UCLA

UCLA Previously Published Works

Title

Narrating the political self in a campaign for US Congress

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2hb9v6pj>

Journal

Language in Society, 35(4)

ISSN

0047-4045

Author

Duranti, Alessandro

Publication Date

2006-09-01

Peer reviewed

**The Struggle For Coherence:
Rhetorical Strategies and Existential Dilemmas
in a Campaign for the U.S. Congress**

Alessandro Duranti

Department of Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles

Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553

Abstract

Through an examination of the talk produced during a campaign for the U.S. Congress, it is argued that some of the candidates' rhetorical strategies can best be understood in terms of their common struggle to create and sustain a sense of coherence of their Self. Other-generated struggle is shown to be based on competing and yet equally legitimate interpretations of what someone said. Self-generated struggle is expressed through three discursive strategies: (1) constructing a narrative of belonging; (2) casting the present as a natural extension of the past; and (3) exposing potential contradictions in order to show how to solve them. A correlation emerges between political identification and the public articulation of personal life experiences and existential dilemmas: the three strategies are used by those candidates who want to present themselves as independent from a particular party's platform or ideology. (Political discourse, U.S. political campaigns, coherence of the self; narrative analysis; conflict)

Introduction¹

In this article, I use data collected in the mid-1990s during a year-long study of a Congressional campaign in California in order to examine the discursive strategies candidates use to maintain a coherent presentation of Self while facing the demands of the political process. I propose to think of this process as a “struggle” that is enacted through the narrative construction of the candidates’ connection to the voters and the public problem-solving of their existential dilemmas. On the basis of the data I collected, I will distinguish between *other-generated* and *self-generated* struggle, that is, between a struggle that is directly brought about by someone else’s explicit or implicit criticism and the struggle that results from a candidate’s own personal search for existential coherence. The other-generated struggle is made visible in situations in which a candidate’s statements are subject to critical scrutiny by his or her opponents or the media. I discuss two such cases and show the crucial role played by semantic and pragmatic ambiguity. In the case of what I call self-generated struggle, I will identify three discursive strategies used by candidates to resolve the issue of coherence: (1) constructing a narrative of belonging; (2) casting the present as a natural extension of the past; and (3) exposing potential contradictions in order to show how to solve them. After examining the extent to which each strategy is common across candidates and situations, I will show that a correlation emerges between political identification and the public articulation of personal life experiences and existential dilemmas: those candidates who want to present themselves as independent from a particular party’s platform or ideology are also the ones who are more likely to use the three strategies mentioned above.

On the other hand, the same strategies are not used by those candidates who more closely identify with a party line or ideology.

Discursive Consciousness

The present study is based on an assumption that is common among contemporary discourse analysts, namely, that individuals' perspectives on their own experiences – including their emotional stance and the awareness of this stance – are often articulated and worked out through talk. If politicians are no exception to this kind of *discursive consciousness*, we might hypothesize that what a candidate *says* throughout a political campaign might offer valuable insights into the dilemmas that characterize any effort to gain the support and approval of a large number of people, an endeavor that is at the core of political campaigns. Understanding a candidate's dilemmas should, in turn, help us understand a number of important cultural assumptions, including the expectations that candidates and voters have about the "ideal" candidate and what is needed to achieve such an ideal status.

Studies in a variety of fields including anthropology, sociology, and psychology have taught us that human beings are constantly engaged in the construction of Self and in the evaluation and monitoring of such a construction. We know that language or rather discourse – the temporal unfolding of linguistic communication – plays a major role in this existential-pragmatic enterprise, enabling individual speakers to articulate their self-understanding through a shared medium and in contexts where others are able to concur, correct, object, or re-direct the meaning of what is being said. Candidates worry about how to project and maintain an image of themselves as beings whose past, present, and

future actions, beliefs, and evaluations follow some clear basic principles, none of which contradict one another. This type of *existential coherence* is often dependent upon, but on a different level from, the textual coherence (or cohesion) associated with the ways in which different parts of a text can be said to form a whole (e.g. Conte 1988; Halliday and Hasan 1976; Stubbs 1983; van Dijk 1977)². Existential coherence is, however, closely related to the coherence speakers-as-narrators search for and construct (e.g. Ochs & Capps 2001; Ochs 2004). As they narrate past experiences and accomplishments and project their future (as leaders, representatives, advocates, etc.) to their potential voters, political candidates closely monitor whether what they (and their opponents) say on one occasion may contradict what they (or their opponents) already said (or are likely to say) in another. They know that voters, opponents, and representatives of the media are continually evaluating their statements as evidence for a particular type of *person* – in the anthropological sense first introduced by Marcel Mauss (1938) – that may or may not be fit to adequately represent the interest of the voters.

