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Paper

"Abortion: analysis of a controversial issue in the US political debate"
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1. INTRODUCTION.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the elements featuring the language used by the US Presidents and political actors in their speeches, platforms and debates about abortion issue.

We've chosen this topic because we observed that the abortion is a sort of taboo in the US political debate. It isn't considered politically sensible to talk explicitly about this topic, because US politicians are afraid of losing women's vote. The American represents talk "in code": the anti-abortion politician define themselves "Pro-Life", while who are favourable to abortion are "Pro-Choice" (e.g. Clinton declared: "I'm not pro-abortion, I'm pro-choice"). In this context, who talks too explicitly is censored, as it has happened to the Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown. "C'è una parola che ai repubblicani di Mitt Romney fa più paura della disoccupazione e della crisi", we read in an article published on Repubblica.it, on the 16th June 2012¹. The Sen. Brown was pulled out from the US House of Representatives because she uttered a word which is considered offensive by the republican represents: "vagina". Brown uttered this word to answer to the umpteenth attack of the conservatives to the women's rights. In fact republican represents promoted a law to make the abortion more difficult, by forcing doctors to do a series of intimidating controls on women who are forced by many reasons to take the abortion as a serious option. "I'm flattered that you're all so interested in my vagina - Lisa Brown said, addressing the Speaker of the House, to explain her opposite vote to the bill - but 'no' means 'no'". The representative was immediately chased away from the House. Thus it was forbidden her to take part in the debate. "What she said is so offensive that I couldn't repeat it in front of some women" thundered Mike Calton, a republican representative from Nashville. The debate on abortion issue is a debate on abortion language too. To quote Threadgold (1986: 44), "Acts of communication are forms of a social discourse which maintains and regulates social activities, and defines status and power relations".

The issue of abortion becomes therefore a controversial protagonist of the American debate, as explained by Elizabeth Nash, researcher of the Guttmacher Institute, an American non-profit

¹ "Dice "vagina", deputata americana cacciata dalla Camera", in *La Repubblica.it*, 06/16/2012, <http://video.repubblica.it/mondo/dice-vagina-deputata-americana-cacciata-dalla-camera/98616?video=&ref=HRESS-1>, accessed on 07/24/2012

organization which works to advance reproductive health including abortion rights². It strongly emerges during the latter anniversaries of the Roe v. Wade decision by the Supreme Court, which establishes the right to abortion since 1973³: there are people who use to meet in some churches to pray for banning abortion (or who organize the March for Life), while other people ask to guarantee and widen women's rights. These positions are kept by the political actors of Washington. Obama declared that the Roe v. Wade decision "protects women's health and reproductive life", while the republican speaker of the House of Representative, John Boehner, said that this decision "destroys the right to life which was described by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence". These positions seem irreconcilable and they are replicated in hundreds of other declarations (republican and conservative politicians by one side, democratic and liberal ones by the other).

Abortion is one of the main issues concerning women's rights. It may be also a significant topic in the electoral campaign of 2012. Obama may in fact gain the White House thanks to the so-called 'gender gap'⁴. A gender issue might return Barack Obama back to the White House. According to a survey by ABC News and The Washington Post, a large majority of American women plan to vote for the Democratic president next November. Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate, has made gains among men but not enough to cover his loss among women. With the presidential elections less than seven months away, Obama is ahead of Romney 51 percent to 44 percent. Seven percentage points represent a good result for Obama, now that the campaign is getting to its heart. The ABC News/Washington Post survey examines different aspects of the electoral race: the economy (the only field where Obama is weak: 76 percent of Americans consider the country still in recession), the candidates' ability to defend the interests of the middle class (Obama is leading by 10 percent), popularity (again, Obama has the edge over Romney because he is considered more likeable, reliable and authoritative by 64 percent of Americans). But women's vote represents the most comforting data for Democrats: 57 percent of American women would vote for Barack Obama (compared to 38 percent who would vote for Romney). The veritable good news for Obama especially concerns white women's vote. As of Mar. 10, Romney was favored by 55 percent of white women. A month later the Republican candidate has lost 7 percent of that group. Obama has the substantive equality in the white female vote and the absolute predominance in the minority (Obama hits almost 80 percent among African-American and Latino women). This explains why the White House could be Democratic for other four years. The survey's outcome does not arrive totally unexpected. American women have traditionally voted for the Democratic candidate. In 2008, Obama had 13 percentage points over McCain among women voters. This year, however, it is quite different. Republicans are imprisoned in an increasingly ideological right wing view and they are working hard to attract the conservative and evangelical vote. As a result, Republicans started a veritable "war against women", as it has been called. The traditional opposition to abortion has been accompanied by a demonization of all forms of contraception (despite 99 percent of American women reporting they have used some form of birth control at least once in their life). In the heart

²Festa R., "In America soffia il vento antiabortista" in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, 04/23/2011, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/01/24/in-america-gli-antiabortistisono-sempre-piu-forti/88027/>, accessed on 07/24/2012

³ Roe v. Wade (January 22, 1973) is the historic Supreme Court decision overturning a Texas interpretation of abortion law and making abortion legal in the United States. The Roe v. Wade decision held that a woman, with her doctor, could choose abortion in earlier months of pregnancy without legal restriction, and with restrictions in later months, based on the right to privacy.

⁴ Festa R., "I repubblicani "spaventano" le donne. E Obama vola nei sondaggi" in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, 04/10/2012, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/04/10/repubblicani-spaventano-donne-obama-vola-sondaggi/203495/> accessed on 07/24/2012

of the election campaign, Virginia's Republican governor, Bob McDonnell – with the support of all candidates - has promoted a law requiring a particularly invasive vaginal ultrasound for all women trying to have an abortion, even those victims of rape. Furthermore, Romney, Santorum, Gingrich and all the Republican leaders have been fighting for months to cut public funding to Planned Parenthood, the national organization working for women's health. Planned Parenthood has been accused of using taxpayers' money to pay for abortions (only 3 percent of Planned Parenthood's funds, none of which are public funds, go toward abortion services).⁵ The republican war is strongly conducted above all in the domestic policy: for example, in South Dakota, Republicans want to legalize the killing of abortion doctors. The war is obviously conducted on the linguistic field, too. In Georgia, a Republican wants to change the legal term for women who have been subjected to rape or domestic violence from "victim" to "accuser". In a recent closed-door meeting of Republican Senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska invited colleagues to tone down their rhetoric in order to avoid being painted as anti-women, since "that might have disastrous consequences in the November vote".

To quote Bayley⁶: "Politics is conducted in and through talk and texts and such talk and texts enact political action" and once more Threadgold (1986:44): "Language, as action, ensures that certain ways of talking and doing are maintained, guaranteeing the stability of the social system, but at the expense of other models of saying and doing which might threaten any stability". Because of this, we will try to analyse the significance of the lexeme *abort**, as well as the co-related terms.

The importance of this topic emerges more and more often in the public, social and cultural debate, too. In March, abortion was the object of a movie, 'October Baby'⁷. It was denied by the big Americans productions and torn to pieces by the criticals (Jeannette Catsoulis in the New York Times wrote "ugliness at its core"), but it cracked the top 10. Sponsored by Christian organizations, anti-abortion movements and a distribution home that is subsidiary of Sony Music Entertainment, the movie grossed more than 3 million dollars, three times as much invested.

A recent fact that does a lot of clamor is the attack to Sandra Fluke, a law student of the Georgetown University by the conservative reporter Rush Limbaugh⁸. In February she was in the US Congress to support the pro-contraception position held by Obama. During the three following shows, Limbaugh insulted Fluke for 53 times. Obama phoned up Fluke, apologizing in the name of all the Americans. The democratic politicians began to use the recordings of the Limbaugh shows during the electoral campaign, to confirm that the Republican Party "makes politic on women's body".

Finally, to give an outline of the activities of the *pro-life* and *pro-choice* organizations, we consider the numbers given us by Operation Rescue, America's most powerful anti-abortion organization. It certifies the triumph of the pro-life movements: twenty years ago there were 2200 abortive clinics;

⁵ Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), commonly shortened to Planned Parenthood, is the largest non-profit organization providing reproductive health and maternal and child health services. It is a related organization which lobbies for pro-choice legislation, comprehensive sex education, and access to affordable health care in the United States.

