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## Leaders pressed to get a word in

Glen McGregor, The Ottawa Citizen

Published: Saturday, October 04, 2008

Though the National Arts Centre was equipped with a shot clock to time leaders' statements, a great failing of the televised debates was the absence of a scoreboard.

To determine a winner, viewers are left to rely on their own impressions, or turn to quickie polling with small sample sizes and the divergent hunches of the pundirati.

But some empirical statistics can still be drawn from the actual words the leaders spoke. A Polls Notes analysis of a debate transcript, drawn from the stream of closed-captioning text, shows that for pure verbiage, Conservative leader Stephen Harper held an edge.



17% Percentage of words spoken by STEPHANE DION  
22% Percentage of words spoken by JACK LAYTON  
17% Percentage of words spoken by ELIZABETH MAY  
10% Percentage of words spoken by GILLES DUCEPPE

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## 2 Hours, 19,000 Words -- Who Gabbed the Most at the English Debate?

Chris Wattie, Reuters

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Of the more than 19,000 words spoken in the two-hour session, Mr. Harper accounted for 22 per cent of them, just slightly ahead of New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton at 20 per cent. Liberal leader Stéphane Dion and Green leader Elizabeth May were comparatively silent, each accounting for 17 per cent of the chatter. Bloc Québécois chief Gilles Duceppe was a wallflower at 10 per cent and spoke fewer words than even host Steve Paikin.

Mr. Harper leaned on his favourite phrase, "Let's be clear," on six occasions, while Mr. Layton matched with six references to petroleum corporation Exxon.

The name of U.S. President George W. Bush was dropped 12 times, including one reference from Mr. Harper.

Other popular buzzwords included: "Iraq" (7 times), "Afghanistan" (24), "environment/al" (14), "economy/economic" (83), "green" (18), "jobs" (54), "arts" or "culture" (47) and "sweater" (2).

### PLUS ÇA CHANGE

The latest overnight head count from pollster Nik Nanos shows a marked shift in the horse race numbers, particularly in Quebec, where he has the Tories dropping into third place as the Liberals surge seven percentage points on the strength of the French-language leaders' debate. Nationally, Nanos says the Tory lead has dropped to just five percentage points.

Projecting these numbers onto the 2006 election results produces a familiar result -- the Tories would return to government with 123 seats -- one fewer than the last election, while the Liberals form the official Opposition with 105 seats, or two better than their 2006 haul, the Seat-o-Matic reveals. In this scenario, the NDP and Bloc are only a few seats off their current totals, too, while the Greens are left bridesmaids once again.

If this pattern holds on election day, one might well ask: 36 days and \$300 million for what, exactly?

### WHOSE NEWSWATCH?

For many election obsessives, news aggregator Nationalnewswatch.com has become a prime source for online

info during the campaign. The site has become so successful that it has had to throttle back on its bandwidth by limiting the number of photographs that appear on its homepage.

By clipping headlines and linking to any source it chooses, National Newswatch is able to offer comprehensive election summary in a way that other mainstream media companies cannot -- unless they decide to link to competitors' sites, as the Globe and Mail does in a limited way on its politics page.

And while other aggregator sites have flamed out over allegations of political bias, Newswatch has proved comparatively even-handed -- or at least, the charges of bias have come from blogging Tories and Libs alike.

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