As such, the struggle for coherence is both other- and self-oriented. On one hand, candidates are concerned with how to save face in front of an audience that evaluates their actions and words and might catch them in a contradiction. Candidates are, in other words, constantly asking the pragmatic question: “Am I (through my words, the positions I take and the decisions that I make) the person I *said* (or promised) to be?” On the other hand, they must also deal with their own sense of coherence. That is, they face the question: “Am I (through my words, the positions I take and the decisions that I make) the person I *want* to be?” It is precisely through their search for ways of presenting themselves as

politically coherent beings that they display in public their own theory of what an ideal candidate should be.

The coherence struggle intersects with morality to the extent to which coherence is presented as evidence for the truth of what a candidate says and therefore of his or her value as a moral being.

Politicians and Ordinary Citizens

Before introducing the data on which my analysis is based, I need to address some commonsense assumptions about politicians as speakers.

The idea that we can use politicians' talk to infer their inner struggle over presentation of Self might be objectionable for those who believe that politicians' talk is crafted – often by others or at least in collaboration with others – to be impenetrable to their true beliefs and desires. In this popular view of political rhetoric, politicians' public speeches do not necessarily reflect what they really think and feel but what they (or their staff) would like the public to believe that they think and feel. An extreme, but not uncommon version of this view is the belief that politicians simply "lie." This view is well represented in the following quote:

When he started as a young man on *The Times* Louis Heren was give a piece of advice by an old hack. He was told you should always ask yourself when talking to a politician: "Why is this lying bastard lying to me?" I think that is quite a sound principle from which to operate. (Jones 1992:53; quoted by Clayman and Heritage 2002:31)

If it were true that politicians routinely lie, there would be little use in analyzing their talk as a window into their inner struggles, including the coherence struggle. Such struggles would have been purposely hidden from us or “edited out” by skillful speech-writers. This kind of attitude may be responsible for accepting gossip as a more reliable source of information than whatever a candidate might say in public. However, I find this information-seeking strategy is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it undermines the value of taking seriously what politicians say and encourages a dismissive – even nihilistic or fatalistic – attitude towards conducting serious empirical research on political discourse. Second, it obscures potential and actual differences between politicians by indiscriminately casting them as equally manipulative and untrustworthy. Third, it encourages alternative and questionable investigative practices such as the search for information on the basis of third-person accounts or gossip. This is a form of discourse that social scientists must consider highly problematic. As studies of gossip³ demonstrate, rather than representing a genuine and candid source of accurate information, gossip is itself a form of social control with different constraints from those that regulate public speech, but with no higher claim to veracity.

Another commonly held and highly questionable popular assumption is that politicians are different from ordinary people because they are “acting” instead of just “being” themselves. Yet, as sociologist Erving Goffman pointed out, in everyday life all individuals can be said to “act,” in the sense that behavior in public places can be better understood if we think of any public arena (e.g. a street, a café, an office, a classroom) as a “stage” where we are engaged in the representation and management of a public persona – what Goffman [1959] called “face.” Simply put, we *all* want to “look good,” “sound good,” and be thought of as a “good person.”

Furthermore, we *all* want to have our behavior approved of by others – this is what Brown and Levinson [1978] call our “positive face,” regardless of whether we are running for public office. In fact, as succinctly captured by the 1960s feminist slogan “the personal is political” and more recently demonstrated by the analysis of family interaction (e.g. Ochs and Taylor 1992), even the most private moments are characterized by stances, postures, claims, and struggles that are intrinsically political.

