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**Abstract**

*The paper provides an interdisciplinary, corpus-assisted critical discourse investigation of 'in/security' in a specialized diachronic corpus consisting of a complete set of 228 State of the Union Addresses covering a whole span of time from President Washington's first address in 1790 to President Obama in 2014. As such it aims at a long-gaze perspective on the construal of 'in/security' in one of the most crucial sites of presidential power. Moving from the assumptions that 'security' and 'insecurity' are mutually co-existent, the analysis of the lemma threat provides a case-study in order to show what type(s) of 'in/security' have been represented by U.S. administrations in order to legitimise and justify security practices throughout their history.*

**Key words:** diachronic corpus-assisted discourse analysis, critical discourse studies, systemic-functional linguistics, political discourse, presidential discourse.

**1. Introduction**

The idea of security has been at the heart of American political culture and political thought since the earliest days of the American Revolution. Indeed, as the drafters of the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* wrote, the prime function of a government is to 'secure' three 'inalienable rights' - 'Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness' - and if a government fails to do so the people have the right to 'alter and abolish it' and to form a new government which will 'effect their Safety and Happiness' and will, ultimately, 'provide new guards for their future security'. However, if the notion of 'security' is ubiquitous, its meaning, and certainly its political significance, has constantly changed over time as a consequence of complex, interrelated patterns of socio-political and cultural factors.

Building on the analysis of diachronic change in a specialised corpus of U.S. presidential speeches (Bayley and Bevitori 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016; Bevitori 2015a), this paper aims at complementing and extending previous work on the semantic profile of the noun *security* (Bayley and Bevitori 2015) in order to move a step further and broaden our perspective on this very complex issue. It starts from the assumption that 'security' and 'insecurity' are, as Dillon (1996) persuasively argues, 'mutually constitutive' and that 'any discourse of security must always already, simultaneously and in a plurality of ways, be a discourse

of danger too' (pp.120-121). There still seems to exist, in other words, an intrinsic duality in the word itself which stems from the Greek and Latin origins of the word; *ἀσφάλεια* (*asphaleia*), and *sēcūritās* (*sine cura*), meaning respectively 'not liable to fall, steadfast', as well as 'freedom from anxiety or care' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Given the crucial role played by institutional discourse in producing, re-producing and legitimizing power (*inter alia* Fairclough 1992; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), presidential discourse may thus be seen as one of the most critical sites to investigate. In spite of few formal powers granted by the Constitution (compared to those granted to Congress, as provided in Art I and II), since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the presidency has in fact gradually expanded its power and what has been come to be known as the 'bully pulpit'<sup>1</sup> has increasingly been used for various purposes (see also Neustadt 1990). In particular, the study focuses on one specific register of presidential discourse, the State of the Union Address (henceforth SoU), which provides one of the most influential platforms of presidential power. In fact, this long-established practice, which is normatively grounded in the Constitution, has not only become more assertive over time, and for a number of reasons, but has also been able to reach a wider audience thanks to its mediatisation (see Bayley and Bevitori 2014, 2016). As a discursive and 'rhetorical' space in which the negotiation of meaning has progressively involved building consensus and mobilizing support and resources around specific proposals, the State of the Union address (alongside other types of presidential speeches) may also fittingly be considered as a site of complex intertextual meaning-making process, in which 'representations of danger' (Campbell 1992) may naturalize certain value positions while making contingent, and somewhat problematic, strategies for coping with insecurities.

In order to explore how and to what extent 'in/security' is construed, or represented, in this very powerful institution, this paper will take an interdisciplinary approach. It will make a combined use of the methodological tools and techniques of corpus linguistics and the analytical tools of a critical discourse analysis, drawing on the framework of systemic functional linguistics (henceforth SFL). My main research questions will address the following: (1) what kind of undesirable outcomes are construed in this institutional (and very powerful) setting over time? (2) what is posed as a *threat* and what *values are endangered*? Before moving on to the analysis, 'in/security' will be defined in the following section.

## **2. Defining In/Security: A Brief Overview**

Security may undoubtedly be described as a cultural keyword; a word which, drawing on Raymond Williams' pioneering work ([1976]1983) on the relationship between words, culture and society, is seen to reflect some dominant or 'core values' within any specific culture.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, in the field of international relations, the notion of 'security' is based on two classical perspectives; (i) as a derivative of power, from the realist standpoint, (ii) as a consequence of peace, from the idealist one (Buzan 1991: 2). As a highly disputed and challenging notion, 'security' is thus susceptible to a range of

interpretations. First of all, its underlying assumption is built around the idea of pursuing 'freedom from threats' (Buzan 1991: 19); indeed, as Buzan cogently suggests 'without threats, there is no security'; or better, 'no justification for state security'. From this it follows that it is the very existence of these threats and invulnerabilities, or 'insecurity' in the widest sense of the term, which constitutes the essential component of 'security'. As Buzan (1991: 141) further argues, 'If no threats existed, part of the state's basic Hobbesian function would disappear'; in other words, as Echavarría Álvarez (2006) has argued, this is the reason why the State was born, in accordance with Buzan's reading of Thomas Hobbes's moral and political theory. From a more critical perspective, 'in/security' in itself may be also understood as an 'intersubjective process' (Buzan 1998; Campbell 1998; Weldes et al. 1999), involving a mutual interaction, in which 'senses of threat, vulnerability and in/security are socially constructed rather than being objectively present or absent' (Buzan et al. 1998: 57; see also Campbell 1998).