⁶ Bayley P. 2005, "Analysing Language and Politics", *MediAzioni*, 1

⁷ <http://octoberbabymovie.net/>, accessed on 25/07/2012

⁸ Festa R., "Usa, studentessa chiede soldi per pillola. E in radio diventa una "prostituta" in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, 03/09/2012 <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/03/09/studentessa-chiede-soldi-contraccezione-radio-diventa-prostituta/196333/>, accessed on 07/24/2012

today they are just about 670⁹. Since 1977, 6100 violent crimes are denounced by these abortive services (the latter dramatic fact was the homicide of the doctor George Tiller in Kansas, in 2009, by an antiabortion militant)¹⁰.

2. ANALYSIS, METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS.

The analysis methodology has been defined on the basis of the research's aim. Recalling the three major research methods for the analysis of political texts, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistic and Corpus Linguistics, this research will use the latter methodology, Corpus Linguistics (CL). This method allows to gather quantitative and qualitative elements of language thanks to on-purpose designed software.

In this case, the analysis was conducted with the aid of the software WordSmith Tools version 4.0, using default settings. This program is a complete and flexible package for processing data such as concordances, wordlists and complex queries; it also provides an integrated set of 32-bit programs working with Windows 98/2000/XP operating systems. The program allows to make several operations on the corpus, such as generating frequency wordlists, studying lexical concordances (collocations) and finding keywords. WordSmith is made up of three main programs: 1) Concord allows to create concordance lists (lists of words used in a worksheet) related to a specific word or phrase, allowing to study its function in a specific context and providing information related to the combined words under analysis; 2) Keywords allows to find a number of keywords for the texts in the corpus; 3) Wordlist allows to create lists of words (or groups of words) which are located in the texts previously selected for the analysis, ordering them alphabetically or by frequency of use. Finally, WordSmith also provides the statistic data related to the analysed corpus.

Thanks to this type of analysis it was possible to use the wordlists in order to underline the selected word's importance, and in order to see how, and how frequently, this word is used in every speech; moreover it is possible to consider the lexical distribution of the analysed word - the regularities and irregularities in collocation patterns - and thus to observe patterns of meanings. This gives information of a lexicogrammatical nature but the software also provides a point of entry to the intertextual dimension. In fact, it is not the frequency of a particular word form that is important, but the frequency of certain meanings which can be teased out through the concordance lines often by expanding the co-text.

3. THE CORPUS.

As we just explained, we will analyse a corpus which is composed of the transcripts of all the State of the Union addresses¹¹, inaugural and acceptance speeches, televised debates, and Democratic and Republican Platforms, held from the 1790 to 2012. Those texts are in the digital archive of the Labic, Forlì University.

We will work with a corpus composed of 499 texts. In those texts, there are 31.122 word types (distinct words). The total running words (or tokens) amounts to 3.568.502.

⁹ Festa R., "Usa, nella heartland americana dove le donne non possono abortire" in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/11/17/nella-heartland-americana-dove-donne-possono-abortire/171418/>, accessed on 07/24/2012

¹⁰ Festa R., "In America gli antiabortisti sono sempre più forti", in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, 01/24/2012, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2011/01/24/in-america-gli-antiabortistisono-sempre-piu-forti/88027/>, accessed on 07/24/2012

¹¹ State of the Union is the annual address presented by the President of the United States to the United State Congress; the address reports the condition of the nation, allows the president to outline his legislative agenda (outlining the president's legislative proposals for the upcoming year) and national priorities to Congress.

We will break down this corpus in three different segments: the first sub-corpus is composed of political texts which are written or spoken between 1790 and 1973; the second one is composed of texts which are written or spoken from 1974 to 1999; the third and last corpus is composed of texts which ranged from 2000 to 2012.

In detail, in the first sub-corpus we find 238 texts. There are 1.778.139 tokens and 22.308 types. The second one is composed of 85 texts and adds up to 708.916 running words, with 15.534 distinct typed words. The third sub-corpus is composed of 176 texts: it amounts to 1.081.447 tokens and 18.397 distinct words.

We chose to break down this corpus in three different sub-corpora, because we verified a subjective intuition had from a close reading of some of these texts: the intuition was the surprising difference of the frequency of the lexeme *abort** in these three sub-corpora. Well, frequency of this lexeme will be our initial entry point of this analysis.

4. ABORTION: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS.

Given those preliminary remarks, we can now focus on the analysis of our corpus. In order to shed more light on our argument, we decide to make a quantitative comparison among the three sub-corpora.

The first step of our analysis consists in drawing up the tokens lists of the corpora, by the Wordlist software. The absolute and relative frequencies¹² of the different word forms of the lexeme *abort** (*abortion*, *abortions*, *abortive*, *aborted*) in the three sub-corpora are surprisingly different, as illustrated in figures 1 and 2:

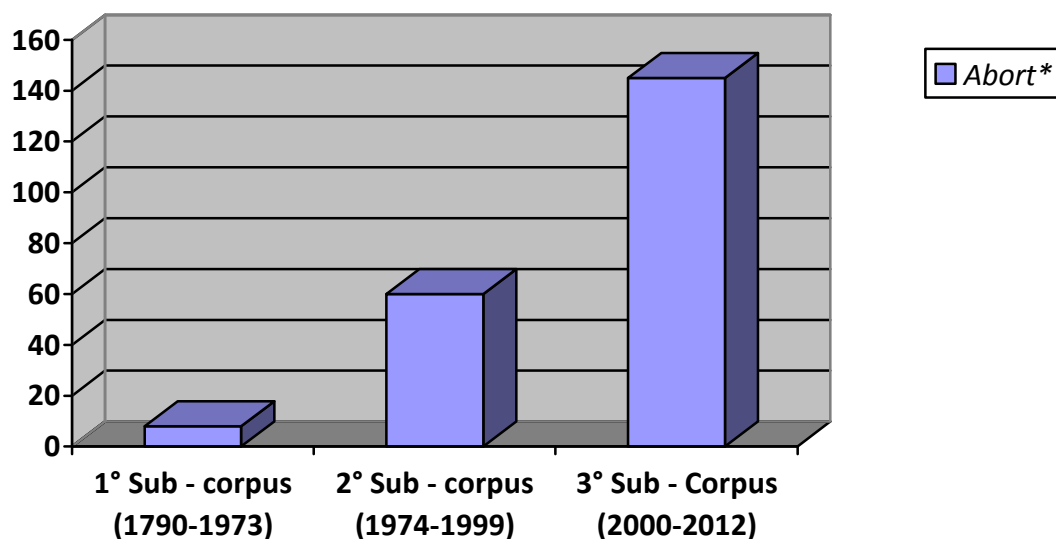


Fig. 1. Absolute frequency distributions of word forms of *abort** in the three sub-corpora.

In the first sub-corpus we only found the word form *abortive*: there are 8 occurrences. In the second one, we counted 56 occurrences of *abortion*, 5 of the plural form, 1 of the adjective *abortive*. In the

¹² There is a great difference between the absolute frequency and the relative frequency. In fact, it is not important to see how many times we find a word in a speech, but it is more important to see how many times a word is pronounced in a speech compared to the tokens word of the speech itself. The relative frequency is estimates with the formula: number of the instances of the word which is under analysis (occurrences) divide with the number of tokens words of the corpus analysed, multiply the result per hundred.

third sub-corpus there are 113 occurrences of *abortion* (it occupies the 1.135th place in the Wordlist ranking, which shows 18.397 lines), 30 of the plural form and 2 of the verb form *aborted*.