In questioning some of the commonsense assumptions about politicians and political discourse, I am promoting an anthropological stance toward contemporary political discourse. This is a research method that is meant to suspend or “bracket” any preconceptions that we might have about politicians based on our commonsense knowledge (e.g. as citizens, voters, etc.), while carefully examining the details of their actions (talk included) across social contexts. Such an examination does reveal some differences between politicians and ordinary citizens. For example, politicians spend more time and resources than most people to study the effects of their past (or future) actions on their audience and, in turn, audiences are typically more watchful and demanding of politicians than they are of other public figures or private citizens. Most individuals making plans about what to do next (e.g. tell their boss that they want a raise, ask someone to go out for dinner, talk to their children about improving their school performance) cannot rely on the professional expertise that is available to politicians, who feel that they must raise money in part to have access to expert advice. On the other hand, although polling hundreds or thousands of people before deciding what to do next is an option that is out of reach for most people, consulting experts is not uncommon. Most people at one point or another have a chance or may be forced to consult with doctors, accountants, lawyers, plumbers, mechanics,

coaches, teachers, spiritual leaders, and others. Even more common is the unsolicited and unpaid problem-solving with friends and relatives about past or future actions that goes on around the dinner table (e.g. Ochs & Taylor 1992) or other communal events, regardless of whether or not such events are name or institutionally recognized. As we occasionally read in the popular press and as I documented in my research, such informal consulting is actually quite common among politicians as well.

For all of these reasons, it is important to avoid establishing an a priori divide between politicians and ordinary citizens. It is equally important to treat their speech with the same care that we, as discourse analysts, devote to the speech of any other person. Furthermore, if we are interested in the meaning of particular rhetorical strategies and the ways in which language can reveal a person's assumptions, goals, and struggles, we need to collect data that would allow us to compare the actions (words included) of one individual speaker across situations. As we shall see, following one or more individuals across time and space – what developmental psychologists call the “longitudinal method” – provides us with insights that would be missed were we to base our study only on interviews or surveys.

Walter Capps' Second Campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives

From November 13, 1995 through November 6, 1996, I documented a political campaign for the U.S. House of Representative in the Central Coast of California known (at the time) as the 22nd district (a territory that included the cities of Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, San Luis Obispo, and Paso Robles). The candidate whose campaign I documented was Walter Holden Capps, a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB)⁴, who

had no previous experience in politics with the exception of a brief campaign (in 1993-94) for the same seat, which he lost by less than 1% of the votes to former California Assemblywoman Andrea Seastrand (Republican). Although considered by many to be an unusual candidate, Capps had previously shown signs of interest in and commitment to public issues. They included international conflict and national identity, as demonstrated by his unorthodox and highly successful course at UCSB on the Vietnam War⁵, where he invited people with vastly different views of the war (e.g. war veterans, anti-war activists, politicians) to discuss their war or anti-war experience and think publicly about the roots of war, its implications, and what could be done to avoid it⁶. A Lutheran, Capps was interested professionally and personally in a wide range of religious beliefs and practices, including Buddhism, monasticism, and Native American religion (Capps 1983, 1989; Hultkrantz and Capps 1976). He often spoke about the “human spirit” as a positive force that should be protected and respected.

I met Walter Capps in August 1994 through his daughter Lisa, who was then a graduate student in clinical psychology at UCLA. In part because of Lisa’s vivid stories about her father’s first campaign, when I met Walter Capps for the second time, on January 9, 1995 (at Lisa’s son David’s baptism), I asked him whether he was going to run again and introduced him to the idea of an ethnographic video-project on the new campaign. He was immediately interested and said that if he decided to run again, he would call me. A few months later he did. What followed was an unusual project and an experience that profoundly affected my professional and personal life and, according to Capps himself, it had an impact on him as well.