In this sense, security is conceptualized within the framework of 'securitization' (Buzan et al. 1998) as an outcome of complex social processes.<sup>3</sup> Within this perspective, security is primarily seen as a 'speech act' (Austin 1962); *i.e.* an utterance which is the act in itself. Speaking security, in other words, is never politically neutral; granting an issue special status may result in legitimising exceptional measures (Buzan et al. 1998: 26). Before moving on to the analysis of how the 'senses of threat' have been construed in this powerful institutional domain over time, I will now turn to the description of the SoU corpus.

### ***3. The State of the Union Address: Functions and Corpus***

The State of the Union address is a type of presidential address, which is annually delivered by the President of the United States to the Congress.<sup>4</sup> According to Article II, Section III of the U.S. Constitution, the President is in fact required to 'report' on the state of the Union and 'recommend' any measures that he believes should be implemented. Article II is as follows:

He shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.

However, as a consequence of a gradual expansion of the presidential power over time, the 'modern'<sup>5</sup> presidents have not merely 'reported' in their Address but they have also been 'expounding' and 'assessing'. Moreover, and in particular since the second half of the twentieth century, they have been 'recreating' narratives as well as 'sharing' experiences. In brief, SoUs have shifted from 'informative' to more 'persuasive' over time.

The SoU corpus contains the complete set of 228 written messages and transcripts of oral addresses delivered by the 44 US presidents, in the region of 1,800,000 running words, thus covering the whole span of time since President Washington's first address in 1790 (which at the time was called the 'Annual Message') to President Obama's in 2014.<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this study, and in order to carry out a diachronic analysis, the corpus has been split up into five partitions that correspond to what may be largely considered main historical

cleavages. These include the Civil War, the two World Wars, the Cold War (including Korea and Vietnam) and, finally, the post-Cold War period, (incorporating 9/11 and the Iraq conflict in which the US has been involved). Table 1 provides detailed information of the five partitions. This was of course an arbitrary decision and the corpus could have been split in many different ways; however, its rationale is based on the assumption that major wars are socially and politically significant defining moments.

Partitions	Time Span	Presidents	No of texts
1	1790-1864 (End of Civil War)	Washington to Lincoln	76
2	1865-1916 (Entrance of WWI)	Johnson to Wilson	52
3	1917-1945 (End of WWII)	Wilson to Roosevelt FD	28
4	1946-1989 (Cold War)	Truman to Reagan	47
5	1990-2014 (Post Cold War to present)	Bush G. to Obama	25

**Table 1** Partitions of the SoU corpus (1790-2014)

Clearly, debates about main turning points in history are quite difficult and controversial among historians and observers. Indeed most people would probably regard 9/11 as an undeniably major watershed in recent history. Nonetheless, since the corpus was designed to be searched and analyzed according to a range of different criteria - *i.e.* by president, by terms in office, by year(s), by party affiliation, or by a combination of any of them - it was decided to keep the post-Cold war period as a macro-unit for scrutiny as it can afford more perspective. Before turning to the analysis itself, the methods and procedures of analysis are discussed in the following section.

#### ***4. A (diachronic) Corpus-assisted Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis***

Over the past two decades, in the footsteps of the pioneering works of Hardt-Mautner (1995) and Stubbs (1996), methodological and analytical techniques developed by corpus linguistics have increasingly been prominent within analysis of discourse, drawing from different theoretical perspectives (*inter alia*, Partington, Morley and Haarman 2004; Baker 2006; Thompson and Hunston 2006; Baker et al. 2008; Morley and Bayley 2009). Some of the generally recognized benefits of a corpus linguistics approach to discourse analysis, which may now be considered fully part of the CDA/CDS agenda (for example, Wodak and Meyer 2009; Cap and Hart 2014), stems from the growing felt necessity to avoid potential biases arising from ad hoc selective use of evidence (or the famously known and much quoted ‘cherry-pick’), with a view to warrant a balance between data-based or -driven analysis and theory (Mautner 2009). The methodological and analytical process, in fact, involves not merely ‘counting’ but also, and more importantly, a combination of bottom-

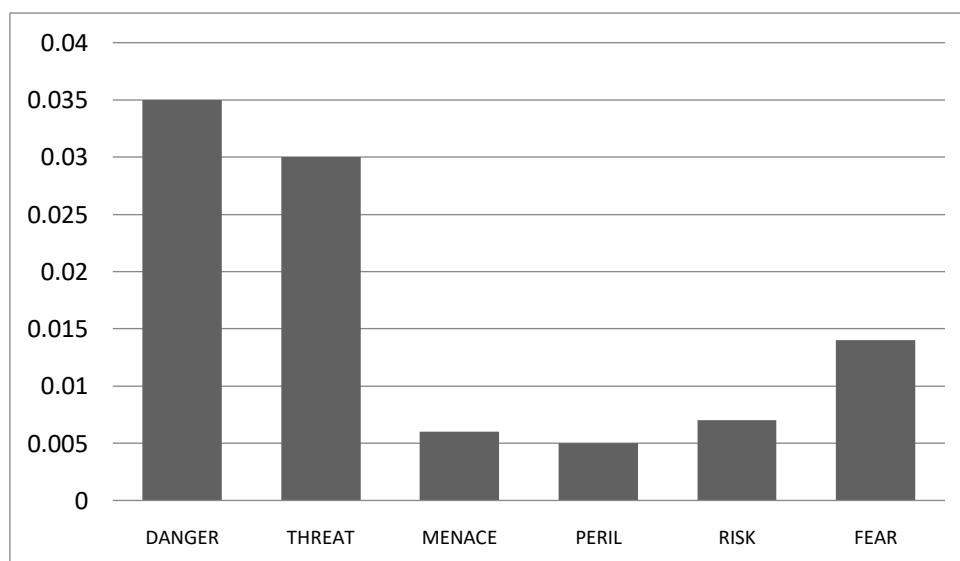
up and top-down procedures; a constant ‘shunting’ (Halliday [1961]2002: 45) back and forth between quantitative and qualitative aspects of texts in their enlarged context/discourse, operating at distinct but interconnected levels of analysis.