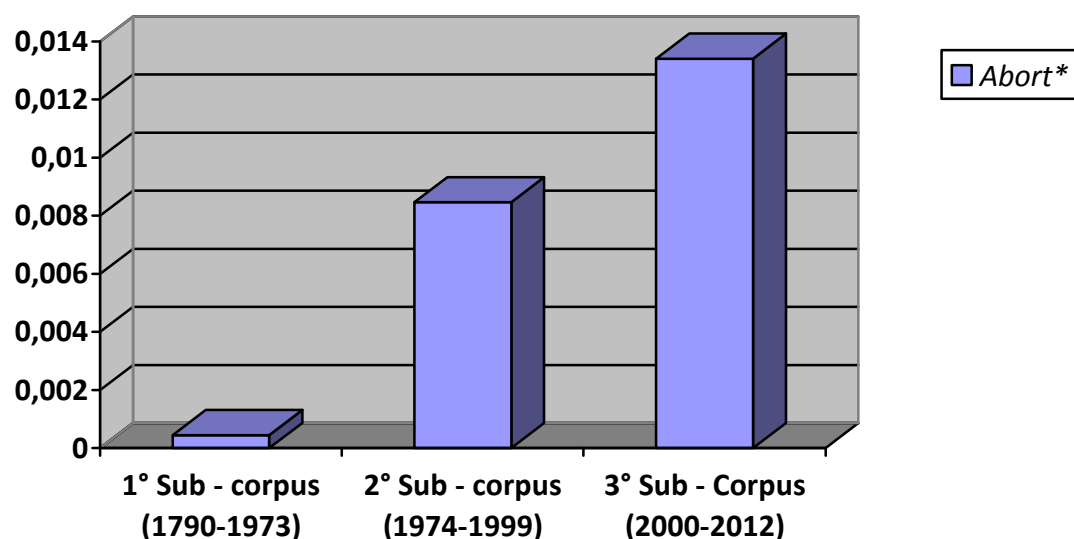


Fig. 2. Relative frequency distributions of word forms of abort* in three sub-corpora.

It is evident that the relative frequency increases surprisingly in the third sub-corpus than in the first and in the second one. In the first sub-corpus it amounts to 0,0004499%; in the second one it is 0,0084636%; in the third sub-corpus it estimates 0,013408%.

It should be noted however, that the adjective form has a meaning that is not associated with the concept of pregnancy interruption, as the Concord program illustrates:

N	Concordance
1	producing such fiscal extravaganzas as the <i>abortive</i> war on poverty, combined with war
2	boundary question with Mexico was unfortunately <i>abortive</i> , but with the earnest efforts on the part of
3	this Government to settle. There had been two <i>abortive</i> attempts to do so through arbitral
4	charges were pending growing out of a former <i>abortive</i> disturbance. The doctrine of asylum as
5	be prepared with confidence that they will not prove <i>abortive</i> , and when the possible result of delay in
6	people. Thus far all the efforts of Spain have proved <i>abortive</i> , and time has marked no improvement in the
7	that purpose, in January last, will probably render <i>abortive</i> a treaty of commerce with that Republic,
8	people of the United States must look back upon the <i>abortive</i> efforts made by the Executive, for a period

Thus we observed that the concept of abortion doesn't take place in the US political texts before the 1973, year of the Roe v. Wade decision with whom the Supreme Court established the women's right to abortion. If we consider the meanings of the adjective *abortive* and the verb *aborted*, in the 2nd and 3rd sub-corpus, we discover that they don't belong to the semantic area on which we focus: this fact emerges by the 'source text' function given us by the Concord program. In order to understand better the different meanings of these word forms, we read the whole clause where recur these words, as illustrated in those two extracts:

1. "We cannot afford, as in the *abortive* Iranian rescue mission, to allow months to pass while we prepare responses."¹³

¹³ Republican Platform, 1980.

2. "Dunn, don't we run a risk, though, if George W. Bush does win with this sort of *aborted* count [...]".¹⁴

N	Concordance
1	related services for contraception and <i>abortion</i> . We encourage a reform
2	Clinton executive orders concerning <i>abortion</i> and to sign into law an end to
3	salute those who provide alternatives to <i>abortion</i> and offer adoption services.
4	action against women who have an <i>abortion</i> . We salute those who provide
5	we have only compassion. We oppose <i>abortion</i> , but our pro-life agenda does
6	We oppose using public revenues for <i>abortion</i> and will not fund organizations
7	will not fund organizations involved in <i>abortion</i> . The cost of turning our back
8	funds from organizations involved in <i>abortion</i> . Most important, we encourage
9	those who provide alternatives to <i>abortion</i> by meeting the needs of
10	We oppose using public revenues for <i>abortion</i> and will not fund organizations
11	schools that provide birth control or <i>abortion</i> services or referrals. Instead,
12	international organizations involved in <i>abortion</i> . Stopping International
13	schools which provide birth control or <i>abortion</i> services or referrals. Our "first
14	are providing positive alternatives to <i>abortion</i> by meeting the physical,
15	which advocate or support <i>abortion</i> . We commend the efforts of
16	oppose the use of public revenues for <i>abortion</i> and will eliminate funding for
17	funding for organizations involved in <i>abortion</i> . To dig their way out of debt,
18	way support abortion or research on <i>abortion</i> methods. To strengthen bilateral
19	which in any way support <i>abortion</i> or research on abortion
20	to the family and our opposition to <i>abortion</i> , we will eliminate all U.S.
21	are providing positive alternatives to <i>abortion</i> by meeting the physical,
22	which advocate or support <i>abortion</i> . We commend the efforts of
23	oppose the use of public revenues for <i>abortion</i> and will eliminate funding for
24	restrict the use of taxpayers' dollars for <i>abortion</i> . We protest the Supreme
25	can be no doubt that the question of <i>abortion</i> , despite the complex nature of
26	Vice President in national elections. <i>Abortion</i> There can be no doubt that the
27	a continuance of the public dialogue on <i>abortion</i> and supports the efforts of

The meaning of *abortion** as pregnancy interruption emerges in the 2nd and 3rd sub-corpus. An example is given us by the Concord program, applied to the second sub-corpus:

We won't therefore consider anymore the word forms *abortive* and *aborted*.

We don't forget to consider the antonymic wordings of *abortion**: *pro-life* and *pro-choice*.

In the first sub-corpus these wordings don't appear.

Analysing the second sub-corpus, we observe that the wording *pro-life* recurs just in a text:

"We oppose abortion, but our *pro-life* agenda does not include punitive action against women who have an abortion".¹⁵

Then, if we analyse the occurrences of the wording *pro-choice*, we observe that it recurs for the first time in the Acceptance Speech that Clinton held on the 16th of July 1992, in New York City:

¹⁴ CNN debate, 9/12/2000.

¹⁵ Republican Platform, 1996.

“Listen, hear me now; I am not pro-abortion. I am *pro-choice* strongly”.

In the third sub-corpus both wordings recur in different texts. There are 6 occurrences of *pro-life* and 5 occurrences of *pro-choice*, as illustrated below:

N	Concordance
1	America. Those of us who are proudly <i>pro-life</i> understand that. And it's got to
2	or any other federal court will also be <i>pro- life</i> ? BUSH: Voters should assume
3	just stated your position. BUSH: I am <i>pro-life</i> . LEHRER: Should a voter
4	should a voter assume -- you're <i>pro-life</i> . You just stated your position.
5	We oppose abortion, but our <i>pro-life</i> agenda does not include punitive
6	should a voter assume -- you're <i>pro-life</i> . You just stated your position.
N	Concordance
1	which is why not only myself but <i>pro-choice</i> Republicans and Democrats
2	they stand in the way. Only the firm <i>pro-choice</i> commitment of this
3	And I am proud to be a pro-defense, <i>pro-choice</i> Democrat! This year's
4	she is as unique as a pro-defense, <i>pro-choice</i> Democrat! Speech as
5	the gun issue and probably even the <i>pro-choice</i> issue. If you look at northern

Thanks to this brief and necessary qualitative analysis of the word forms of *abort** (it emerged that *abortive* and *aborted* don't belong to the semantic area which interests us) and of the antonymic wordings (*pro-choice* and *pro-life*), we draw up now a graphic outline concerning the absolute and relative frequencies of these words in the three sub-corpora:

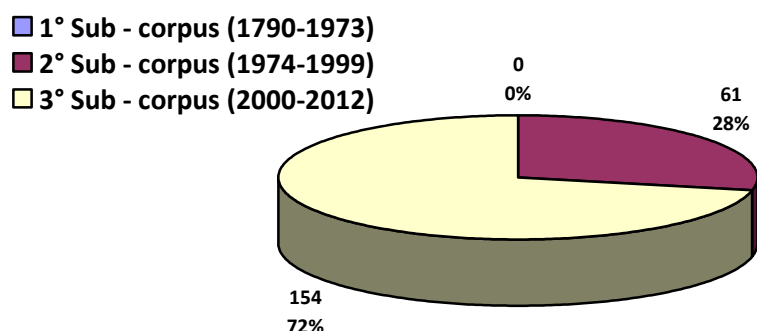


Fig. 3. Absolute frequency distributions of *abort** (*abortion* and *abortions*), *pro-life* and *pro-choice* in the three sub-corpora.

