

Using context to identify the language of face-saving

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Aristotelian ethos or credibility is reflected through the use of language. We examine the language of face-saving in parliamentary arguments. In **oral question period** in a Westminster-style parliamentary system, the opposition asks **confrontational** questions, which require a defensive face-saving response, whereas government backbenchers ask **friendly and promotional** questions, for which a response need not be defensive. Can we distinguish the two kinds of response?

Reputation-threatening question and answer pair

Q. [John Reynolds] Mr. Speaker, the former finance minister continues to amaze the crowds with his dance of the veils, with the ethics counsellor standing just off stage catching whatever is shed. The first layer was the blind trust that no one could see through. Next came blind management. Now we are down to the last and flimsiest layer, the supervisory agreement. Could the Prime Minister explain why the former finance minister was allowed the opportunity for hands on management by the ethics counsellor while all other ministers adhered to the stricter blind trust or blind management agreements?

A. [John Manley] Mr. Speaker, the arrangements that were in place were those that were appropriate to the circumstances and, in fact, reflect the views of the Parker commission that reviewed these matters in the past. The former minister complied entirely with the requirements before him.

Non-threatening question and answer pair

Q. [Shawn Murphy] Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. Recently we have been reading more and more articles in the media concerning high levels of sulphur in fuels, air pollution and health problems that result from these high levels. On this issue could the minister tell the House what actions are being taken to deal with the issue of high sulphur levels in fuels in Canada?

A. [David Anderson] Mr. Speaker, the announcement I made earlier this year covers gasoline, diesel and fuel oils outside road fuels. It will reduce the amount of sulphur in gasoline from its average now of 360 parts per million to 30 parts per million. In on road diesel, the figure will go from 500 parts per million to 15. The dates for this are the end of 2004 for gasoline and June 1, 2006, for diesel.

Novel dataset for analyzing reputation defence:

Question and answer pairs during the oral question period of the Canadian parliamentary proceedings (Hansard) from 1994 to 2014.

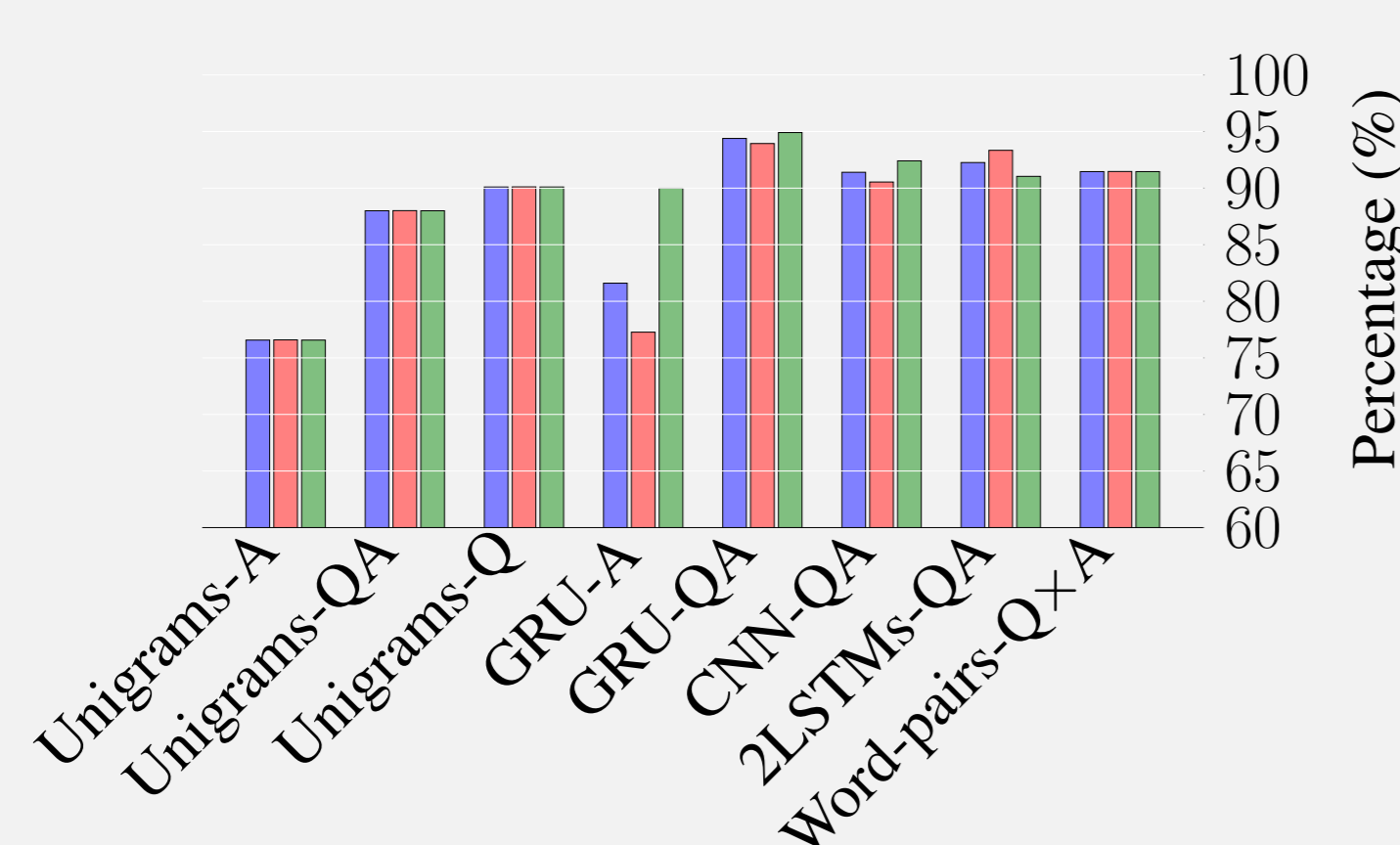
Governing party	Threatening	Non-threatening
Liberal and Conservative	4,524	4,524
Liberal	11,090	1,736
Conservative	11,504	2,004