However, albeit fruitful, the approach is not without shortcomings, and concerns have recently been raised as regards to some of its constraints (Miller et al. 2014). In fact, depending on research questions as well as levels of investigation, a ‘trade-off’ between ‘volume’ and ‘richness’ of analysis, or, in other words, between low-level and high-level of analysis, is desirable, and indeed essential (Halliday and Matthiesen 2004: 49). More specifically, dealing with relatively large diachronic corpora of specialized registers, such as the one being used in this study, features of rhetorical discourse, as well as forms of variation are not easily retrievable due to the instability of word meanings over time (see Bevitori 2015b; Bayley and Bevitori 2016).

## 5. Case Study: *THREAT*. A Diachronic Perspective

### 5.1 Quantifying ‘Insecurity’

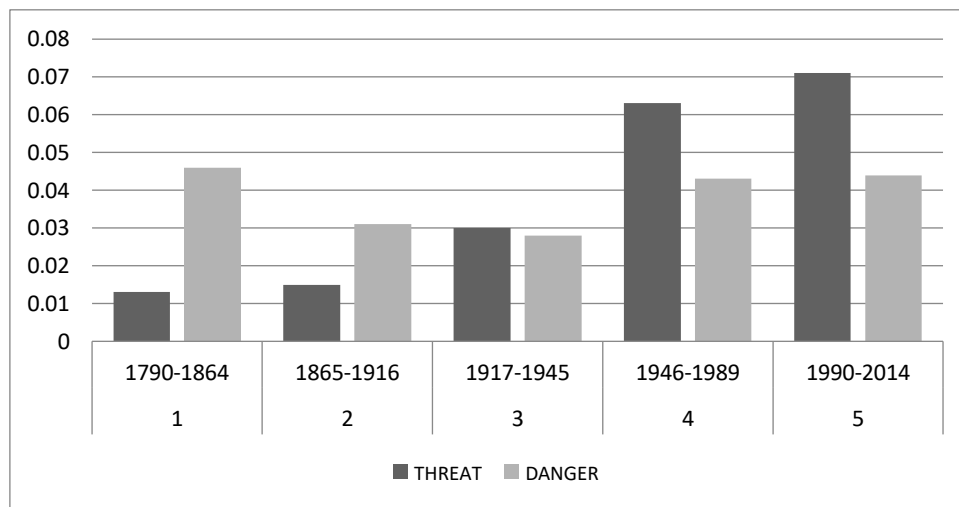
As a preliminary step in the analysis the frequencies of selected search words in the semantic domain of ‘insecurity’ in the whole SoU corpus were first computed and compared. These include the lexical items DANGER, THREAT, MENACE, PERIL, RISK and FEAR<sup>7</sup>. As Figure 1 shows, DANGER and THREAT are most recurrent, occurring approximately five times more frequently compared to RISK, MENACE and PERIL, together encompassing around 80 percent of all occurrences. The lemma FEAR, which may be classified in the semantic category of ‘reaction to danger’ (see Bayley et al. 2004), is slightly more frequent but still largely lagging behind the first two.



**Figure 1.** Relative frequency of selected lemmas per 100 words

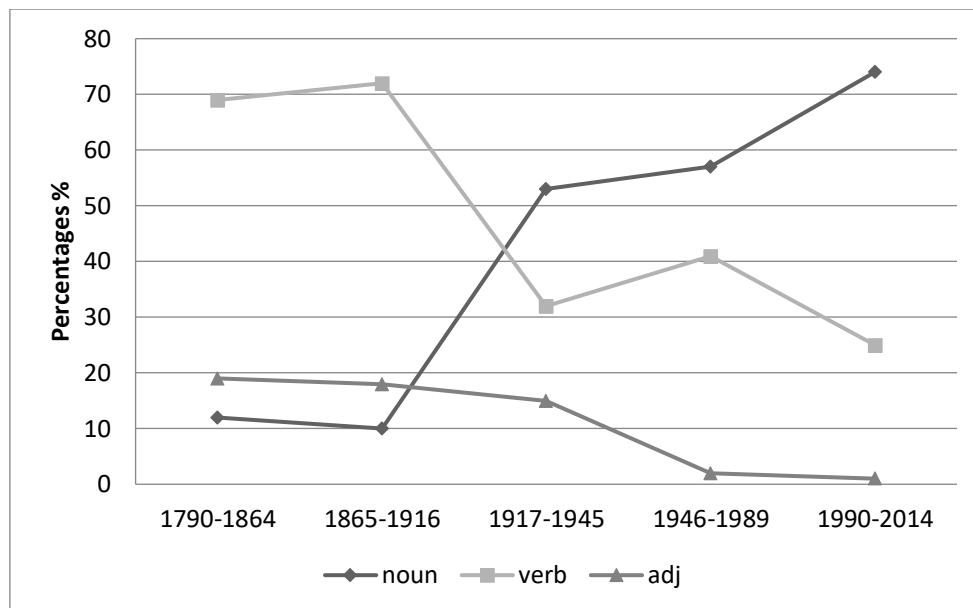
As far as the former is concerned, there are 624 instances of DANGER and 518 instances of THREAT in the SoU corpus corresponding to a normalized figure

of 0.034 and 0.28 per hundred words (or tokens) respectively. Interestingly, however, a close examination of the distribution of their frequencies across the five historical partitions as identified earlier (see Table 1) reveals that the frequency of *THREAT* gradually increases over time from 0.013 in the 1790-1865 partition to 0.03 in the 1917-1945, raising rapidly in the Cold-War period to 0.06, reaching 0.07 in the more recent period. On the other hand, the frequency of *DANGER* displays an ‘ebb and flow’ pattern; from 0.046 in the 179-1865 partition, it decreases to 0.031 and 0.028 in the 1865-1916 and 1917-1945 respectively, but it then shows a swift increase in the Cold War period to 0.044 followed by a very slight increase, 0.045, in the post-Cold War period.