From November 1995 to November 1996, I was with Walter and Lois Capps on the campaign trail for a total of twenty one days. In addition to being with them in Santa Barbara, I also traveled in their car to Paso Robles, Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Lompoc, San Luis Obispo, and Oceano. I always brought my video camera and tried to video tape as much as possible of Walter Capps' interactions at his home, in the car, and before, during and after rallies and public debates. Although after a certain point in the campaign I was denied access to the Capps-For-Congress headquarters (one member of his staff was particularly adamant about stopping me from videotaping the staff at work), Walter and Lois never asked me to turn the camcorder off or to erase any portion of what I had recorded. In addition to fieldnotes and printed material (from the headquarters⁷ or from the press), I recorded about 40 hours of video taped material that documents Capps interacting with a wide range of people, including his opponents. I also had a number of occasions to informally talk with many of the people involved in the campaign and I interviewed Capps' daughter Lisa on camera about her views of the campaign and the impact on her family.

The campaign was a very close and dramatic political race. In March 1996, Walter Capps fainted and had to be hospitalized (the word "heart attack" was avoided by campaign staff and by the doctors). In May of the same year, while Walter and Lois Capps were driving home on Highway 154, they were injured in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. As a result of his injuries, Walter Capps was confined to a wheel chair and kept away from the campaign trail for several weeks. The sharp differences between Capps and incumbent Seastrand drew national attention. There were articles in *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*, and the race was featured on National Public Radio programs and on ABC

Nightline. Capps' campaign received the backing of important political figures in the then Democratic administration, including a visit and rally in Santa Barbara with Hillary Clinton on September 12, 1996, an even bigger rally with President Clinton on November 1st, and two visits by George Stephanopolous, whose personal assistant was Laura Capps, Walter's younger daughter. At the end, Capps won the congressional seat – the first Democrat in 50 years to win this position in his district (see Table 1).

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Party affiliation</i>	<i>Number of Votes</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Walter H. Capps	Democratic	102,915	49%
Andrea Seastrand	Republican	90,374	43%
Steven Wheeler	Independent	8,308	4%
Richard D. Porter	Reform Party	3, 429	2%
David L. Bersohn	Libertarian	1,948	1%
Dawn Tomastick	Natural Law Party	1,569	1%

TABLE 1. Final results of November 6, 1996 election, California 22nd District (San Luis Obispo-Santa Barbara) (*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 7, 1996, Section A, p. 24)

It was a happy ending for him and for my project given that I had ended up with a rare documentation of a successful campaign. Less than a year later, as I was starting to analyze my transcripts and video tapes, Walter Capps died of a heart attack while trying to catch a cab at the Dulles Airport, in D.C.

Since then I have been trying to find a way to analyze my collection of tapes and notes in a way that could do justice to two ambitious and potentially contradictory goals: (1) a narrative of the extraordinary efforts and success of an

unlikely candidate catapulted from a university campus to the world of national politics and (2) an analysis of such a story that would be more than a friend's tribute, something that could qualify as an account for members of my discipline, linguistic anthropology, and others in the social sciences. My first effort was an article I delivered at the 2001 Georgetown Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (Duranti 2003), where I documented how Walter Capps' words and message during the first day of the campaign were designed for and, at the same time, affected by the interaction with the audience. In this article, I continue with a related issue: the public articulation of the inner and outer struggle for coherence of the Self. Listening to Capps on the campaign trail and later, while reviewing my fieldnotes and video tapes, I was often struck by the continuous efforts by Capps-the-candidate to reach out to his audience without having to compromise his sense of authenticity with respect to his other identities (e.g. Capps-the-scholar, Capps-the-family-person, Capps-the-teacher). Over time, I came to the realization that such efforts were part of a more general struggle, which all candidates for public office must face. As a result, the analysis that I present here has been widened to include Capps' opponents.

Following one candidate: Positive and negative consequences

Early in my project I decided to focus on one candidate across time and space instead of focusing on particular events, e.g. debates, or trying to divide my time among several candidates. This focus on one participant was for me a new method, which turned out to be, in several respects, radically different from what I had adopted in previous studies, when I had documented and analyzed one type of event or activity across time and participants (e.g. the Samoan *fono* in

Duranti 1981, greetings in Duranti 1992, or homework in Duranti and Ochs 1997). In particular, the methodological choice of having one constant focus of attention in my recordings had a number of important consequences for the type of data I collected and the type of study such data afford.