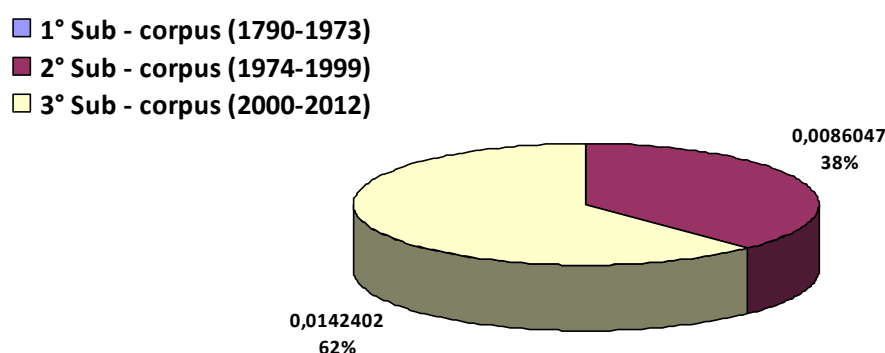


Fig. 4. Relative frequency distributions of *abort** (*abortion* and *abortions*), *pro-life* and *pro-choice* in the three sub-corpora.

It is evident that is rather recent and it is above all increasing the use of the words associated to the matter of abortion in the US political texts.

Therefore we will focus our analysis just on the 2nd sub-corpus (1974-1999) and the 3rd one (2000-2012).

It may be useful to observe the dispersion of *abortion** within the different texts of both sub-corpora. This analysis is possible thanks to the Plot tool¹⁶ of the Concord program. Here an important difference emerges between the two sub-corpora.

N	File	Words	Hits	1,000	Dispersion	Plot
1	republican platform_1996.txt	27.817	11	0,40	0,492	
2	republican platform_1988.txt	36.209	6	0,17	0,478	
3	republican platform_1984.txt	27.379	6	0,22	0,300	
4	republican platform_1976.txt	20.416	5	0,24	0,282	
5	republican platform_1992.txt	28.451	4	0,14	0,429	
6	republican platform_1980.txt	34.500	3	0,09	-0,069	
7	198 reagan 1985.txt	4.212	3	0,71	0,250	
8	reagan sou 1985.txt	4.203	3	0,71	0,250	
9	clinton acceptance 96.txt	7.204	3	0,42	-0,069	
10	democratic national platform_1980.txt	38.059	2	0,05	-0,069	
11	reagan sou 1988.txt	5.005	2	0,40	0,300	
12	democratic national platform_1992.txt	8.315	2	0,24	0,300	
13	201 reagan 1988.txt	4.819	2	0,42	0,300	
14	democratic national platform_1996.txt	18.111	2	0,11	-0,069	
15	clinton acceptance 92.txt	4.392	1	0,23	-0,069	
16	bush snr acceptance.txt	4.149	1	0,24	-0,069	
17	democratic national platform_1976.txt	21.138	1	0,05	-0,069	
18	reagan sou 1984.txt	4.912	1	0,20	-0,069	
19	197 reagan 1984.txt	4.935	1	0,20	-0,069	

Fig. 5. Dispersion of *abortion** given by the plot tool applied to the second sub-corpus (1974-1999)

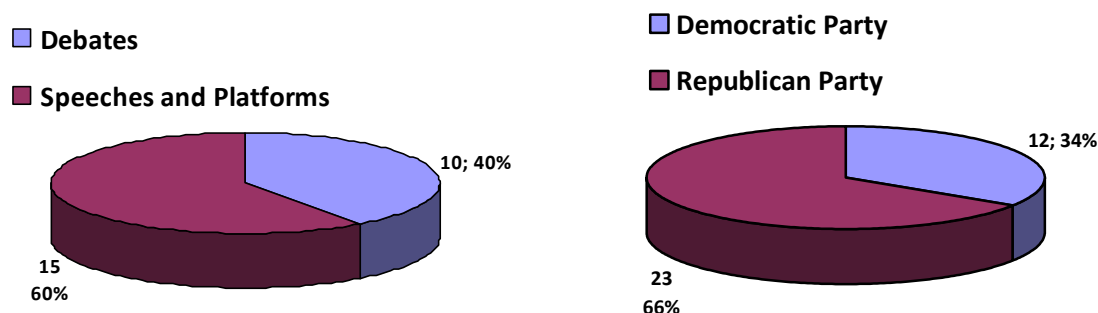
N	File	Words	Hits	1,000	Dispersion	Plot
1	debate2000a.txt	30.898	15	0,49	0,306	
2	obama-mcain3.txt	15.448	14	0,91	0,015	
3	republican platform_2008.txt	23.346	12	0,51	0,478	
4	republican platform_2004.txt	41.586	12	0,29	0,029	
5	bush kerry 2.txt	16.264	11	0,68	0,210	
6	gore-bush1.txt	17.156	10	0,58	-0,069	
7	republican platform_2000.txt	43.138	9	0,21	0,188	
8	bush kerry 3.txt	15.249	7	0,46	-0,069	
9	don stenberg.txt	382	3	7,85	0,478	
10	democratic national platform_2000.txt	24.236	3	0,12	0,250	
11	democratic national platform_2008.txt	26.451	2	0,08	-0,069	
12	nita lowey.txt	425	2	4,71	0,300	
13	cnn3oct200.txt	26.168	2	0,08	0,300	
14	cnn10oct2000.txt	7.918	2	0,25	0,300	
15	cnn4oct2000.txt	8.184	2	0,24	-0,069	
16	democratic national platform_2004.txt	18.850	1	0,05	-0,069	
17	barack obama.txt	4.703	1	0,21	-0,069	
18	219 bush 2006.txt	5.282	1	0,19	-0,069	
19	obama acceptance 2008.txt	4.693	1	0,21	-0,069	

Fig. 6. Dispersion of *abortion** given by the plot tool applied to the third sub-corpus (2000-2012).

This comparison allows us to obtain two important information: firstly, the distribution of the word *abortion** is uneven (although we observed - thanks to the relative frequency - that it recurs more times in the 3rd sub-corpus than in the 2nd one). The occurrences of the word are just in 26 texts of the 3rd sub-corpus (it is composed of 176 texts); while in the 2nd sub-corpus there are 19 texts in which *abortion** recurs (it is composed of 85 texts). About these 19 texts, 6 have a high number of

¹⁶ The plot tool shows also the plot dispersion. In other terms, it shows the search word occurs in the file which the current entry belongs to. That way you can see where mention is made of your search word in each file.

hits¹⁷ (over 10 hits a text). Differently the texts of the 3rd sub-corpus: we find only a text in which there is a so high number of hits (11 hits). The second information is about the context in which the term *abortion** is used: it never appears in the debates of the 2nd sub-corpus, while it is used in the 40% of the debates within the 3rd sub-corpus. If we focus on the speeches and the platforms of both sub-corpora, we moreover observe that the republican politicians use the term *abortion** more than the democratic ones: the issue of the abortion is dominated by the Republican Party (it emerges through a purely quantitative analysis).



However we know that it is not enough, and not even important, to see just how many times one word is pronounced in a speech, but it is most important to see how many times the word is pronounced compared to the tokens words of the speech.

Considering the texts of the 2nd and 3rd subcorpus in which the term *abortion** recurs, we observe that the relative frequency's datum confirms that the use of this word is mainly diffused in the speeches (the relative frequency amounts to 0,0389%) than in the debates (0,0279%), and *abortion** is uttered mainly in the republican texts (0,0251%) than in the democratic ones (0,0117%).

Another useful tool of Wordsmith in order to point out the increasing diffusion of the term *abortion**, is given by Keyword program¹⁸. Comparising the wordlist of the 3rd sub-corpus with the wordlist of the 1st and the 2nd subcorpus, we obtain a keywords list of 2616 words. Of which, 1541 words are positive key, because they occur more often than it would be expected by chance in comparison with the reference corpus. *Abortion* is a positive key, occupying the 528th place in the Keyword ranking (sorting by the Keyness Index).