**Figure 2.** Relative frequency of *THREAT* and *DANGER* across partitions

This becomes even more interesting when considering the breakdown and distribution of the word-forms of *threat*\*<sup>8</sup> over time. In fact, while the verb is overall slightly more frequent than the noun, accounting for 49 percent of all instances compared to 43 percent (8 percent are adjectives), only an examination of their distribution across the historical partitions can yield a more accurate picture (see Figure 3). The first observation to be made is that while in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, up to the entrance to World War I (1790-1864 and 1865-1916), the verb *threaten*\* occurs with a significant higher frequency, covering around 70 percent of all instances. This is followed by the adjective (20 percent) and the noun, whose frequency is around 10 percent.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of word-forms of THREAT across partitions

In the 1917-1945 partition, although the verb has still a higher occurrence (55 percent of all instances), the frequency of the noun starts to increase (30 percent of all instances), while the adjective progressively decreases (15 percent). It is from the Cold War period, however, that an inverse tendency may be observed; while the frequency of the noun grows to more than 55 percent of all instances, both the frequency of the verb and the adjective falls considerably, the former to around 40 percent and the latter to 2 percent. This escalating trend in the frequency of the noun may also be observed in the 1989-2014 partition, the post-Cold war period, in which the noun *threat*\* occurs in more than 70 percent of all instances, while instances of the verb cover only 25 percent, and the remainder are adjectives (2 percent).

The quantitative analysis so far has thus shown that there is a steady and consistent increase in the use of the noun form in the SoU corpus over time which, in turn, seems to suggest that the nature of the ‘threat’ has increasingly become more opaque, since nominalizations are less explicit than verbs in terms of participant roles, as has been noted in a number of studies (*inter alia* Fowler et al. 1979, Kress 1995, Fairclough 2003, Dunmire 2007 for a review). This finds more evidence in the fact that the most frequent word form in the post-Cold war period (partition 5) is the plural form of the noun: *threats*. I will return to this crucial aspect later on. Bearing in mind these preliminary quantitative results, I will now turn to the analysis.

## 5.2 From ‘Threatening Dangers’ to ‘Complex Threats’

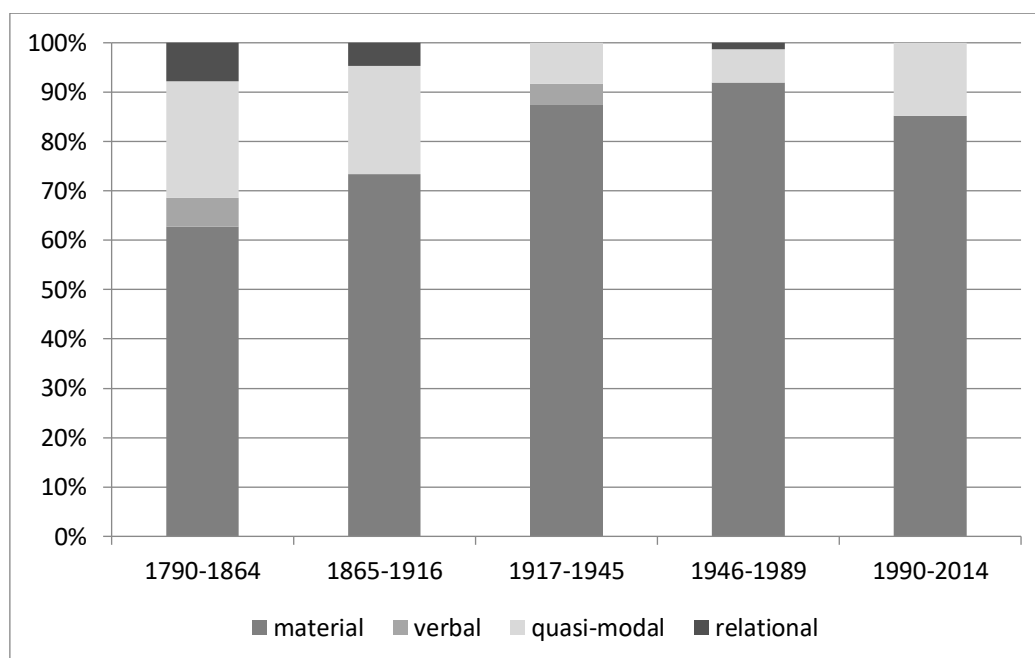
### 5.2.1 Meanings of THREAT

As far as meanings of *threaten* are concerned, in SFL verbs can be classified into different process types in the system of transitivity (Halliday and Matthiesen 2004; see also Bayley et al. 2004). The following examples from the SoU corpus show that *threaten* can be classified as:

- a verbal process (i.e. verbs of ‘saying’ - e.g. *Mexico threatens war*);

- a material process (i.e. verbs of ‘doing-and-happening’ - to endanger; e.g. *violation threatens the peace of the entire region; citizens believe which are now threatened by the tide of atheistic communism*);
- a quasi modal (e.g. *it threatens to disturb the harmony*);
- a relational process (i.e. verbs of ‘identifying’ or ‘classifying’ - e.g. *special funds for job-creating public programs should be made available [...] if recession threatens*).