Our approach:

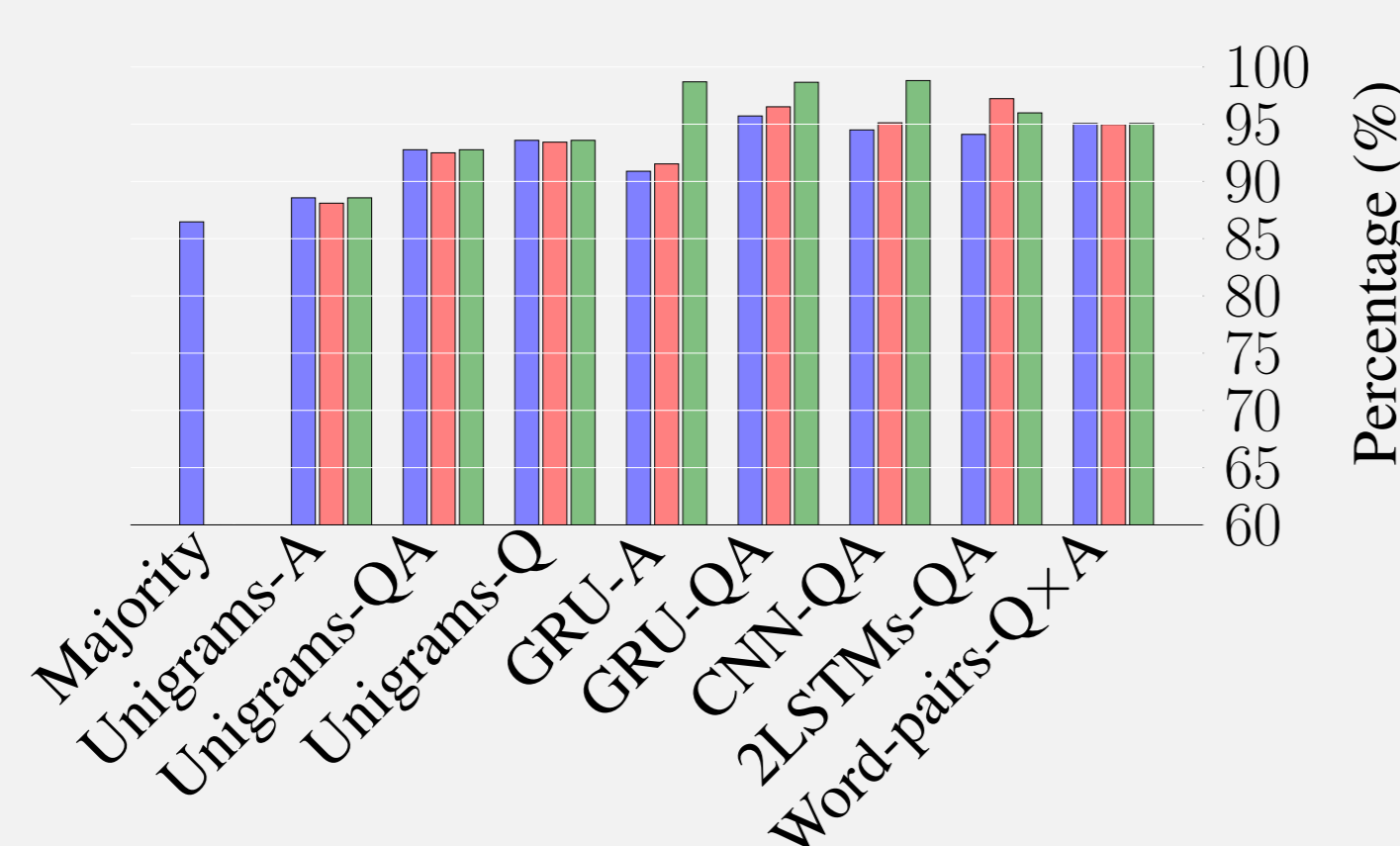
- Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN)
- Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM)
- Gated Recurrent Units (GRU)
- SVM classifier trained with all possible combinations of words extracted from cross-product of questions and answers