¹⁷ 'Hits' means the number of occurrences of the search-word.

¹⁸ This program allows to identify the 'key' words in one or more texts. The key words are calculated by comparing the frequency of each word in the wordlist of the text you're interested in with the frequency of the same word in the reference wordlist. A word will get into the listing here if it is unusually frequent (or unusually infrequent) in comparison with what one would expect on the basis of the larger wordlist.

N	Key word	Freq.	%	Freq.	RC. %	Keyness	P	mi
515	OVER	1.386	0,13	2.250	0,09	100,88	0000	
516	PALESTINIAN	75		18		100,69	0000	
517	UNDECIDED	55		5		100,51	0000	
518	KOSOVO	53		4		100,47	0000	
519	FRIEND	134	0,01	76		99,94	0000	
520	ARGUMENTS	106		46		99,94	0000	
521	BREAKS	69		14		99,54	0000	
522	AFGHAN	66		12		99,28	0000	
523	OSAMA	48		2		99,26	0000	
524	SORRY	78		21		99,09	0000	
525	LEADERS	324	0,03	340	0,01	99,03	0000	
526	AGENDA	176	0,02	128		98,85	0000	
527	HAPPENS	85		27		98,74	0000	
528	ABORTION	113	0,01	54		98,60	0000	
529	WHETHER	608	0,06	813	0,03	98,57	0000	
530	AMERICA'S	568	0,05	744	0,03	98,35	0000	
531	MARY	52		4		98,23	0000	
532	SIDE	325	0,03	343	0,01	98,14	0000	
533	BRUCE	41		0		97,90	0000	
534	CANDIOTTI	41		0		97,90	0000	
535	KURTZ	41		0		97,90	0000	
536	VIEWERS	41		0		97,90	0000	
537	MR	424	0,04	503	0,02	97,27	0000	
538	TELLING	77		21		97,18	0000	
539	MATE	57		7		96,97	0000	
540	ADS	47		2		96,96	0000	
541	HEALTHCARE	47		2		96,96	0000	

Fig. 7. What we see by comparison of the third subcorpus's wordlist with the reference corpus's wordlist, which is composed of the texts of the first and the second subcorpus.

Finally we analyse what text ranks first by the relative frequency of *abortion**: it results the 3rd presidential debate Obama vs. McCain (0,0897%), confirming the increasing importance of this issue. The second ranked text is the 2nd debate Bush vs. Kerry (0,0666%), while the 1st debate Bush vs. Gore (0,0576%) takes place in the 3rd position in this frequency's ranking.

5. ABORTION: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORDS.

Since the first texts in which the word *abortion** was used, it appears a strongly controversial concept.

If we analyse the first two texts– by a chronological order – in which the term *abortion** appears, we observe that they are quite recent – both are of 1976 – just three years after the Supreme Court's decision that in 1973 established the right to abortion. They are the Republican Platform and the Democratic one. At once differences on the issue emerge.

In the Republican Platform, the word *abortion** is associated with the expression “values human life”. Moreover we observe that the Republican Party expressed three different positions on the Supreme Court's decision. There are 4 occurrences of this word:

- Paragraph ‘The American Family’:
“Because of our concern for family values, we affirm our beliefs, stated elsewhere in this Platform, in many elements that will make our country a more hospitable environment for family life [...] a position on *abortion* that values human life [...]”.
- Paragraph ‘Women’:
“The question of *abortion* is one of the most difficult and controversial of our time. It is undoubtedly a moral and personal issue but it also involves complex questions relating to medical science and criminal justice. There are those in our Party who favor complete support for the Supreme Court decision which permits abortion on demand. There are others who share sincere convictions that the Supreme Court's decision must be changed by a constitutional amendment prohibiting all *abortions*. Others have yet to take a position, or they have assumed a stance somewhere in between polar positions.

We protest the Supreme Court's intrusion into the family structure through its denial of the parents' obligation and right to guide their minor children. The Republican Party favors a continuance of the public dialogue on *abortion* and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children."

In the Democratic National Platform, the word *abortion* appears in the Paragraph 'Civil and Political Rights' and it assumes the meaning of 'right to defend':

"We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of *abortion*. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S. Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area."

Reading all the texts – speeches and platforms – held since 1976 (2nd and 3rd sub-corpus), we can draw up some significant information about the mood given by republican and democratic representatives. Thus they can conduct us to do some general considerations. By the way, it's useful the collocated tool given us by the Wordlist program. We draw up some words which occur within a search window of 5 words either side at the node.

Excluding from the analysis the so called *empty words* (e.g. *the, of, to, and, a, on...*), we observe that the word *abortion** is often associated with words like *partial(-birth)* for 30 times, *organizations* (19 occurrences), *ban* (17), *will* and *would* (15 and 9 occurrences), *fund* and *funding* (20 occurrences, totally), *pro* (15), *against* (14), *provide* (15), *oppose* (15), *right* and *rights* (7 and 8), *services* (12), *more* (12), *late (-term)* (10), *our* (10), *promote* and *support* (5 and 5), *life* (9), *public (revenues)* (8), *reduce* (8), *alternatives* (7), *women* (7), *adoption* (7), *contraception* (6), *number* (6), *issue* (6), *pill* (6), *agree* (5), *rare* (5), *law* (5), *sign* (5).

We focus now on some of these words. From the meaning clusters¹⁹ (or patterns) taken across both the sub-corpora, it is possible move inside specific texts by identifying, for example, those in which our search words have the highest frequency or those in which they tend to be co-selected. The software can help us with this, either through Wordsmith's plotting function.

→ WILL, WOULD

The frequent co-selection of the auxiliary verbs *will* and *would* with *abortion** conducts us to a consideration. The authors of this texts tend to talk about bills concerning this issue. They repeat a standard clause, as illustrated in the following example:

We oppose using public revenues for abortion and *will* not fund organizations which advocate it.

This clause recurs in fact in the Republican platforms which are held in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008.

We observe that *will* and *would* are used to talk about political intentions and they give a different strength to the declarations, as illustrated in the following clauses:

"[...] when Congress sends me a bill against partial-birth abortion, I *will* sign it into law".²⁰

"[...] on the issue of partial-birth or so-called late-term abortion, I *would* sign a law banning that procedure".²¹

¹⁹ A 'cluster' is a group of words which follow each other in a text. The term phrase is not used here because it has technical senses in linguistics which would imply a grammatical relation between the words in it.

²⁰ Acceptance Speech held by Bush (2000)

²¹ Gore in the first presidential debate with Bush, moderator Leher (October 3, 2000).

Moreover these verbs are used by the republican politicians to forecast dramatic or ideal situations: it is a rhetoric strategy to confirm the goodness of their conservative position on this issue, as we observe in the following extracts from two Bush's declarations (1st debate with Gore, 2000):

"I'm worried that that pill will create more abortion, *will* cause more people to have abortions".

"I believe banning partial-birth abortion *would* be a positive step toward reducing the number of abortions in America".

→ OPPOSE, PROMOTE, SUPPORT

The co-selection the *oppose* with *abortion** is quite frequent. In fact this collocate recurs within a sort of standard expression: "(we) oppose funding organizations involved in abortion" or within the quasi-synonymic clause "(we) oppose using public revenues for abortion". These expressions recur in the 75% of the clauses in which *oppose* is co-selected with *abortion**. We find them exclusively within the Republican Platforms of 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004.

An analogue concept is express by the use of the verbs *promote* e *support*: these verbs are repeated in a negative mood environment. We observe in fact that their subjects are *organizations* or *public revenues*:

"we will eliminate U.S. funding for organizations which in any way *support* abortion or research on abortion methods"²².

Promote or *support* are used by both fronts also to describe political addresses. We quote two extracts:

"Abstinence education in the home will lead to less need for birth control services and fewer abortions. We support educational initiatives to *promote* chastity until marriage as the expected standard of behavior".²³

"Our goal is to make abortion less necessary and more rare, not more difficult and more dangerous. We *support* contraceptive research, family planning, comprehensive family life education, and policies that support healthy childbearing. For four years in a row, we have increased *support* for family planning".²⁴

→ (MORE) RARE

The adjective *rare* appears always associated with *more*.