Although distinct, these meanings are all interrelated, encompassing epistemic modality and negative appraisal; to put it differently, they all project a possible future action that is to be construed as unwelcome (Bayley et al. 2004). A perusal of instances of the verb *threaten\** in the corpus (Figure 4) shows that the material process largely predominates in all partitions, followed by the quasi-modal, while the verbal and relational processes occur with a low frequency and, moreover, are restricted to certain periods of time; in fact a few instances of the verbal process are found only in the 1790-1865 period.



**Figure 4.** Distribution (%) of meanings of the verb *threaten\** across partitions

However, as already observed, although frequency may be significant in itself, it is only by shifting back and forth between the contextual configurations of the lexeme and close reading of the entire texts in the wider cultural and socio-political context(s), that a more comprehensive picture can be obtained. Hence, by scrutinizing the collocational profile of the lexeme in the enlarged co-text and context of occurrence, it is possible to see that different semantic motifs tend to emerge and prevail over time, which will be detailed in the following sections.

### 5.2.2 1790-1865 : Securing the Union

As noted in the previous section, the verb form *threaten\** is more frequent than the nominal form in this historical partition. An analysis of instances in this



period shows that the Threatener typically involves a potential negative event, i.e. *controversies (in particular over borders), difficulties, agitation*, which appears likely to jeopardize the ongoing process of peaceful relations and the tranquility of the country, and may, therefore, undermine the stability of the Union. The most frequent right collocate of the verb is the preposition *to*, accounting for half of all instances; moreover, typical associations of the semantic sequence *threaten\* to* include *disturb, interrupt, clog, thwart, endanger*, while threatened or endangered entities are *peace, (friendly/good/fraternal) relations, harmony*. The following excerpts from Presidents Jefferson, Polk, Buchanan and Pierce illustrate the point:

- (1) Circumstances, fellow citizens, which *seriously threatened the peace of our country* have made it a duty to convene you at an earlier period than usual. (Jefferson 1807)
- (2) The difficulty with the Brazilian Government, which *at one time threatened to interrupt the friendly relations* between the two countries, will, I trust, be speedily adjusted. (Polk 1847)
- (3) When my last annual message was transmitted to Congress two subjects of controversy, one relating to the enlistment of soldiers in this country for foreign service and the other to Central America, *threatened to disturb the good understanding* between the United States and Great Britain. (Pierce 1856)
- (4) It has been the misfortune of both countries, almost ever since the period of the Revolution, to have been annoyed by a succession of irritating and dangerous questions, *threatening their friendly relations*. (Buchan 1859)

If on the one hand, the territorial question, and the safeguarding of friendly relations tend to dominate, on the other, this is seen to intersect with the process of nation-building and identity construction, alongside political and constitutional conflicts about the nature of the system of government. In these years, in fact, the debate around federalism and the Constitution was indeed crucial; for example:

- (5) The consequences of this feature of the Constitution appear far more *threatening* to the peace and integrity of the Union than any which I can conceive as likely to result from the simple legislative action of the Federal Government. (Jackson 1830)

This may also be confirmed by looking very cursorily at the occurrences of the word *constitution* in the whole corpus, which reveals that more than 60 percent of all instances are found in the 1790-1864 partition. Some historical reasons may obviously be given in this respect, which due to space limits will not be discussed here. However, it will suffice to note that the item becomes increasingly more frequent in the decade between 1850 and 1860, as the Civil War approaches.

### 5.2.3 1865-1916: Securing financial interests

Moving to the main features characterizing the 1865-1916 partition, although patterns relating to good and amicable relations are still present in the period from the end of the Civil War to the entrance of World War I, as example (6) illustrates:

- (6) In the summer of 1889 an incident occurred which *for some time threatened to interrupt the cordiality of our relations with the Government of Portugal.* (Harrison 1890)

The main meaning patterns revolve around issues of financial and commercial insecurity; in fact, the most commonly found threatened entities may be classified as belonging in the semantic field of 'financial prosperity'. Typical patterns of co-selection of both the verb and adjective include *monetary system, currency, gold, and silver*. This is particularly evident in the speeches of President Cleveland, who was elected for two non-consecutive mandates (1885-1889 and 1893-1897), and was a stark supporter of the gold standard monetary system in opposition to the free coinage of silver, but also later on with both Presidents Harrison and McIngley:

- (7) All history warns us against rash experiments which *threaten violent changes in our monetary standard and the degradation of our currency*. The past is full of lessons teaching not only the economic dangers but the national immorality that follow in the train of such experiments (Cleveland 1895)
- (8) It was agreed by all that the withdrawal from circulation of so large an amount of money was an embarrassment to the business of the country and made necessary the intervention of the Department at frequent intervals to *relieve threatened monetary panics*. (Harrison 1891)
- (9) The Secretary of the Treasury has outlined a plan, in great detail, for the purpose of *removing the threatened recurrence of a depleted gold reserve* and save us from future embarrassment on that account.(McIngley 1897)