First, by following one candidate I was able to establish a relationship of trust with him and most of his close associates in a range of situations that, by their very nature, are potentially contentious and volatile. That such a relationship was indeed special was made apparent on a number of occasions, including one time when I sent two of my graduate students to record an event that I could not attend because I was out of the country. Despite the fact that they were experienced fieldworkers and had been trained in how to minimize the potential disruption that recording with a video camera can produce in certain social situations, they ran into problems with some of the people who were at the event. From their accounts and those of some of the people at the event, I later concluded that the lack of a relationship with the people in the campaign had been a major factor in the way in which my students had been perceived. Contrary to my expectation, as a fieldworker and videographer, I was not replaceable. I had mistakenly assumed that the right I had acquired to record people's interactions could be easily transferred to other researchers of my choosing. I was wrong. I had forgotten to take into consideration the fact that my relationship with Capps and his associates had been built through a long series of exchanges that provided information to him and the people who surrounded him as to the kind of person I was. The first important act had been the introduction by Capps' older daughter Lisa. But many more exchanges after that first introduction had contributed to establishing a relationship of trust,

including my conversations with Capps about academic subjects as well as about life outside of academia. Equally important, I believe, had been the exchanges that we did not have and especially the silences with which I had learned to show respect while witnessing the difficult choices or situations that Capps and his staff constantly faced.

Second, following one person across situations allowed me to see the same person interact with a variety of people and audiences, sometimes delivering what appeared to be, but in several respects was not, the *same* speech or the *same* message (Duranti 2003). Given the importance of contextual variation in discourse analysis and the shared assumption among many analysts that the audience is “co-author” (Duranti and Brenneis 1986), recording the speech of the same individual across situations was an ideal method for collecting very rich data on how speakers and listeners adjust to and interpret each other’s actions.

Third, despite the potential objection to the limiting nature of having *only one* main “subject,” closely following one candidate did not mean that I collected information about only one person in the campaign. On the contrary, I was continuously exposed to and put in situations in which I could record the talk of a wide range of people, namely, all the individuals and groups Capps-the-Candidate came into contact with. I recorded the talk of many individuals on at least one occasion (including many supporters as well as some moderators and journalists) and the talk of several other individuals over a number of occasions (this was the case with members of Capps’ family and staff as well as with most of his opponents).

Finally, I need to acknowledge that the qualitative and quantitative difference between the data I was able to collect on Capps and the data I was able to collect

on the other candidates limits my ability to make certain kinds of claims. I cannot match the wealth of information that I have of Capps across situations with what I know about the others. For example, I do not know how the other candidates spoke when in front of an audience exclusively made up of supporters. Nor do I know about their discussions with their advisors or other interactions outside of public events. Nevertheless, I believe that such limitations were unavoidable for practical and ethical reasons. I could not record Capps' opponents in events other than public debates because, by interacting with people from different campaigns, I would have run the risk of exposing potentially sensitive information to competing groups, not to mention the very likely possibility of making candidates or their staff suspicious of my activities. I became particularly aware of this potential problem on one occasion when, after I had been recording a public debate, I was approached by a member of Rep. Seastrand's staff and questioned about my goals and to my funding. I realized then that, despite the presence of hundreds of people, including journalists and professional cameramen, I had not been invisible and there were concerns about whether I was working for the Capps-for-Congress campaign or for some other organization. It turned out that Capps' supporters were also confused about my role and goals. Once I became aware of these issues, I decided that, in addition to wearing a badge that identified me as "Anthropology, UCLA," I would not share, during the campaign, any of my video tapes with anyone in the Capps-for-Congress camp or with any other groups.⁸

The Emergence of the Struggle for Coherence

One of the recurring features of the talk I recorded during the campaign was the mention of existential issues in Capps' speeches. This was particularly striking during the first day of the campaign, when Capps voiced his own doubts about leaving a profession he loved, that is, being a UCSB faculty, and having to enter the world of politics, where, instead of getting the job on the basis of your qualifications, as he said, "you have to beat your opponent." (San Luis Obispo, Nov. 14, 1995) At first, I thought that this was a type of public self-reflection that only an academic would engage in. But as the campaign progressed, I realized that Capps was only giving voice to the more general struggle for coherence that most, perhaps all, candidates must face. An analysis of the discursive strategies Capps and others adopted in their effort to overcome such a struggle could provide new insights into political campaigns from the point of view of their main protagonists.