This wording is used by the republican politicians and by democratic ones too, as illustrated the following clause:

"[...] I think abortions ought to be *more rare* in America".

As said by Bush jr during the first presidential debate with Gore (October 3, 2000). In the other field this wording recurs in the 1996 Democratic National Platform and in the 2000 one, too, as illustrated within the Paragraph 'Choice' (significant title, as we observed already, because this term refers to the democratic self-definition *pro-choice*):

²² Republican Platforms of 1984 and 1988.

²³ Republican Platform, 1996

²⁴ Democratic National Platform, 1996

“Our goal is to make abortion less necessary and *more rare*, not more difficult and more dangerous. We support contraceptive research, family planning, comprehensive family life education, and policies that support healthy childbearing[...].”

The political aim appears therefore shared by both parties.

→ REDUCE

“Reduce the number of abortions”. This expression is used four times by Bush jr during the debates with Gore and Kerry. The same concept appears also in the democratic Nita Lowery’s speech (“reduce the need for abortion”) and in the Democratic National Platforms (e.g. 1996: “reduce unintended pregnancies”; 2008: “reduce the need for abortions”).

The difference between the parties appears therefore the way to achieve this goal.

→ CONTRACEPTION*

If we co-select *abortion** with *contraception**, we observe an interesting result that shows us the distance between the republican position and the democratic one.

By one side, we observe the occurrence of this clause:

“we oppose school-based clinics, which provide referrals, counseling, and related services for *contraception* and abortion”.²⁵

While by the democratic side we read this extract from the Nita Lowery’s speech:

“we try to reduce the need for abortion through better access to *contraception*”.

→ ALTERNATIVES AND ADOPTIONS

In the Republican Platforms of the 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, the word *alternatives* is always co-selected with *adoption**. We read:

“We salute those who provide *alternatives* to abortion and offer *adoption* services”.

By co-selectioning *abortion** with *adoption**, we observe that adoption is one the most repeated political proposal by the Republican Party. Only one time (there are six texts in which appears this co-selection), the democratic politician confirm an analogue concept, within the Democratic National Platform of 2004:

“we strongly support family planning and *adoption* incentives. Abortion should be safe, legal, and rare”.

The other 5 texts are the Republic Platform of 1996, 2000, 2004, in the declaration of Bush jr during the 3rd debate with Kerry (“we can work together to reduce the number of abortions: continue to promote adoption laws”) and in the Bush sr Acceptance Speech (1988). It is interesting to point out how Bush sr talks about abortion and adoption. He starts from a concrete and personal fact and finishes with an abstract and universal expression: “chose life”.

“We must change from abortion to *adoption*. I have an adopted granddaughter. The day of her christening we wept with joy. I thank God her parents chose life”.

²⁵ Republican Platforms held in 1996, 2000, 2004 e 2008.

We point out that is a rhetoric strategy which was also used by McCain, during the 3rd debate with Obama (2008):

"Cindy and I are adoptive parents. We know what a treasure and joy it is to have an adopted child in our lives. We'll do everything we can to improve adoption in this country."

This strategy aims at giving the perception that the speech's author really knows the object of his declarations: then it helps to create empathy with his listeners. The real strength of a leader is in fact his ability in involving his citizens-voters thanks to his simple rhetorical skills (in this case, through concrete examples taken from his self personal life, which are connected to abstract concepts). They never present technical terms but they are suitable for not educated citizens, probably the ones who most take to heart the issue of the abortion. In this way they try to create a close contact with their listeners, avoiding to take the stereotypical idea of the "far-from-people" politician.

→ PILL

It is significant the co-selection with *pill*. It isn't for a quantitative datum (4 occurrences), but for a qualitative one: this word refers to the Pill RU-486, which was topic of an animate debate between both political fronts in at the electoral campaign of 2000. This co-selection just appears in fact during the 1st debate Gore vs. Bush (2000) and it refers to FDA's approval of this kind of abortion. "This is a very important topic, and it's a very sensitive topic because a lot of good people disagree on the issue" declared Bush jr. And Gore confirmed the opponent's position: "Now, this is, indeed, a very important issue".

This 'very important issue' is source of a deep political division. By the way it is useful to point out the distance between the political positions which are expressed by both opponents, during the same debate:

- Bush jr: "I was disappointed in the ruling because I think abortions ought to be more rare in America. And I'm worried that that pill will create more abortion, will cause more people to have abortions".
- Gore: "I do support that decision. They determined it was medically safe for the women who use that drug".

→ PARTIAL-BIRTH OR LATE-TERM ABORTION

The wordings *partial-birth* or *late-term abortion* are synonymic²⁶. They are the collocates of *abortion** which recur more often: we count 30 occurrences of *partial-birth* and 10 ones of *late-term*. They are repeated mainly during the debates (1st Gore vs. Bush jr, 2nd and 3rd Bush jr vs. Kerry, 3rd McCain vs. Obama): 24 occurrences - they are totally 40 - appear within the transcripts of the debate. The other 16 occurrences are used only by republican politicians (Bush jr Acceptance Speech of 2000, his State of the Union Speech of 2003, Republican Platforms of 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, the republican Don Stenberg's Speech of 2000).

Both wordings recur in association with verbs like *ban/banning*, grammatical prepositions like *against*, adjectives like *barbaric* and *brutal* ("practice of"), expressions like '(I ask you to) end the practice'.

²⁶ 'Partial-birth abortions' or 'late-term abortions' are abortions which are performed during a later stage of pregnancy. A late-term abortion often refers to an induced abortion procedure that occurs after the 20th week of gestation. However, the exact point when a pregnancy becomes late-term is not clearly defined.

Thanks to this quick analysis it is evident that both parties share the opposition to *partial-birth abortion*. While the reasons of this opposition don't seem shared. Here we have two extracts from the first presidential debate with Gore vs Bush, 2000:

Gore: "On the issue of partial-birth or so-called late-term abortion, I would sign a law banning that procedure, provided that doctors have the ability to save a women's life or to act if her health is severely at risk".

Bush: "I think a noble goal for this country is that every child, born and unborn, ought to be protected in law and welcomed into life. But I know we got to change a lot of minds before we before we get there in America. [...] Surely this nation can come together to promote the value of life".

The democratic politicians confirm the necessity to ban this abortive procedure, in order to defend women, while the republican one promote the "value of life" (specifically, the "life of every child, born and unborn").

→ LIFE

We analyse the co-selection of *abortion** with *life* by the Concordance program. We observe that it exclusively appears within the republican texts. This co-selection emerges for the first time (by chronological order) in the Republican Platform of 1976:

"Because of our concern for family values, we affirm our beliefs, stated elsewhere in this Platform, in many elements that will make our country a more hospitable environment for *family life*: [...] a position on abortion that values *human life*".

This same wording recurs in the 1996, 2000 and 2004 Republican Platforms:

"We oppose abortion, but our *pro-life* agenda does not include punitive action against women who have an abortion".

In the successive Republican Platform (2008), in the Paragraph 'Maintaining The Sanctity and Dignity of Human Life', we read:

"abortion is a fundamental assault on the sanctity of *innocent human life*".

The abortion is admitted by the Republican Party only one time, by Reagan, in his State of the Union Speech of 1988, when he talks about the "right of taking a life in self-defense":

"Well now, we come to a family issue that we must have the courage to confront. Tonight, I call America -- a good nation, a moral people -- to charitable but realistic consideration of the terrible cost of abortion on demand. To those who say this violates a woman's right to control of her own body -- can they deny that now medical evidence confirms the unborn child is a living human being entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Let us unite as a nation and protect the unborn with legislation that would stop all federal funding for abortion -- and with a human life amendment making, of course, an exception where the unborn child threatens the life of the mother. Our Judeo-Christian tradition recognizes the right of taking a life in self-defense".