Interestingly, the semantic motif of 'financial prosperity' frequently intersects with war issues; this should be of no surprise since the period leading to the entrance of World War I is characterized by many conflicts, *e.g.* Spain, the Philippines and Cuba, to mention but a few. At a closer look, the lemma THREAT is frequently co-selected with the item *war* in this period. The analysis of the patterns shows that the participant role of the Threatener can be defined as some kind of instability in other states (*e.g. uprising, trouble*), while the endangered entities may be broadly classified in the semantic category of American commercial interests, and ultimately, prosperity. Moreover, these patterns are typically co-selected with the noun phrase 'for a time', as well as some of its variants, which occurs as the most three-word frequent cluster in this segment and highlights the prevailing informative/reporting character of the message in this period:

- (10) Last June trouble which had existed *for some time* between the Republics of Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras culminated in war--a war which *threatened to be ruinous to the countries* involved and *very destructive to the commercial interests of Americans, Mexicans, and other foreigners* who are taking an important part in the development of these countries. (Roosevelt 1906)
- (11) The Republic of Cuba last May was in the throes of a lawless uprising that *for a time threatened the destruction of a great deal of valuable property*--much of it owned by Americans and other foreigners--as well as the existence of the Government itself. (Taft 1912)

It should also, albeit very briefly, be mentioned that some environmental insecurity begins to emerge at the turn of century, although it is mostly

circumscribed to the speeches of President Theodore Roosevelt, the leader of the Conservation movement, fighting to preserve America's natural beauty; moreover, the lemma is typically gramaticalized as a noun, as example 12 illustrate:<sup>9</sup>

- (12) As an incident to creating the deep waterways down the Mississippi, the Government should build along its whole lower length levees which taken together with the control of the headwaters, will at once and forever put a complete stop to all *threat of floods* in the immensely fertile Delta region. (Roosevelt 1909)

#### 5.2.4 1917-1945: Securing the social space

The period between the entrance of World War I and the end of World War II saw the emergence a new type of insecurity, which may be glossed as 'social insecurity'. Typical meaning patterns cover a broad semantic field which includes health, welfare, as well as safety. However, at this stage, social insecurity was posited as a rather abstract concept:<sup>10</sup>

- (13) I wish I could bring to you the precise recommendation for the prevention of *strikes which threaten the welfare of the people and menace public safety*. (Harding 1922)
- (14) In the other category, crimes of organized banditry, coldblooded shooting, lynching and kidnapping have threatened our security. (Roosevelt 1936)

Nonetheless, although the analysis shows that meaning patterns of THREAT characterizing social insecurity tend predominate in this period, others hints at that fact that the question of national insecurity assumed a renewed importance, as well as more urgency, at the outbreak of World War II. In particular, FDR Roosevelt's 1941 address may be regarded as a turning point; in fact, this annual message, which is also commonly known as the 'Four Freedoms' speech, raised many issues and concerns about a possible American involvement in the war. In this speech, Roosevelt emphasized the uniqueness of that historical moment in which the United States, in spite of the many conflicts and tensions that permeated their past history, were confronted, for the first time, with an 'imminent danger' to their 'national' security. A close inspection of instances of THREAT in the 1941 speech, which in itself account for one third of all instances of the lemma in all twelve SoU speeches delivered by Roosevelt between 1934 and 1945, shows that while the verbal form *threaten\** is still more frequent, and both participant roles and temporal reference are more explicit (*i.e.* wars posed a danger to American security/national unity etc.), the noun *threat\** functioning as a more abstract lexical choice, and thus acting to obfuscate not only agency but also temporality, as will be explained in the following section, seems to provide a turning point. This extract (15) is the beginning of Roosevelt's 1941 speech:

- (15) Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Seventy-seventh Congress: I address you, the Members of the Seventy-seventh Congress, at a moment unprecedented in the history of the Union. I use the word 'unprecedented,' because at no previous time has *American security* been as seriously *threatened* from without as it is today. Since the permanent formation of our Government under the Constitution, in 1789, most of the periods of crisis in our history have related to our domestic affairs. Fortunately, only one of

these--the four-year War Between the States--ever *threatened our national unity*. Today, thank God, one hundred and thirty million Americans, in forty-eight States, have forgotten points of the compass in our national unity. It is true that prior to 1914 the United States often had been disturbed by events in other Continents. We had even engaged in two wars with European nations and in a number of undeclared wars in the West Indies, in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific for the maintenance of American rights and for the principles of peaceful commerce. But in no case had a *serious threat* been raised against our national safety or our continued independence. [...]

This passage is quite crucial and the occurrence of the noun *threat* seems to coincide with the moment in which the Roosevelt administration set the stage for future action. In fact, the objectified representation of the ‘threat’ emphasizes a character of immediacy, which provides the basis of a strategy for challenging the isolationist position in American foreign diplomacy. After the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War period, however, major changes occurred.

### 5.2.5 1945-1989: Securing peace, prosperity (and common goals)

Turning to the Cold War period, two distinctive features emerge. First, as I have noted earlier (see section 5.1), the majority of instances of the lemma within this partition (and in contrast to the previous historical periods) are nouns. This sharp increase in nominalizations is quite significant; from a functional perspective, in fact, nominalizations are a type of ‘grammatical metaphor’ through which processes are worded, or metaphorically realized, as nouns (Halliday and Matthiesen 2004). As a powerful resource for construing ideological positions, while nominalizations tend to partly or entirely obscure participant roles, prepositions within a noun group can also express a number of complex relational, causal and transitivity roles (see also Bayley et al. 2004). Typically the prepositions *of* and *to*, both emerging as top collocates of ‘threat’, may respectively identify the Threatener (*threat of*), and the endangered entity (*threat to*). Moreover, the Threatener may also be identified through pre-modifiers, adjectives or classifiers (e.g. *the continuing threat*, *the Soviet threat*), or post-modifiers (e.g. *in recognition of the threat which the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan posed to Western interests*). However, a distinction should be made between the early Cold War and late Cold War. As far as the former is concerned, typical collocation patterns of the noun group *threat of* in this segment unsurprisingly point to discourses in the semantic area of ‘defence’ (*aggression, violence*) in particular from Communism:

- (16) We are moving through a perilous time. Faced with *a terrible threat of aggression*, our Nation has embarked upon a great effort to help establish the kind of world in which peace shall be secure. (Truman 1951)
- (17) While maintaining our military deterrent, we must intensify our efforts to achieve a just peace. In Asia we shall continue to give help to nations struggling to maintain their freedom against the *threat of Communist coercion or subversion*. (Eisenhower 1956)

Similarly, classifiers such as *Soviet, Communist, military* emerge as the most frequent left collocates of the noun *threat*, alongside adjectives functioning as intensifiers, such as *serious, grave, increased, dark, continuing, constant, terrible*. The analysis of the pattern *threat to*, on the other hand, shows that the

endangered entity that US Presidents most typically construct in their discourse(s) is frequently an element in the semantic field of 'national' security, as well as world peace and freedom:

- (18) The existence of a strongly armed imperialistic dictatorship poses a *continuing threat to the free world's and thus to our own Nation's security and peace*. (Eisenhower 1957)
- (19) But despite this progress, we must maintain a military force that is capable of deterring any *threat to this Nation's security, whatever the mode of aggression* (Johnson 1968)

It is perhaps worth mentioning the fact that the notion of a 'free world', which would come to typify the Cold War bipolar world system of the two opposed blocks, and which predictably characterises most of Truman's and Eisenhower's SoU discourse, is found in Roosevelt's aforementioned 1941 speech ('We are putting forth our energies, our resources and our organizing powers to give you the strength to regain and maintain a *free world*'), although here 'free world' has a different meaning; it refers to the countries opposed to the Axis-power. Nonetheless, the idea of a 'common' and totalizing *threat to the 'free world'* operates as a legitimizing discourse to justify war, which tends to frequently resonate in the foreign policy discourses of later Cold War and post Cold War administrations, for example:

- (20) Strategically, economically, and morally, the defense of Europe is a part of our own defense. [...] Indeed, the state of our Nation is in great part the state of our friends and allies throughout the world. The gun that points at them points at us, also. *The threat is a total threat and the danger is a common danger*. (Truman 1951)
- (21) We are in Vietnam because the United States of America and our allies are committed by the SEATO Treaty to 'act to *meet the common danger*' of aggression in Southeast Asia. We are in Vietnam because an international agreement signed by the United States, North Vietnam, and others in 1962 is being systematically violated by the Communists. *That violation threatens the independence of all the small nations in Southeast Asia, and threatens the peace of the entire region and perhaps the world*. (Johnson 1966)
- (22) To promote peace and stability in the broader Middle East, the United States will work with our friends in the region *to fight the common threat of terror*, while we encourage a higher standard of freedom. (Bush jr. 2005)

Still, although national insecurity coming from external aggression is certainly paramount in the early Cold War, issues of economic insecurity also appear closely interlinked. In many instances, in fact, patterns of co-selection indicate that 'inflation' is construed as the Threatener, while the entities threatened are in the semantic field 'economic stability':

- (23) At the present time, our *prosperity is threatened by inflationary pressures* at a number of critical points in our economy. (Truman 1951)
- (24) Every investment in *personal security is threatened by this process of inflation*, and the real values of the people's savings, whether in the form of insurance, bonds, pension and retirement funds or savings accounts are thereby shriveled (Eisenhower 1956)
- (25) *This inflation--which threatens the growth, productivity, and stability of our economy--*requires that we restrain the growth of the budget to the maximum extent consistent with national security and human compassion (Carter 1981)

Although in the late Cold War period ‘national security’ in terms of national defence remains a high priority, and many of the insecurity issues characterizing the early Cold War are still present, an expansion in the nature of the ‘threat’ (e.g. *nuclear weapons*) can also be observed. Furthermore, a new development of the concept of ‘national security’ to include non-traditional issues, such as the environment and healthcare can be traced. While patterns of environmental discourse conspicuously typify President Clinton’s discourse, it should be mentioned the fact the *National Security Strategy*, signed by President Reagan in 1988, had already recognized global environmental problems as ‘potential *threats to the peace and prosperity* that are in *our* national interest, as well as the interests of the affected nations’ (my emphasis, NSS 1988).<sup>11</sup>

### 5.2.6 1989-2014: ‘in a world of complex threats’

With the end of the Cold War, and thus with the disappearance of the Soviet enemy, new types of ‘threat’ began to emerge. The first point to be made is that not only the use of nominalizations increased dramatically in this period (covering 70 percent of all instances) but, and perhaps more significantly, the noun is more frequently grammaticalized as a plural, in fact, more than half of all instances of the noun in this partition are plural forms, which increasingly act to construe the ‘threat’ as more volatile and intangible:

- (26) *The threats we face today as Americans* respect no nation's borders. Think of them: terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, drug trafficking, ethnic and religious hatred, aggression by rogue states, environmental degradation. (Clinton 1996)
- (27) Fifth, we must move strongly against *new threats to our security*. (Clinton 1997)
- (28) To protect our country, we reorganized our government and created the Department of Homeland Security, which is mobilizing *against the threats of a new era*. (Bush 2003)
- (29) Just as jobs and businesses can now race across borders, so can *new threats and new challenges*. (Obama 2011)
- (30) Here at home, we'll keep strengthening our defenses and *combat new threats like cyber attacks*. (Obama 2014)