In the following sections, I will focus on a number of discursive strategies that make the struggle for coherence evident. One of my goals is to show that excerpts of political discourse that have been previously analyzed as elements of "political manipulations" (Wilson 2001) or of particular kinds of interpretive ideologies (Hill 2000) can be reframed in terms of a more general set of concerns that occupy and affect aspiring and established politicians.

Using examples from the data I collected, I will show that the issue of the coherence of the Self can be either other- or self-generated. The struggle is other-generated when someone hints at or directly accuses a candidate of lacking coherence – the most typical case being the accusation of misrepresenting oneself. The struggle is self-generated when the candidates themselves voice

what they frame as their own concern with the coherence of their persona (e.g. the coherence of their position on different issues). This latter type of self-reflective discourse conforms to what Giddens (1991) called “the reflexive project of the self,” a project that he saw as tied to modernity and industrialization⁹. As I will show below, however, an examination of a variety of situations within the same political campaign shows that there is variation in terms of the frequency and manner in which candidates engage in self-reflexive discourse.

Other-Generated Struggle: Being Accused of Lack of Coherence

Constantly being under scrutiny for one’s behavior includes the risk of being labeled as lacking coherence. Something a person said or did on one occasion can be framed as being at odds with what the same person, or in some cases, his or her associates or staff, said (or did) on another. Examples abound in contemporary politics. In some cases, the charge of lacking coherence can be extended to include accusations that a candidate or politician in office “lied” or failed to keep his or her word. I will mention here two previous studies that focused on these accusations. The first is John Wilson’s (2001) analysis of the discrepancy between British Prime Minister John Major’s assertion on November 1, 1993, that he and his cabinet were not going to have *any* contact with the IRA until they gave up violence and the subsequent admission, on November 28 of the same year, by the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, that the talks with the IRA had in fact been going on for three years. Wilson suggests that the two groups involved in the controversy were adopting a different semantics. Members of the government seemed to rely on a subtle semantic distinction between the verbs *talk* and *communicate* : they claimed that

they would *not talk* to IRA representatives but did not say that they would *not communicate* with them through unauthorized third parties. As we shall see, something similar happened in the debates I recorded in California.

The second study is by a linguistic anthropologist, Jane Hill (2000), and concentrates on the criticisms leveled against the U.S. President George Bush (Senior) for reaching a compromise in 1990 with Congress to raise taxes despite his 1988 campaign statement, later read as a “promise,” *not* to raise taxes (“Read my lips: no new taxes”). Hill pointed out how the accusation that he had violated his promise presupposes what she calls “the discourse of truth,” a discourse that seems to be preferred by the U.S. media, but is not universally adopted. Over the last two decades, linguistic anthropologists have shown that in a number of cultural contexts alternative principles and conditions are at work for interpreting a person’s actions, including what Hill (2000) calls the “discourse of theater.”

In the data I collected, candidates made accusations of inconsistencies or contradictions by quoting from a variety of sources, including political campaign ads and statements made by their opponents during the on-going debate or in the past. I will here briefly analyze two such cases. The first involves the meaning of the term *independent*. The second centers on the meaning of “having been *to Washington*.”

Case # 1: “Independent.”

In the following excerpt from a public debate sponsored by The League of Women Voters in Santa Barbara, October 7, 1996, Independent candidate Steven Wheeler accuses Walter Capps of claiming to be “an independent” despite the

fact that he is running as a Democrat¹⁰. This accusation gives Wheeler a chance to remind the audience that he is running “without party affiliation” and that this was made possible thanks to the support of thirteen thousands people who signed a petition to put his name on the ballot¹¹. (For transcription conventions, see Appendix A).

(1) (October 7, 1996; Santa Barbara; public debate sponsored by The League of Women Voters)

Wheeler; ... I’m running as **an independent** that means that I am running **without party affiliation**. now the last time uh- I checked it took thirteen thousand signatures to get on the ballot as an Independent that’s what I went out and did=I got 13 thousand signatures. it took me up and down. the Central Coast. I went to every city here and I had a chance to- talk to a lot of people and find out what their concerns about the issues were. (but) I just found out a couple of weeks ago, that I am not the only one who is running as an independent=my opponent here Walter Capps is taking out ads billing himself as a **non-partisan** kind of guy and he refers to himself twice as **an independent**, ... but- Walter, you know, I would suggest you check with your campaign the last time I hear you were running as a Democrat. uhm.