→ RIGHT*

Now we analyse the co-selection of *abortion** with *right** (within a search window of 5 words either side at the node). We observe the following sheet:

N	Concordance
1	pill decision, by not being clearer on abortion rights . The Democrats are
2	by bringing up his opposition to abortion rights , if that is possible. They
3	like private school vouchers, and abortion rights could come up tonight.
4	and the right to a safe, legal abortion ; expand medical research; and
5	support a woman's right to choose an abortion and unlimited stem-cell
6	Langley (ph) says Bush's opposition to abortion rights has won her over.
7	of life: If I know where you stand on abortion , gun control, school prayer,
8	the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion rights as the law of the land and
9	have denied the people their right to set abortion policies in the states and are
10	of that right against those who perform abortions . We oppose using public
11	of that right against those who perform abortions . We oppose using public
12	who had a history of being for abortion rights , you would consider
13	Wade was rightly decided. I think that abortion is a very difficult issue and it is
14	like private school vouchers, and abortion rights could come up tonight.
15	right to choose a safe and legal abortion , regardless of ability to pay,
16	of that right against those who perform abortions . We oppose using public

We have 16 occurrences, 9 of these ones are transcripts of debates. If we focus on the platforms, we notice an interesting political difference within the concept of right to abortion. In the Republican Platforms (1999, 2000, 2004, 2008), we read:

“Our purpose is to have legislative and judicial protection of that **right**²⁷ against those who perform abortions”.

In the Democratic National Platform we discover that the concept of *right* isn't related with the children, but it refers to the women (and the men), as this extract of the text of 1980:

“We also recognize the belief of many Americans that a woman has a **right** to choose whether and when to have a child. The Democratic Party supports the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion **rights** as the law of the land and opposes any constitutional amendment to restrict or overturn that decision. Furthermore, we pledge to support the **right** to be free of environmental and worksite hazards to reproductive health of women and men”.

The same meanings recurs in the Democratic National Platforms of the successive years:

- 1992: “All Americans should have universal access to quality, affordable health care—not as a privilege, but as a right. [...] provide for the full range of reproductive choice—education, counseling, access to contraceptives, and the **right** to a safe, legal abortion”;
- 2008: “Choice. The Democratic Party strongly and unequivocally supports Roe v. Wade and a woman's **right** to choose a safe and legal abortion, regardless of ability to pay, and we oppose any and all efforts to weaken or undermine that right”.

This quick analysis of the meanings of the term *right** co-selected with *abortion** allows us to consider that this word assumes two antinomic meanings. They correspond to two political positions which appear apparently irreconcilable on the issue of abortion (with the exception of what Reagan said, in his State of the Union Speech of 1988): the republican front defends the right to life, while the democratic one confirms the right to choose. From this double concepts derives the self-definitions *pro-life* and *pro-choice*, which appear extremely pertinent to point out the republican position and the democratic one on this matter.

²⁷ The right to life. Just before we read in fact: “We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and we endorse legislation to make it clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to unborn children.”

→ PRO-CHOICE AND PRO-LIFE

We find *pro-* collocated with *choice*, *life*, *abortion*.

The wording *pro-choice* assumes the meaning of favourable to the right to abort - in the American political language – thanks to Clinton, in his Acceptance Speech (1992):

"And George Bush -- George Bush won't guarantee a woman's right to choose. will. Listen, hear me now; I am not pro-abortion. I am *pro-choice* strongly. I believe this difficult and painful decision should be left to the women of America. I hope the right to privacy can be protected, and we will never again have to discuss this issue on political platforms. But I am old enough to remember what it was like before Roe v. Wade. And I do not want to return to the time when we made criminals of women and their doctors".

Clinton takes the distance from the definition *pro-abortion*, that is used to define the democratic politicians by the opponents. *Pro-choice* is a self-definition that will be used by Obama, during the 3rd debate with McCain (2008). As we observe in the following extract, Obama ignores the definition given by the opponent ("nobody's *pro-abortion*") and he declares "there is a some common ground":

"I want to make on the issue of abortion. This is an issue that look, it divides us. And in some ways, it may be difficult to reconcile the two views. But there surely is some common ground [...] because nobody's *pro-abortion*. I think it's always a tragic situation".

Later, during the same debate, McCain attacks the opponent who defines on a "extreme pro-abortion position". Moreover he gives the meaning of "to be pro-abortion" to the expression "health for the mother", just uttered before by Obama:

"Just again, the example of the eloquence of Sen. Obama. He's health for the mother. You know, that's been stretched by the pro-abortion movement in America to mean almost anything. That's the extreme *pro-abortion* position, quote, "health"²⁸".

We focus on the use of the wording *pro-life*. It appears for the first time in the Republican Platform of 1996 (and it recurs in these one of 2000 e 2004):

"We oppose abortion, but our *pro-life* agenda does not include punitive action against women who have an abortion".

Here it isn't a self-definition, as in Clinton's declaration ("I am pro-choice"). Pro-life is the adjective given to the term *agenda*, thus it is presumed a range of political activities, which aim to defend the right to life.

The first pro-life self-definition is urged by the moderator Lehrer during the 1st debate Gore vs Bush jr. Lehrer asks explicitly Bush about his status:

"[...] All right, on the Supreme Court question, should a voter assume you're *pro-life*. You just stated your position.
BUSH: I am *pro-life*".

The Republican Party will define itself 'proudly pro-life' during the 3rd debate Obama vs. McCain (2008), by this candidate's declaration:

²⁸ Related to the Obama's declaration: "With respect to partial-birth abortion, I am completely supportive of a ban on late-term abortions, partial-birth or otherwise, as long as there's an exception for the mother's health and life, and this did not contain that exception".

“We have to change the culture of America. Those of us who are proudly *pro-life* understand that”.

‘Proud’ are also used by the democratic politicians, as we can read in the speech of the Honorable Jane Harman, Candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives (California):

“I am proud to be a pro-defense, *pro-choice* Democrat”.

Again Nita Lowery, U.S. House of Representatives (New York) uses this wording, as we read in the following clause:

“Only the firm *pro-choice* commitment of this administration has kept the right to choose intact”.

She coins also another definition to attack her opponents: *anti-choice*. Lowery declares:

“Since 1995, the right to choose has been under assault by our opponents in Congress. [...] they held our U.N. dues hostage to their extreme *anti-choice* views”.

This wording was uttered a second time by Gore, in the 1st debate with Bush jr (2000):

“And Governor Bush has declared to the *anti-choice* groups that he will appoint justices in the mold of Scalia and Clarence Thomas, who are known for being the most vigorous opponents of a woman's right to choose”.

→ ROE V. WADE, LAW, ISSUE

The words *law* and *issue* are quite frequent as collocates²⁹ of *abortion** and we observe also a specific reference to the Roe v. Wade decision.

By the way Gore said an interesting clause during the CNN debate with Bush jr (2000):

“on the *issue* of partial-birth or so-called late-term abortion, I would sign a *law* banning that procedure, provided that doctors have the ability to save a women's life or to act if her health is severely at risk. And that's not the main *issue*. The main *issue* is whether or not the *Roe v. Wade decision* is going to be overturned. I support a woman's right to choose; my opponent does not”.

We observe that Gore pointed out if “the main issue is whether or not the Roe v. Wade decision is going to be overturned”: it is significant, because we already observed it in our introduction. This issue is debated since 1976, just three years after the Supreme Court’s decision, as illustrated in the examples below:

- In the Republican Platform:

“The question of *abortion* is one of the most difficult and controversial of our time. It is undoubtedly a moral and personal issue but it also involves complex questions relating to medical science and criminal justice. There are those in our Party who favor complete support for the Supreme Court decision which permits abortion on demand. There are others who share sincere convictions that the Supreme Court's decision must be changed by a constitutional amendment prohibiting all *abortions*. Others have yet to take a position, or they have assumed a stance somewhere in between polar positions.

We protest the Supreme Court's intrusion into the family structure through its denial of the parents’ obligation and right to guide their minor children. The Republican Party favors a continuance of the public dialogue on *abortion* and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children.”

²⁹ ‘Collocates’ are called the words adjacent to the search word.

- in the Democratic National Platform:
 "We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of *abortion*. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S. Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area."

The democratic position is confirmed in the Democratic National Platform of 1980, too:

"The Democratic Party supports the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion rights as the law of the land and opposes any constitutional amendment to restrict or overturn that decision".

As well as in the recent declaration of Obama in the 3rd debate with McCain:

"But I am somebody who believes that Roe versus Wade was rightly decided³⁰. I think that abortion is a very difficult issue and it is a moral issue and one that I think good people on both sides can disagree on".