A word of caution is, however, in order. As a matter of fact, meanings of the item *threat* point to distinct semantic sets in the different administrations. For example, while in President Clinton at the eve of the ‘bold new world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’, the nature of the ‘threat’ relates to both ‘hard’ (i.e. military) (e.g. *threat of weapons of mass destruction*) as well as ‘soft’ (i.e. non-military) dimensions of security (e.g. *threat of AIDS, of global warming*) issues, in President Bush jr, and particularly after the events of 9/11 event, which radically changed the ‘new’ securitization framework and acted as a watershed for US’s foreign policy and global security, the Threatener is unsurprisingly represented by *attacks, acts of terrorism* and, in particular, *terror*:

- (31) To promote peace and stability in the broader Middle East, the United States will work with our friends in the region *to fight the common threat of terror*, while we encourage a higher standard of freedom. (Bush 2005)

However, what all the above examples (27-30) have in common is the fact that

the ‘threats’ are classified as ‘new’; the adjective is, in fact, by far the most frequent left collocate of the plural noun *threats*. Moreover, the noun is typically co-selected with material verbs such as ‘meet’ and ‘face’, in contrast to the occurrence of the verb ‘pose’, which tends to predominate in the Cold War period and functions in a very similar way to the material process of the verb *threaten*. Finally, as example (30) illustrates, other types of ‘soft’ insecurities, such as *cyber threats*, are a recurrent theme of Obama’s discourse, emerging as an essential tool in creating a favourable environment, construed as being conducive to economic and social progress, and aiming at shifting the balance of power towards more soft issues, such bargaining and diplomacy:

- (32) Just as jobs and businesses can now race across borders, so can *new threats and new challenges*. (Obama 2011)
- (33) You see, in a world of complex threats, our security, our leadership, depends on all elements of our power, including strong and principled diplomacy. (Obama 2014)

## **6. Conclusions**

As a core political, social and human value, ‘in/security’ has always played a vital role in US public discourse. Like other political and cultural keywords, ‘security’, in fact, does exist and has meaning only within social, political and cultural practices. Building on a longstanding research interest aiming to explore diachronic variation in specialised corpora of U.S. Presidential speeches (Bayley and Bevitori 2014, 2016; Bevitori 2014, 2015a) the paper has proposed a diachronic corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, within the framework of SFL, in order to explore how ‘in/security’, as a socially and historically constructed concept, has been construed in one of the most powerful institutional settings; the US presidency. In particular, the analysis of the selected lexical item THREAT has provided a case study to illuminate trends and patterns emerging from one specific register of presidential discourse - the State of the Union addresses throughout their long- span history, covering over two hundred years of presidential discourse. The linguistic and discursive diachronic investigation of the construction of what is ‘to be considered and collectively responded as a threat’ (Buzan et al. 1998: 26) shows that far from being fixed, notions of ‘in/security’ have changed and diversified over the centuries depending on a number of historical, as well as social and political factors. The analysis has highlighted the fact that isolated texts/speeches have meaning only within a larger framework which the notion provides, which endorses an evolutionary shift in representations of ‘in/security’ from the concrete to the more abstract. While in the period between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the most frequently constructed endangered entities broadly include the stability and the (financial) prosperity of the Union, in the period between the two World Wars, patterns related to ‘social in/security’ tend to prevail. However, with the end of World War II and the beginning of the early Cold War period, ‘in/security’ began to be strongly associated with military aggression, in which American peace and national security emerged as threatened entities. Crucially, this is also set to coincide with a dramatic rise of the frequency of the nominalised form *threat*\* throughout the period as a linguistic device adding complexity and

ambiguity, as discussed earlier. It is in fact in the aftermath of the Cold War era that the very concept of ‘in/security’ came increasingly under question; not only did the notion expand to include new types of ‘threat’ but, at the same time, new social and political priorities came to the fore, while others faded in importance. This has of course large implications for endorsing, legitimating or, conversely, contesting, political agendas to adequately respond to the problem(s) at stake, with different political and normative consequences.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The term ‘bully pulpit’ was first coined by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 to indicate an expansion of the presidential power and authority to influence the public.
- <sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the meanings of ‘keywords’ from distinct perspectives, see Bayley and Bevitori 2015: 62.
- <sup>3</sup> The concept of ‘securitization’ belongs to the field of international relations and is generally associated with the Copenhagen School of security studies whose main purpose is to understand issues related to: who securitizes, for whom, and on what issues (see Buzan et al. 1998). For a critique of the ‘securitization’ framework, see McDonald 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> With the exception of 1841, 1881, 1993 but twice in 1790 and 1891. A more detailed account is found in Bayley and Bevitori 2016.
- <sup>5</sup> According to Tulis (1987), the watershed between the traditional and modern era in the ‘rhetorical’ presidency is provided by President Wilson and his redefinition of the office. For a critique of the traditional/modern divide, see Teten 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> The texts are freely available at The American Presidency Project, at [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu) (accessed July 2014)
- <sup>7</sup> Small capitals indicate that all word-forms of the lemma are included.
- <sup>8</sup> The asterisk indicates all inflected forms of the word form.
- <sup>9</sup> For a discussion of environmental issues in US presidential speeches from a diachronic perspective, see Bevitori 2015a.
- <sup>10</sup> See Bayley and Bevitori 2015 for a discussion of how the concept of ‘social security’ has developed over time.
- <sup>11</sup> The *National Security Strategy* was first published in 1986 and became the highest official document stating US foreign and security policy.

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