Audience; ((sparse chuckle, laughter))

Here the coherence issue centers on the meaning of “independent” and the pragmatic conditions for claiming such a status. The term “independent” had

indeed been used by Capps and his campaign office. For example, it is found in five ads produced in September of the same year (the month just before the debate from which (1) is taken). All five ads concluded with the voice over slogan “Walter Capps, independent, in touch and in the mainstream.”¹² One of the five ads stated: “Walter Capps represents the independent non-partisan spirit of our community.”

In the debate from which the previous excerpt is taken, Capps did not respond to Wheeler’s criticism.¹³ However, if we examine his speeches, his interviews with representatives of the media, and his conversations with members of his staff or family, we find evidence of the fact that his use of the term “independent” could be interpreted differently from Wheeler’s notion of “having no party affiliation.” In Capps’ usage, “independent” implies “not easily influenced by special interest groups or partisan politics.” For example, in response to a question by a Channel 12 reporter after his announcement speech in San Luis Obispo, on November 14, 1995, Capps describes himself as “an independent voice” in order to contrast himself with his characterization of the incumbent Andrea Seastrand, whom he accuses of “taking orders” from the Republican speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich.

(2) (November 14, 1995; CD2:30m:52s-31m:55s; San Luis Obispo)

Reporter;   So what’s going to make uh this time different from last time?

Capps;   Oh. All kinds of things. First of all- (first of all), I’m a much better candidate. Last time was the first time I had run for office. [...]
                   Second thing is that, this time we’re running against a person who has a (background/record of service) [...] What I have discovered, is that she is not responding, to the needs and interests of the

people of the 22nd district. She is taking her orders [...] from the uh- Republican uhm Speaker of the House. [...] I think that what the people want is **an independent voice**. Somebody, who knows the people so well that that person can speak on behalf of them.
[...]

This example together with the television spots show that there was an important semantic difference between Wheeler's and Capps' (and his campaign office's) use of the term "independent." The difference is semantic and syntactically marked¹⁴. Wheeler uses "independent" as a noun, as in "*an independent*," whereas Capps and the people who participated in the preparation of his ads use it as an adjective, as in "independent, in touch and in the mainstream" (in the above mentioned ad) or "an independent voice" in Capps' own words¹⁵. To be "an independent" (noun) in Wheeler's terms, one needs to be *not affiliated* with any of the existing certified political parties (e.g. Democratic Party, Republican Party, Green Party, etc.)¹⁶. To be "independent" (adjective), in Capps' meaning of the term, candidates need to demonstrate that they are not just following whatever their party does or says to do. In this respect, one could argue that this particular accusation of lack of coherence (for pretending to be "(an) independent") is based on a semantic difference, similar to the one hypothesized by Wilson (2001) and mentioned earlier. This type of analysis, however, should be considered to be only the first step in the attempt to understand the logic as well as the occurrence of such attacks on coherence. I will discuss what else we should consider after introducing the next round of attacks on coherence, a round that involves Walter Capps and Andrea Seastrand.

Case #2: Who has been to Washington?

The second case of other-generated coherence struggles centers on the meaning of the phrase “having been *to* Washington.” In the context of the campaign, and more generally in American political discourse, “Washington” is a metonym for “the (federal) government,” which includes elected and non-elected officials. As illustrated in the following statement by a Democratic pollster, political candidates and their staff assumed in 1995-96 that a considerable percentage of the voters held negative opinions of the federal government and more generally of politicians.

(3) (December 28, 1995; staff meeting of the Capps-for-Congress campaign)

Pollster; [...] There is a: ... a strong disconnect ... between the average person and their elected official (in Washington). they um ... uhm think what happens in Washington is that ... you get elected ... you go there with their ideals ... and three months later you're corrupted by the process. Because um you are no longer isolated you don't talk with (your) average (people) on the street. The only people you see in Washington are the lobbyists ... who give you gifts ... and who write legislation for you and wh- who talk to you before you go on the floor put your card in to vote. [...]