Five-fold cross-validation

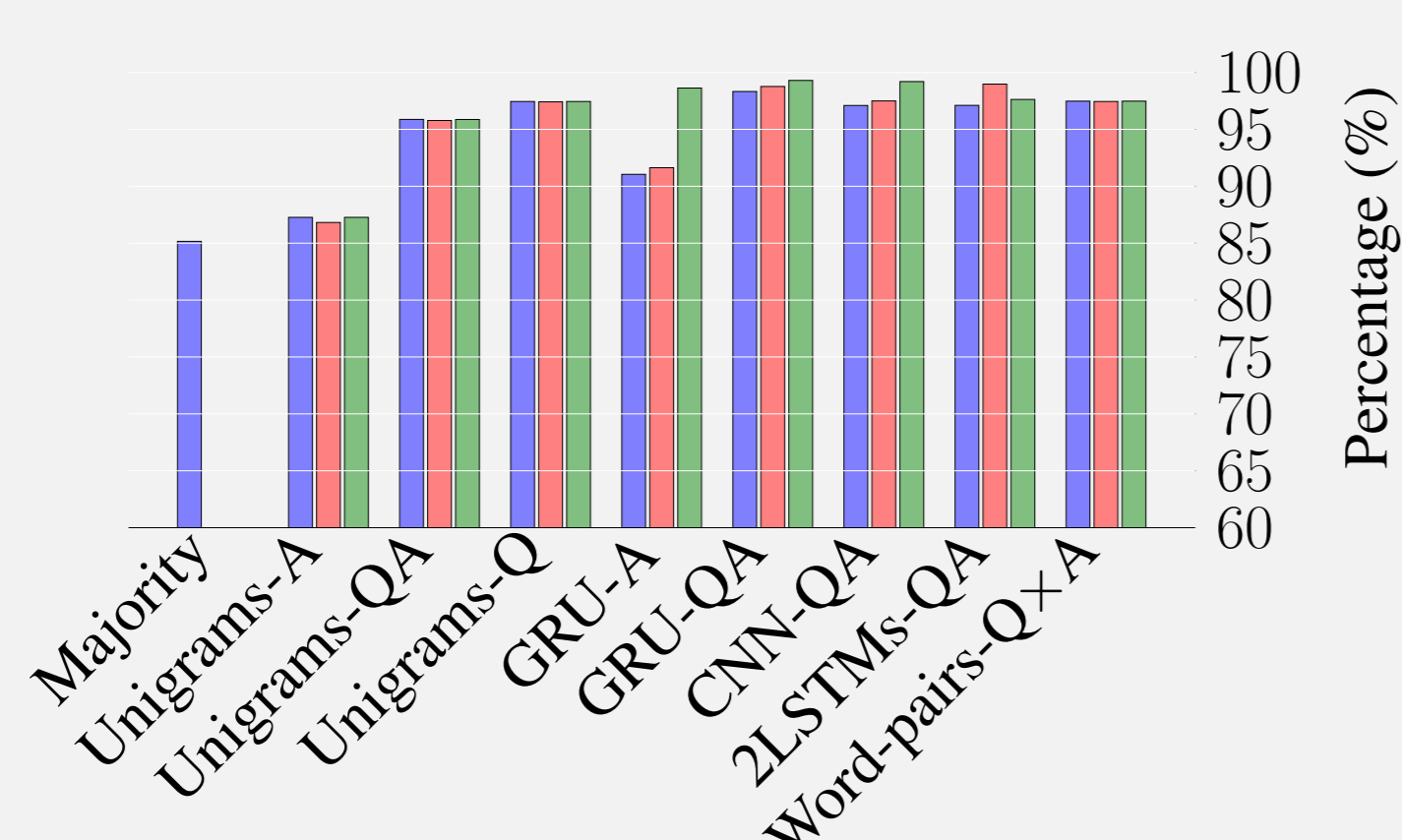
Canada 1994–2014; Threatening: 4,524; Non-threatening: 4,524



