

‘THE BATTLE OF IRAQ’
THE ADEQUATION OF SADDAM HUSSEIN AND
OSAMA BIN LADEN IN THE BUSH WAR ON TERROR NARRATIVE

Adam Hodges
University of Colorado

This paper was given as part of the Discourse, War and Terrorism panel, organized for the 2004 American Anthropological Association (AAA) annual meeting. Due to a change of the annual meeting from November 17-21 in San Francisco to December 15-19 in Atlanta, the panel met as part of a Society for Linguistic Anthropology forum held on November 19, 2004 in Berkeley, California. The paper was also posted as part of a virtual forum for the Annual Meeting and can be accessed at AnthroCommons.

On April 22, 2004, The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland released a study that showed "a majority of Americans (57%) continue to believe that before the war Iraq was providing substantial support to al Qaeda, including 20% who believe that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11 attacks" (PIPA 2004). Such public belief remained consistent since the February 2003 build up to the invasion of Iraq. Similarly, a Pew Research Center poll conducted at the beginning of October 2002 showed that two-thirds of Americans believed "Saddam Hussein helped the terrorists in the September 11th attacks" (Pew 2002).

How are we to explain studies such as these that illustrate a seeming disconnect between public perception and the evidence presented and agreed upon by experts? What strategies are at play in constructing a social reality where Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden are identified as co-conspirators?

In this critical discourse analysis, I examine the discursive linkage of these two entities into a cohesive enemy in the repeatedly told Bush War on Terror Narrative (BWOTN), using excerpts of presidential speeches from October 2002 through October 2003. My argument centers on the construct of adequation explicated by Bucholtz and Hall (2004) in their model of identity formation. I show how the tactic of adequation is at work in the BWOTN, where the narrator, President George W. Bush, discursively imposes similarities and erases differences on behalf of Iraq and al Qaeda to identify these otherwise disparate entities as a cohesive enemy alliance. This identity is legitimized through (1) a rhetorical coupling of past actions of "terror" carried out by Saddam Hussein with actions of "terror" conducted by al Qaeda to position the two entities in a category that is morally and politically equivalent, (2) a discursive matching of complementary roles each is capable of playing in an alliance - Iraq as a potential source of support (shelter, funding, arms, etc.) for terrorists and al Qaeda as a potential benefactor of such support, and (3) a narration that invokes a historical-causal entailment (Bruner 1991) between the past events of 9/11 and future possible events resulting from a supposed Iraq/al-Qaeda alliance.

As shown in this analysis, adequation is a tactic not only used by a group to assert its own identification, but can be used from an outside position to impose similarities on others. Used from a position of power, the tactic of imposed adequation at work in the BWOTN has played an important role in defining identities that shape socio-political interaction on a global scale and has had a profound impact on the state of world affairs.

References

Bucholtz, Mary and Kira Hall. 2004. "Language and Identity." In Alessandro Duranti (ed.) *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. 2002, October 10. "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy: Midterm Election Preview." Retrieved November 28, 2003 from the World Wide Web: <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=162>.

Program for International Policy Attitudes. 2004, April 22. "US Public Beliefs on Iraq and the Presidential Election." Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/IraqReport4_22_04.pdf.

Program for International Policy Attitudes. 2004, October 21. "The Separate Realities of Bush and Kerry Supporters." Retrieved from the World Wide Web: http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Pres_Election_04/Report10_21_04.pdf.