wrote George Orwell in 1946, "to make lies sound truthful and murder repectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (Orwell 1956: 366). No better way to make "pure wind" appear solid is there than to make the unshared seem shared. In the year since the invasion of Iraq began, it has become evident that none of the causa belli

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[12] Nixon's name is synonymous with the blatant abuse of presidential power. To avoid impeachment because of his involvement in the Watergate scandal, Nixon became the first president to resign the office.

[13] In the early months of his presidency, Bush, struggling with the legislature over tax cuts, commented offhandedly that "a dictatorship would be a heck of a lot easier" (Perlstein 2002).

[14] The extreme marketing of the WMD argument prompted former UN inspector Hans Blix to comment that Blair and Bush "are not vendors of merchandise but leaders of whom some sincerity should be asked when they exercise their responsibility for war and peace in the world" (Lovell 2004).

exists. The aluminum tubes that were put forth as proof that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction were, concluded the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) back in June, actually only intended for use in conventional rocket production (Dickinson 2003). That the documents indicating Iraq was trying to purchase yellow cake uranium from Niger to use in those aluminum tubes were forged was known by the CIA approximately a year prior to Bush's announcement of them in his 2003 State of the Union address (Dreyfuss and Vest 2004). The proof that Saddam had had a hand in the 9/11 attacks was that Mohammad Atta, the Egyptian ringleader of the terrorist attacks, had met with one of Saddam's operatives in Praque, but the FBI disproved that surmise (Kwiatkowski 2004). The mobile bioweapon labs and the unmanned aerial vehicles for the delivery of said bioweapons were also found less than able to proffer support for Bush's invasion. As a matter of fact, the Director of Central Intelligence, George J. Tennet, admitted that he had on more than one occasion had to correct public misstatements on intelligence by the Bush administration (Jehl 2004). Moreover, David Kay, Bush's choice of inspector to replace Hans Blix in the search for weapons of mass destruction, admitted last February that there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction.[15]

Yet in the face of all the counter evidence Bush's new mantra became and remains "the threat." Why? The answer may be that repetition works. Repetition convinces people. Bush's repetition is mantra-like because it emulates the ancient sacred verbal formula of repeating in prayer. As true today as it was in times past, "to repeat is to signify" (Barthes 1972 as cited in Du Bois 1986). Repetition and ritual in religion evoke an unknown authority; a political speech is a ritual (Bloch 1975) and can use repetition to evoke an uknown authority as well. A member of the religious congregation then and of the political constituency now is what Du Bois (1986: 332) calls the "manticist":

(27)   **The manticist listener**, through the structure of ritual
         speech and of the ritual event, is put directly in touch
         with **a sourceless message** whose authority he can
         observe in its very form: it is self-evident   (Du Bois 1986: 333).

In (27), the expressive function of articles is once again made clear. Du Bois chooses to introduce this type of hearer with a definite article (i.e., *the manticist listner*) in order to convey that it is this specific worldview, as opposed to others, that enables one to accept something said as unquestionable truth. The indefinite article in *a sourceless message* de-focuses the referential identity of a particular message, allowing generalization into an extraordinary kind of message. That is, it is an absolute and is defined by an unknown source. Though a critical thinking audience with an education in the tradition of the Age of Reason would presumably question the reliability of evidence, this is not

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[15] In fact, when Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, defected to Jordan in 1995, he was the head of Iraq's weapons programs. The evidence he had taken with him was that all of Iraq's weapons had been destroyed during the summer of 1991. Clinton and the second Bush both lied about WMD. Regime change has been the real policy all along (Akerman 2004). The only difference has been in how that policy is implemented.

always the case.[16] A footnoted anecdote from Laura Nader (1997) illustrates the sometimes unassailable authority of a political entity in America:

> (28)   After an invited lecture at Ohio State Law School **a law professor** challenged my position by asserting that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor had stood in the same place three months earlier saying that people like alternative dispute resolution. I asked him what her evidence was. His answer: "She doesn't need **evidence**, she's **a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court**."   (Nader 1997: 714)

The indefinite noun phrases in (28) are just as epistemologically powerful. Nader's attitude is given away by her choice of the indefinite *a law professor*. She demonstrates her astonishment by de-focusing the referential identity of the law professor because she wishes to stress how inconceivable it is that anyone trained in democratic law would make such a comment, especially an attorney who trains other future attorneys, law professors and magistrates. Moreover, the law professor's indefinite *evidence* shows his attitude about the U.S. Supreme Court Judges - they not only do not need the evidence, they also amazingly need no evidence of any kind. Finally, his selection of the indefinite *a Justice of the Supreme Court* categorizes O'Connor into a special type, one of those who are beyond reproach because they have absolute knowledge of truth, almost as if they judge by divine right in the fashion of the divine right of kings to rule. The veracity of her words is self-evident.