Liberal governing party; Threatening: 11,090; Non-threatening: 1,736



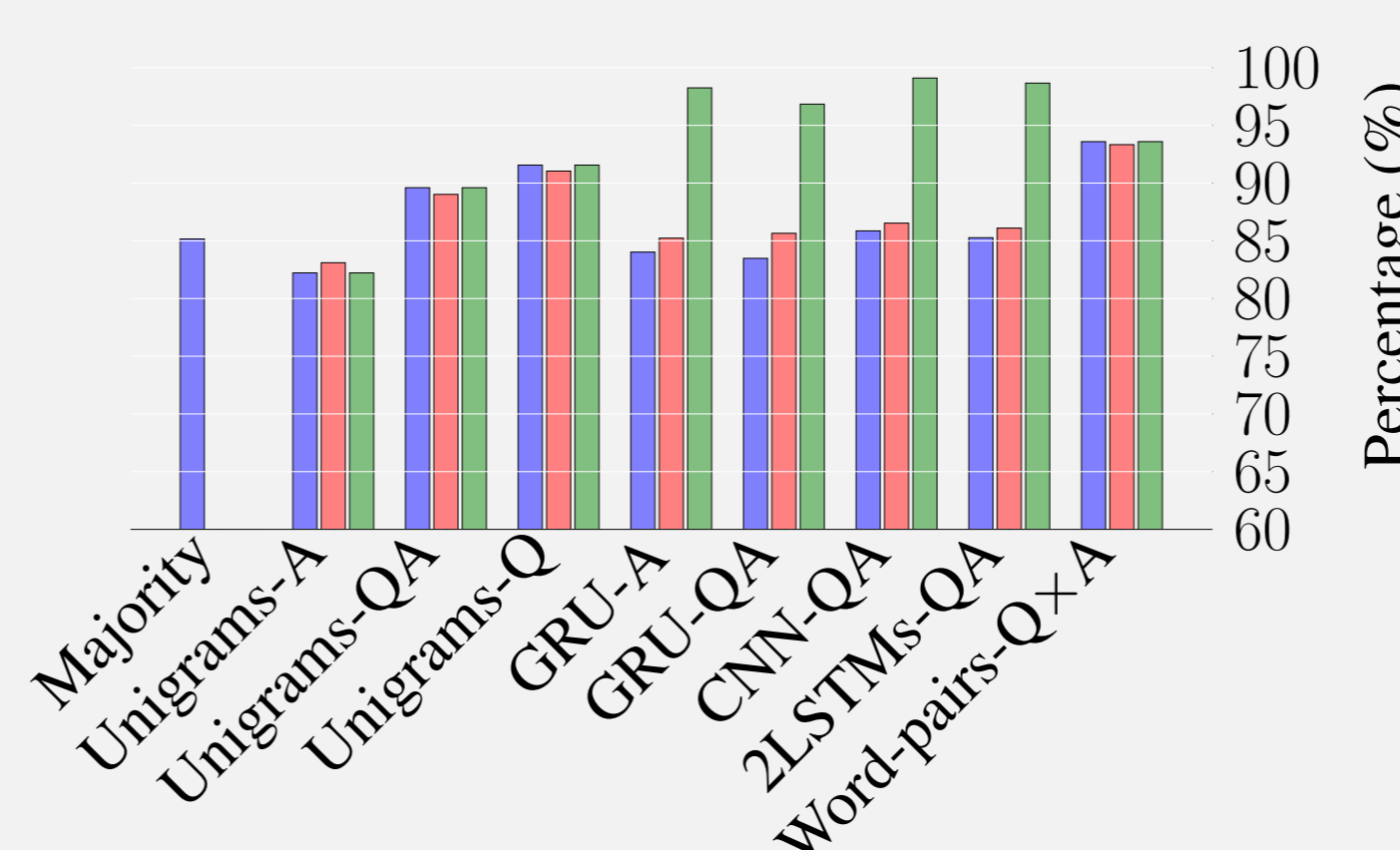
Conservative governing party; Threatening: 11,504; Non-threatening: 2,004