In the republican texts, *law* recurs always with the meaning of bill, to promote adoption or to ban the partial-birth abortions, as illustrated in the following extracts:

"My answer is, we're not going to spend taxpayers' money on abortion. This is an issue that divides America [...] I think there ought to be parental notification *laws*. [...]"

I also think we ought to continue to have good adoption *law* as an alternative to abortion."³¹

"I believe the ideal world is one in which every child is protected in law and welcomed to life. I understand there's great differences on this issue of abortion, but I believe reasonable people can come together and put good *law* in place that will help reduce the number of abortions. Take, for example, the ban on partial birth abortion".³²

Thanks to this analysis, we observe that the democratic position is totally different, as confirmed by Clinton in his Acceptance Speech (1996), during which he declared "this decision should be left to a woman [...]". Here we quote:

"We respect the individual conscience of every American on the painful issue of abortion, but believe as a matter of *law* that this decision should be left to a woman, her conscience, her doctor and her God".

6. CONCLUSIONS.

The objective of this paper, as we told in the introduction, was trying to understand in which context, and how, words concerning the abortion are used by the US Presidents and political actors. This analysis allowed us to deepen several matters.

Firstly, we observed that the issue of abortion came recently into the US political debate, and the words concerning this topic are becoming more and more used. This emerges through sectioning the corpus in three chronological periods. Thus it is immediately evident that frequency distribution is very different. The word *abortion** and his antonymic wordings *pro-life* and *pro-choice* are

³⁰ The same concept is expressed in the Democratic National Platform in 2008, paragraph 'Choice': "The Democratic Party strongly and unequivocally supports Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to choose a safe and legal abortion, regardless of ability to pay, and we oppose any and all efforts to weaken or undermine that right".

³¹ Bush in the 2nd debate with Kerry (2004).

³² Bush in the 3rd debate with Kerry (2004) .

absent in the first sub-corpus (1790-1973) and they have an extremely low frequency in the second one (1974-1999): it is a remarkable fact. Moreover the occurrences of the word *abortion** tend to occur in the republican texts and in the monologues, like the Acceptance Speeches, the State of the Union addresses and the party's Platforms. The issue of abortion belongs to the Republican Party: we observed that the 66% of the occurrences of *abortion** appears in the republican texts. The absolute and relative frequencies of these words are however low also in the third sub-corpus (2000-2012): it confirms that abortion is a sort of taboo topic, as we observed in our introduction. Nevertheless the highest relative frequency of the word *abortion** emerges in three debates (the first of these is the third debate Obama vs. McCain: the more recent debate that we have in our corpus): it confirms that abortion is a controversial issue, which is becoming more and more important in the US political debate.

The frequency of the co-selection of *abortion** with the verbs *will* and *would* shows that abortion is often issue to debate, in order to achieve the shared aim: "to reduce the number of abortions" (and other objectives concerning abortion, like "to ban partial-birth abortion" or "not to fund organization involved in abortion"). *Will* and *would* are used to talk about bills concerning abortion issue: *will* and *would* give a different strength to the declarations. These verbs are used by Republicans also to forecast dramatic or ideal situations, to confirm the goodness of their conservative position.

However it is evident that both parties have an attitude of negative appraisal³³ concerning abortion and partial-birth abortion, that is reinforced by accumulated collocation with expressions of negative appreciation – *more rare, oppose, reduce, ban*.

Moreover the word *abortion** tends to be avoided by both fronts to define their selves political positions³⁴, while it is uttered by republican politicians to attack the opponents, e.g. "that's the extreme pro-abortion position", said McCain to attack Obama (3rd debate, 2008).

Both self-definitions *pro-life* (that was uttered for the first time in the Republican Platform of 1996, to define the political agenda of the Republican Party) and *pro-choice* (that was coined by Clinton in his Acceptance Speech of 1992) give us the idea of the difference between conservative position and liberal one concerning this issue. These wordings appears in fact strongly associated to the concept of *right**, which assumes a double meaning. It means 'right to life' for the republican politicians, while 'right to choose' is confirmed by the democratic actors. Thus, the debate on abortion becomes a debate on two different rights, which appear irreconcilable. A third kind of right is considered by Reagan, in his State of the Union Speech of 1988: he talks about the "right of taking a life in self-defense", to consider when "the unborn child threatens the life of the mother". A common ground is however confirmed by the democratic Obama, who said "I want to make on the issue of abortion. This is an issue that look, it divides us. And in some ways, it may be difficult to reconcile the two views. But there surely is some common ground [...] because nobody's pro-abortion. I think it's always a tragic situation".

We can consider moreover another important difference between the Republican Party and the Democratic one: the first one utters the word *alternatives* really more often than the second one. We observed that it is always co-selected with *adoption*. By the way, it is significant this extract of the Bush sr Acceptance Speech (1988): "We must change from abortion to adoption". The Republican Party confirms the will to reduce the number of abortions through promoting adoption and abstinence. It strongly opposes contraception (and pill RU-486, too), that is instead promoted by

³³ 'Appraisal' is a term used within SFL to describe the various resources of speakers in making evaluation. (Bayley P. 2007, "Terror in political discourse from the Cold War to the unipolar world" in N. Fairclough, G. Cortese and P. Ardizzone (eds), *Discourse and Contemporary Social Change*, Bern: Peter Lang).

³⁴ e.g. "I am not pro-abortion. I am pro-choice", said Clinton (1992 Acceptance Speech).

democratic actors, as we read in the Lowery's speech. Adoption is also promoted through a rhetoric strategy, as we observed, by two republican actors: Bush sr and McCain³⁵. Thanks to concrete examples taken from their personal life, they try to show they know closer the object of their declarations. Moreover this strategy helps to create empathy with their listeners and to involve their citizens-voters. In addition, we observe that simple rhetorical skills are suitable for not educated citizens, probably the ones who most take to heart the issue of the abortion.

An aspect of this topic that totally belongs to Republican Party is the opposition to fund organizations involved in abortion. It emerges many times in many Republican Platforms, since 1992. The Democratic Party assures instead to support family planning ("for four years in a row, we have increased support for family planning", we read in 1996 Democratic National Platform) but it doesn't specify if it funds abortion services.

Finally we observed that the 1973 Supreme Court decision is still one of the main issues concerning the topic of abortion. Just since 1976, in both Democratic National and Republican Platforms, we observe different positions on this issue. The Republican Party wrote "we protest the Supreme Court's intrusion into the family structure through its denial of the parents' obligation [...and] support the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children". While the Democratic one assured: "We feel, however, that is undesirable to attempt to amend the US Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area". Thus it is significant what Gore uttered in the CNN debate with Bush jr (2000): "The main issue is whether or not the Roe v. Wade decision is going to be overturned. I support a woman's right to choose; my opponent not".

The analysis of this corpus was carried out with the help of Corpus Linguistics. This method allows to make researches on the whole collection of texts, thanks to a specific electronic program (in this case, Wordsmith Tools 4.0). In this way it is possible to obtain the frequency wordlist, the keywords and to show collocations and concordances. One of the main strength of CL is the feature of being data-driven and not theory-driven. This allowed us to discover the semantic connection between abortion and right, considering the difference of this latter word's significance: right to life and right to choose result antinomic in the US American debate, as is underlined by the definitions "pro-life" and "pro-choice". The analysis of the connection between abortion and right, though not initially considered, gives us the opportunity to show that the meaning of words depends on the context in which they are in.

Even though CL aims to obtain results and reproducing them, the present paper does not claim to give a complete analysis of the language's features used by the US political actors, inasmuch as the object of our research doesn't include the 2012 presidential debates. As we illustrated in our introduction and we observed through this analysis, the issue of abortion is in fact becoming only recently a matter of the US political debate. Thus it may be one of the main issues in the 2012 US political debate, as well as it can influence the electoral choice of American women, as we read on *Il Fatto Quotidiano* ("A gender issue might return Barack Obama to the White House"³⁶).

³⁵ e.g. "We must change from abortion to adoption. I have an adopted granddaughter. The day of her christening we wept with joy. I thank God her parents chose life" said Bush sr (1988 Acceptance Speech).

³⁶ Festa R., "I repubblicani "spaventano" le donne. E Obama vola nei sondaggi" in *Il Fatto Quotidiano.it*, 04/10/2012, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2012/04/10/repubblicani-spaventano-donne-obama-vola-sondaggi/203495/> accessed on 07/24/2012

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