Not only is it the repetition that Bush employs in his speeches that is effective, it is also his lack of evidentiality, the particular linguistic structures employed to display attitudes regarding knowledge (Chafe 1986: 271). In all but excerpts (6, 9, and 11)[17] Bush speaks statements that are declarative. That is, his utterances are offered as unqualified statements of fact. To be fair, speakers of English most often consider knowledge factual and thereby do not offer epistemic qualification.   However, when the evidence is in doubt as we now know it was, some epistemic modals should have been employed. In (17), which is declarative, Bush does use *in my view*, a phrase that qualifies his knowledge but in a manner which indicates that it is a belief, downgrading the need for proof because faith is concerned with matters other than simply evidence. In a similar vein, his use of the definite article hints at his mien - he is convinced, as you and I should be. The definite article can perhaps also mark epistemological certitude. Chafe (1986: 262) and Mushin (2001: 18) both consider evidentiality a reflection of the speaker's attitude toward knowledge. Though the definite article is not a modal, it can be emphatic and judgmental, especially with the referent unshared and the purpose pursuasive. Put differently, the presupposed referent communicates an inferential

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[16] Perhaps it is hardly ever the case. We are so programmed to certain social requirements and constraints that we are not necessarily able to see the "control." "Most of the time indeed," writes Bloch (1975: 3-4) "this appears to the actors as the only natural way to behave."

[17] *Can* in (6) shows a weak degree of deduction in which the conclusion, and hence the evidence, is deduced from the hypothesis in the *If* clause. In (9), *may* shows a low degree of reliability, but that works to the president's advantage for he wants his audience to realize that there is great reliability in the knowledge of how to prevent Saddam's future use of a WMD. The *could* of (11) also marks deduction. The implied *If* clause is the present participial phrase "facing clear evidence of peril" and we know that even a remote chance is too risky to take.

epistemological stance.[18] Inasmuch as presupposition is the purview of all political parties, the question of why it was resoundingly successful for the Bush administration this time round persists.

Few if any times in America's past could be considered as uncertain as those following the eleventh of September 2001. The oceans on our coasts were no longer barriers to invasion. America was no longer impregnable. The seed of doubt had been planted. All was not right with the world. God was not in His heaven. The gray shades of the Democrats left a foul stench in our nostrils and our minds. We might not be totally good. The rhetoric of the right, on the other hand, filled us with pride, justification and a manifest-destiny-like certainty.[19] One might wonder whether the addressees and the electorate actually had a free choice in the aftermath of 9/11 or whether they were merely controlled by the powerful and manipulated into believing that they were exercising free will. And perhaps, as Lakoff (2001) suggests, President George W. Bush truly believes in "the potency of the performative speech act" (p. 316). If you say that there are weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorism enough, they will come,[20] as they apparently did in the minds of millions of Americans.

10. Conclusion

The presupposed referents employed by the White House and conservatives in general, concerning the urgency of invading Iraq, were not only unshared they were unfounded. We now know that the threat was neither grave nor gathering. The weapons of mass destruction were actually weapons of mass delusion. Political language has a powerful tool in the form of definiteness, as excerpts from the president's speech and sundry quotations from members of Congress and the media indicate. Articles are multifunctional and expressive. The selection of the indefinite when the definite would be more typical engenders a feeling of generalization or categorization. The choice of a definite article where an indefinite would normally be expected can create a sense of prominence, and perhaps even certitude. In the fashion of a poet or a novelist, the politician can manipulate definiteness in an effort to control the addressee.

Bush must have known that the threat from the Iraqi regime was not imminent, but he must also have known, as Teddy Roosevelt and every president since knew, that Congress would dodder and delay in indecision until it would no longer be credible that Iraq was a threat. It seems that weapons of mass destruction were not the problem, Saddam was. The task of the White House was deciding how to effect regime change. As a perceptive political entity, the Bush administration tied its goal to the need of the American public to feel safe from terrorism. Immediately prior to mid-term elections, a circuit of speeches employing unshared referents as social commonalities,

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[18] Consider again the definite noun phrases from both sides of the political spectrum in this paper. The speakers are not only marking prominence, they are also making epistemological assessments. They are showing the certitude that they have about their knowledge.

[19] "Manifest destiny" is the belief that Americans are somehow "chosen" and therefore have a "devine right" to expand their territory. The term was first used to justify the imperialism of nineteenth century America.

[20] Word in the Muslim world is that WMD have come. According to the Mehr News Agency, the U.S. and British forces have imported WMD through southern Iraqi ports under cover of dark and transported them to an unknown location near Basra (*Tehran Times*, 2004).

advertisement-like appeals to fear, and accusations of treacherous behavior adeptly deluded the public into acquiescence and intimidated the opposition into silence.

Though identifiability frequently contrasts definiteness from indefiniteness, definite phrases can be employed in order to construct the illusion of identifiability. It is indubitably clear that political debate and rhetoric on both sides of the political continuum promote the employment of presupposed referents as though we all assume them and the use of unshared referents as if we all share them.   The details of this analysis indicate that the White House built a nearly invincible argument for the invasion of Iraq. The circumstance of uncertain times and the employment of definite noun phrases as first mentions of previously unshared referents achieved the hidden didactic goal of pre-empting counter arguments by establishing the illusion of shared social reality. The political left failed to overcome the presuppositions and the fear-peddling and failed to explain that addressees neither shared nor identified the assumed referents. Whereas the White House and the conservatives gained in power, the liberals lost control of the House of Representatives and became an even smaller minority in the Senate. Moreover, the press and irreverent members of the legislature began to reek of muck. Though Iraq has been an occupied country for over a year now, signs of weapons of mass destruction have still not turned up. Presently, a new presidential election season is upon the American electorate. It should prove intriguing to observe whether the Oval Office can maintain the rhetorical illusion of solidity or whether voters will awaken to the controlling manipulativeness of the right and show their disillusionment at the ballot box.

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