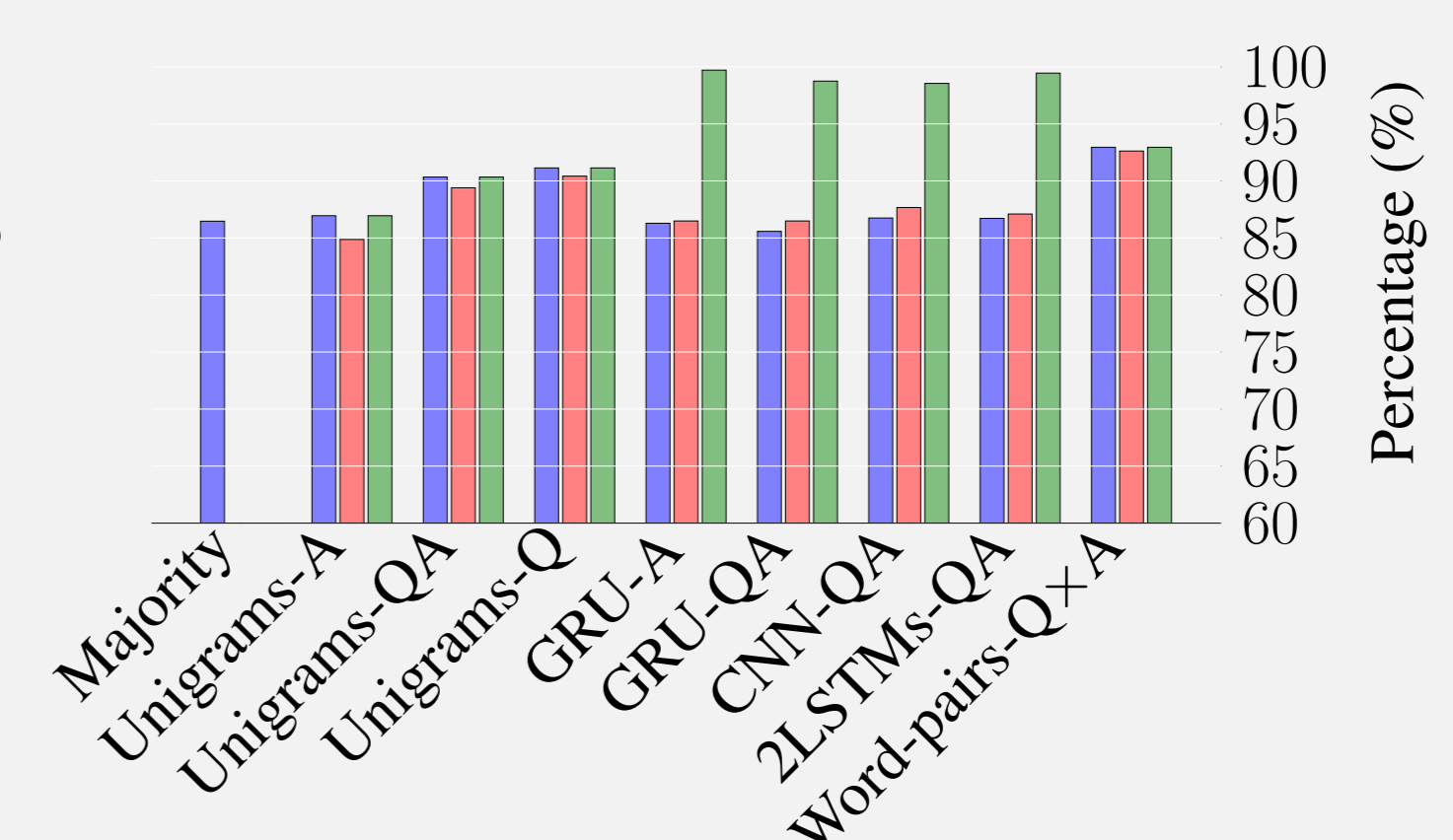
■ Accuracy ■ Precision ■ Recall

Cross-parliament setting

Train on Liberals and test on Conservatives

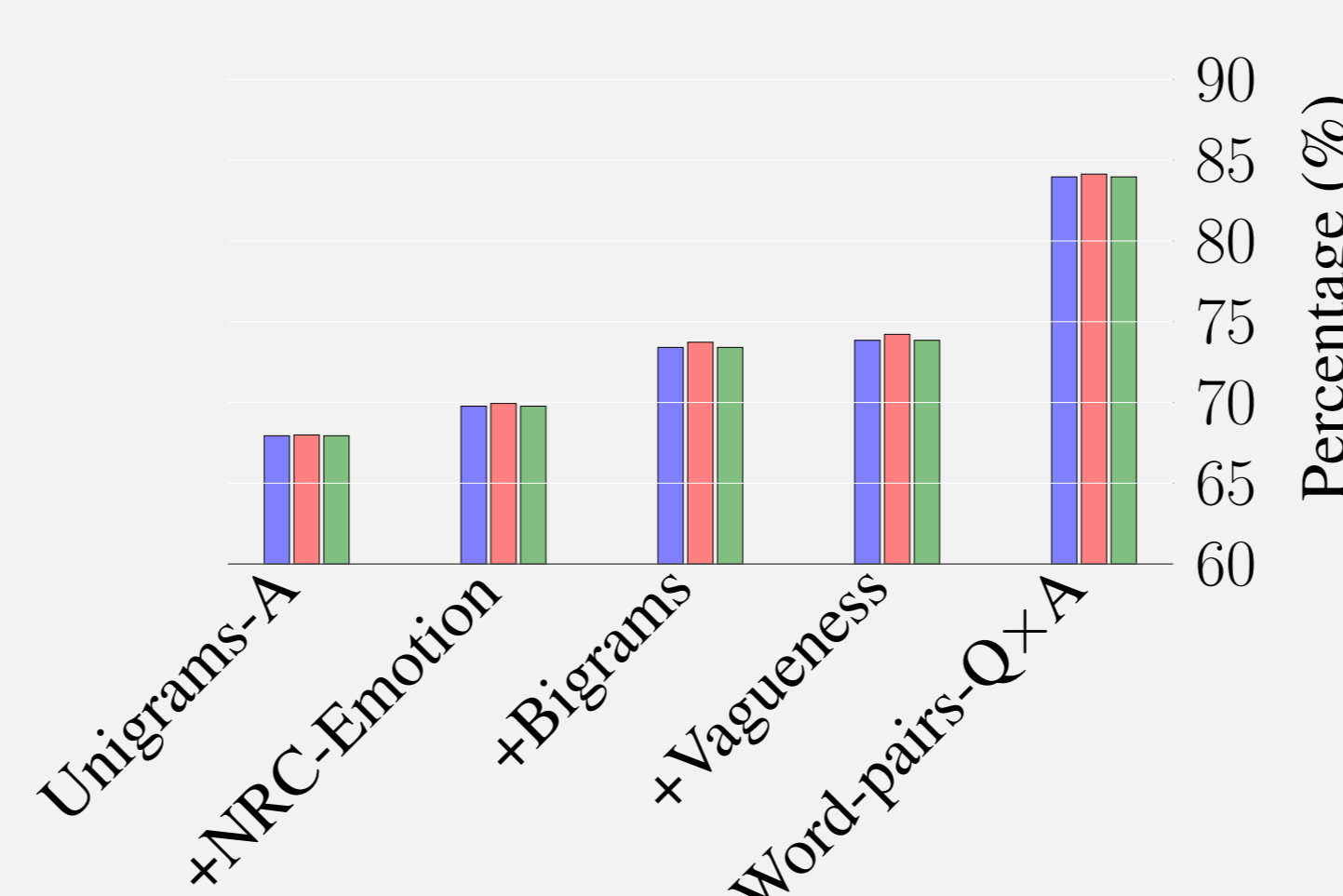


Train on Conservatives and test on Liberals

