

Culture & Communication

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Anthropology 4, Winter 2021

Lecture 13: Narrating the Political Self

Topics

1. The Presentation of Self in political speeches
(see Chapter 10 in Reader)
2. Constructing a coherent, authentic Self
3. Taking Context into consideration
4. Taking the Audience/Recipient(s) into consideration

Language, the measure of our lives

“We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the **measure of our lives.**” (Toni Morrison, *Nobel Prize Lecture*)

Novels:

The Bluest Eye (1970)

Sula (1973)

Tar Baby (1981)

Dreaming Emmett (a play)

Beloved (1987)

Jazz (1992)

Paradise (1997)

Home (2012)

God Helped the Child (2015)



What makes humans different?

Social organization?

Culture?

Language?

Morality?

Reflexivity?

e.g., Knowing we are mortal? Knowing that we know?
Knowing that we can lie? Wondering about the meaning of
life (in general and our own)?

We “measure” our life with language

Construction of a **self**

Existential **dilemmas** in narratives of personal experience

Coherence vs. authenticity (Ochs 2004)

Existential coherence

Radical reflexivity (Charles Taylor 1991) about who I
should be and who I want to be

Coherence vs. Authenticity

“In recounting narratives of personal experience, tellers are pulled between their desire to arrive at a **coherent** account of life events and their desire to construct an account that is **authentic**, that is, that resonates with their understandings and sensibilities of what it was like to participate in the events being narrated. The **desire for coherence** of life experience is so strong, however, that it often overwhelms the **desire for authenticity**. Narrators want an explanation of events and moral guidelines for participating in them. In their desire to make sense out of events, they construct for themselves and for their interlocutors narratives that have a beginning, a middle, and an end, wrapped in a cloak of moral certainty” (Ochs 2004, “Narrative Lessons”, p. 278, emphasis added)

Connecting with audience

To explain who we are, we need to connect to our audience, for them to take our point of view, we need to show we can take their point of view.

Recipient Design (from Conversation Analysis)

Humor

Lack of Coherence? Truth?

An “Independent” – meaning?

“I have never been there [i.e. Washington]”

Existential Coherence

Narratives of Belonging

“we have been here all this time ...”

“I know what people in the 22nd district believe in
because- [...] you are ... the people with whom
we've lived our lives.”



Walter Capps, 11-13-1995, Paso Robles

Nov, 1995

Capps: [...] because uh, Lois and I ... have lived here, in fact the first time we came in here in- August of 1964, **we stayed across the street.** we- we came out from- from uh, Yale University, uh to teach uh at **U.C. Santa Barbara.** and we came down from Oregon. we stopped across the street, had a- ... had a- .. we were carrying a- trailer with uh, our belongings. we didn't have any children then that was in nineteen-sixty-four.... we've been here a:ll this time... we've lived here a:ll these years. we know the people... of the twenty-second district..., you know- ..., **our children were born. in the twenty-second district.** they've all gone to school here. ... uh so what I'm suggesting is, ... not only suggesting I know this to be the case: that I represent ... majority. opinion. in the twenty-second district. I mean=1 know what people in the twenty-second district believe in because- these are our people.... you are- ... the people with whom we've lived our lives.

Aug 1996

Capps: I've been on the faculty at the University of California at Santa Bar- bara for- about thirty years. ... uh went to public schools. ... uh got my Ph.D. from Yale University =came out with my wife Lois who is here today. ... uhm ... our children were born and raised in ... Santa Barbara ... **in the 22nd district.** they've gone on- they all went through uhm ... college in- uh- in California=the oldest one went to Stanford.... Just got her PhD from UCLA the middle one went to- to UCSB and went to ... uh the University of Sydney. in Australia. the youngest one was an honor student at **UC Berkeley** and now works in the White House.

Recipient Design

Referents are identified as relevant to the “context,” e.g., taking the point of view of the recipient/listener and the on-going activity.

“ ... our children were born and raised in ... Santa Barbara ... in the 22nd district.”

“they've gone on- they all went through uhm ... college in- uh- in California”

Coherence vs. Authenticity

“they've gone on- they all went through uhm ... college in- uh- **in California**=the oldest one went to Stanford.... Just got her PhD from **UCLA** the middle one went to- to **UCSB** and went to ... uh the **University of Sydney. in Australia.** the youngest one was an honor student at **UC Berkeley** and now works in the White House. ...”

Independent Candidate

“I’m a **native Californian** and I’ve lived in this district for seventeen years. ...”

“I have also been surfing since I was eleven. I’ve uh been up and down the **Central Coast** lately and uh- fortunately the waves have been flat so I’ve uh- been able to spend more time campaigning”

“... And I have coached my son’s soccer team over the last three years.” (August 9, 1996)



Wheeler – Debate in Santa Maria, Aug 9, 1996

Grammar: Tense & aspect in English

Past tense (*he walked in*)

Historical present (*he walks in*)

Present perfect (*he has walked in*)

Past perfect (*he had walked in*)

Present progressive (*he is walking*)

Past progressive (*he was walking*)

Use of Perfective

- a. we have lived in this district for thirty years
- b. we've raised our children here.
- c. I've been a member of the University of California at Santa Barbara.
- d. I've been on the faculty at the University of California at Santa Barbara for about thirty years.
- e. I've lived in this district for seventeen years. I've served on the board to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Santa Barbara J.C.'s, the Santa Barbara County Food Bank, and the Environmental Defense Center.
- g. I've been up and down the Central Coast lately
- h. the waves have been flat
- i. I've coached my son's s- soccer team over the last three years.