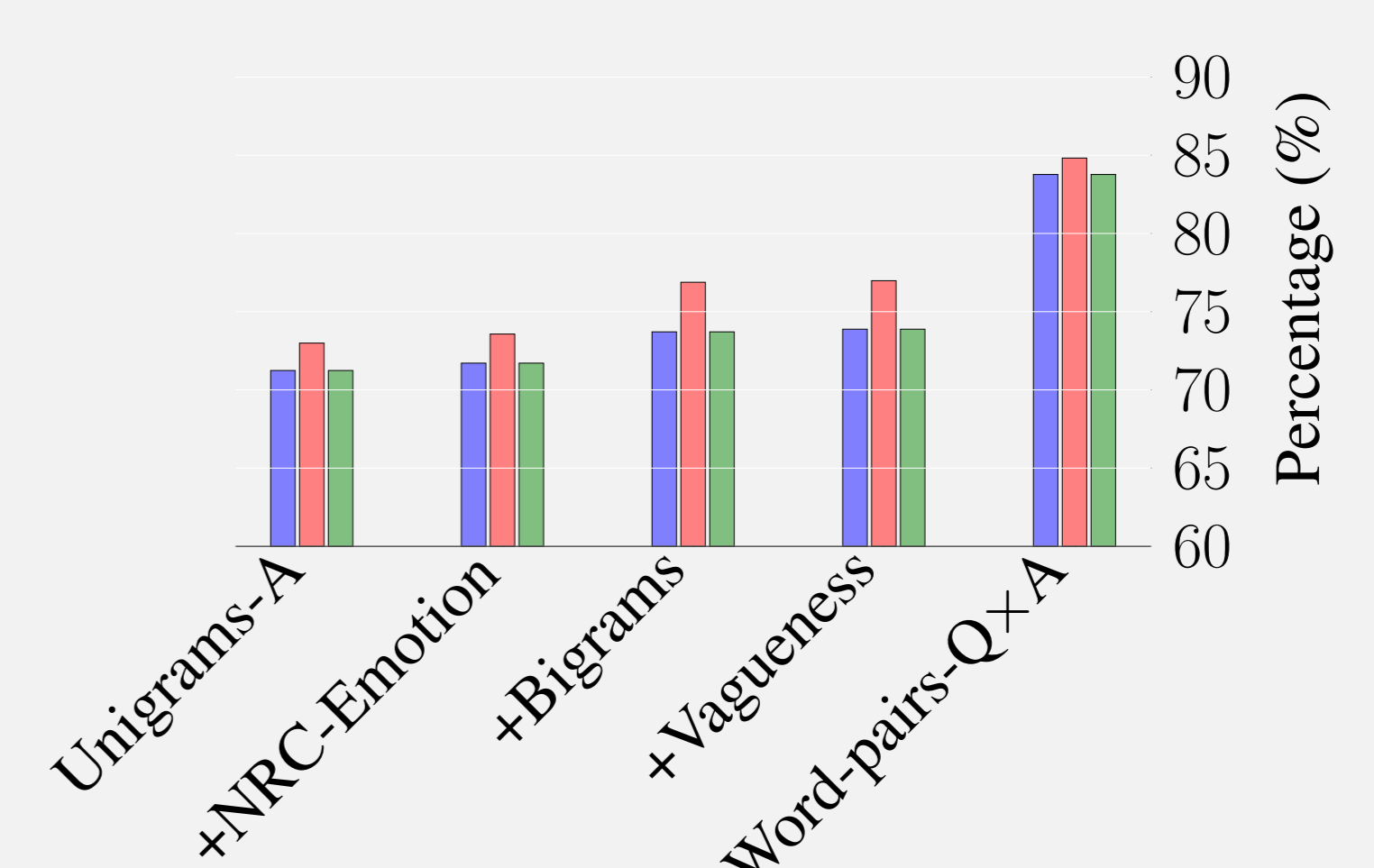


Cross-parliament setting with balanced data (1,700 each class)

Train on Liberals and test on Conservatives



Train on Conservatives and test on Liberals



- Reputation defence language can be detected with high accuracy regardless of differences in ideologies.
- Bigrams, NRC emotions (anger+pos+neg), and vagueness cues can help distinguish the language of face-saving.