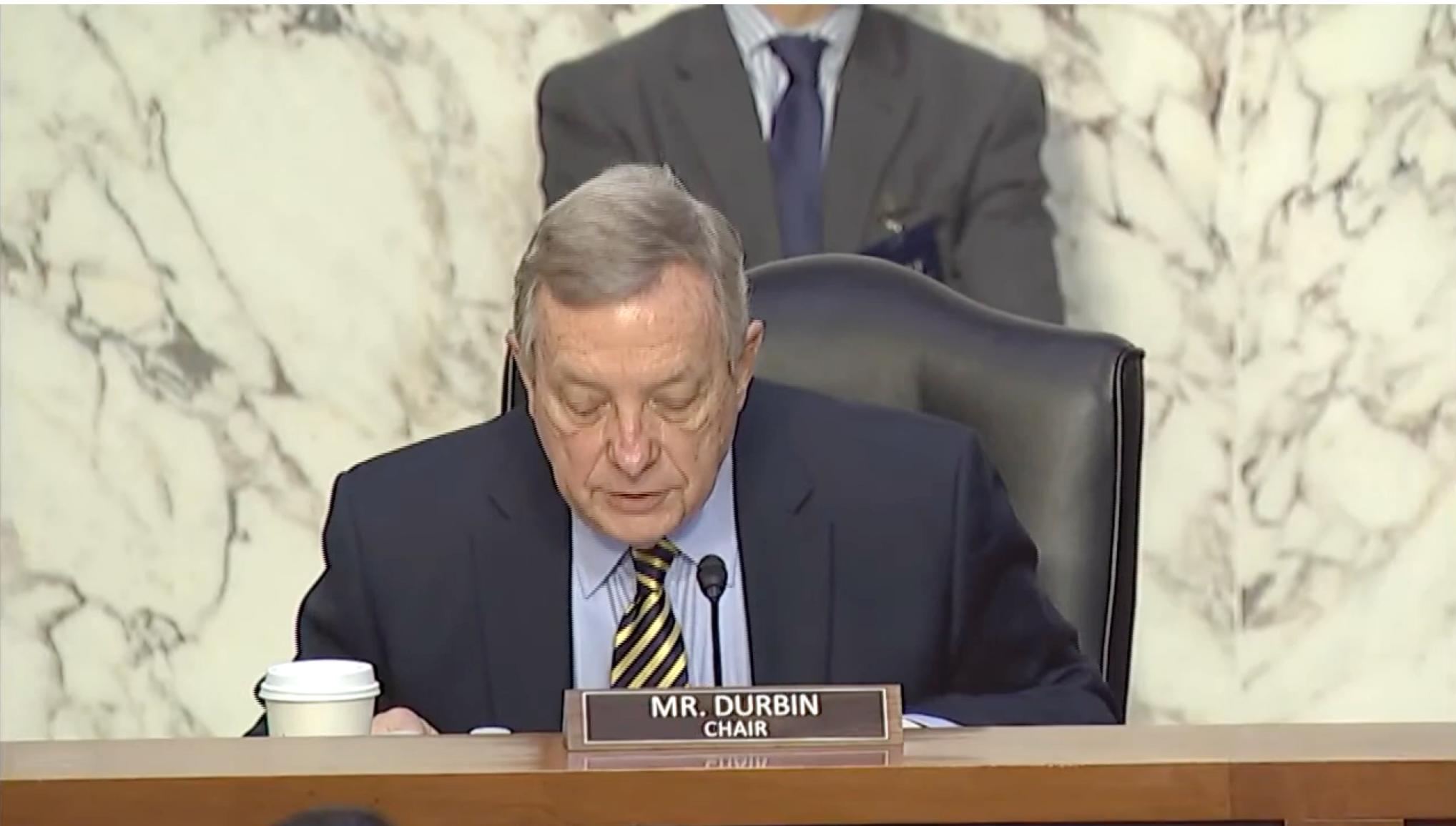
Fixing potential contradictions

Wheeler; I believe that the terms pro business and pro environment do not need to be mutually exclusive terms not only in this district but in this country. (9 August 1996)

February 22,

Judge M. Garland Testimony, Senate Confirmation Hearings.

Let's listen to Garland's opening statement.



Judge M. Garland Testimony, Senate Confirmation Hearings, First Day

Let's think about the CONTEXT

What is going on here?

What is planned, expected and what is being done through language.

Let's examine the transcript.

(rough) Transcript on C-SPAN

THANK YOU MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE.

I AM HONORED TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY AS THE PRESIDENTS -- AS THE PRESIDENT'S NOMINEE TO BE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.

I WOULD LIKE, FIRST, TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO INTRODUCE YOU TO MY WIFE, MY DAUGHTERS, JESSE AND BECKY, AND MY SON-IN-LAW XAN. I AM GRATEFUL TO THEM, MY ENTIRE EXTENDED FAMILY THAT IS WATCHING TODAY ON C-SPAN, EVERY DAY OF MY LIFE.

THE PRESIDENT NOMINATES THE ATTORNEY GENERAL TO BE THE LAWYER, NOT FOR ANY INDIVIDUAL, BUT FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.

Discussion of beginning of Garland's opening statement.

Focus on who is mentioned.

Similarity with Capps' political speech in his campaign?

A similar but different Event

Another Confirmation Hearing

For CIA Director



Senate Confirmation Hearings of William Burns as CIA Director (Opening Statement starts at 1m:50s)

Coherence, authenticity and Recipient Design

How does Burns start his opening statement?

Does he mention his family?

When and how?

How is the mention of the family members used? To do what?

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