Some candidates exploited this negative attitude in creating a contrast between “the government” and “the people.” In the following excerpt, incumbent Seastrand speaks in support of tax cuts as an initiative that would benefit voters by allowing them greater control over a larger portion of their earnings. In this case, “Washington, D.C.” explicitly includes the Clinton’s

administration as well as any other government “bureaucrats” who would have access to tax revenues for their salaries or programs.

(4) (August 15, 1996; San Luis Obispo Debate)

Seastrand; What we’re trying to do is cut uh- uh- those government dollars from Washington D.C. and leave it in the pockets of those of us at home. And they’re not gonna put it in their mattress. They’re gonna do something with that money. Put it in the bank for a savings account. Save it for their children’s college fund and maybe make some interest and let someone else from the local bank be able to borrow it for a home. Do all those things that we do with our dollars and uh- grow that economy. I’m a believer in the American spirit and I think we here at home know how best to use those dollars than **the bureaucrats and the Clinton administration in Washington D.C.**

A few minutes later, Capps uses his chance to answer a question from the audience to ridicule the inconsistency of those elected officials who criticize the very system of which they are part. Although expressed in generic terms –“the people who now serve in Washington” –, the audience knows that Seastrand is the likely target of this criticism. In this classic example of what linguistic anthropologists call “veiled speech” (Brenneis 1978), Capps can be interpreted as blaming Seastrand for lacking coherence: a politician and bureaucrat who criticizes politicians and bureaucrats.

(5) (San Luis Obispo, August 15, 1996; public debate among candidates)

Walter; [...] uhm and you know it's- it's always kind of amazing to me that **the people who now serve in Washington** are the one's who are leading the anti-Washington charge.

Audience; ((sparse laughter))

Walter; I mean, the ones who- who are most against politicians and bureaucrats are **the politicians and the bureaucrats**. // I'm not-

Audience; ((more sparse laughter))

Walter; I'm not quite sure ... what that's saying about- about our society.
[...]

Figure 1.

Debate in San Luis Obispo, California, August 15, 1996.

At the table, from left: Dick Porter, Rep. Andrea Seastrand, the moderator, Steven Wheeler, and (holding the mike) Walter Capps.

Later in the same debate, Seastrand, in turn, criticizes Capps for misrepresenting himself as someone who has never been to Washington. If we take Seastrand's remarks to be motivated by the interpretation of Capps' earlier criticism of "the people who now serve in Washington" as a criticism aimed at her, we have here a case of what Marcyliena Morgan (1991) called "baited indirectness"¹⁷: Seastrand appears to "bite the bait" that is only *implicit* in Capps' generalized criticism. In (6), without referring to Capps' previous criticism of her statements – and yet using a discourse framing, *I'm amazed*, which echoes Capps' *it's always kind of amazing* in (5) –, Seastrand focuses on his claim that he has never been to Washington and cites evidence that, on the contrary, he has been to Washington. I will first quote, in (6), Seastrand's criticism and then show, in (7), the passage of Capps' earlier talk where he appears to have made the claim in question.

(6) (San Luis Obispo, August 15, 1996; public debate among candidates; CD2:45m:16s-45m:50s)

Seastrand; and, as far as my friend (uh- p-) Professor Walter Capps –hh uh- I'm amazed that you've stated on several occasions in this meeting that **you've never been to Washington**. I'm gonna have to go into my files and look at The Santa Barbara News-Press, because I think that they. reported that **you even went into the Oval Office of the President himself**. Your- uh one of your family members has or works there with (such Ste-) George Stepanopolous' office. and so uh I was given the impression on reading that article that **when you go to Washington, you meet the President**. So anyway it's interesting but it's an election time. [...]

Seastrand is here pointing out that Capps cannot claim that he has not been to Washington because, according to the newspaper *The Santa Barbara News-Press*, he visited the President in the White House. This remark seems at first to rest on a literal interpretation of *having been to Washington*, namely, the act of having physically been in the city of Washington, D.C. (implicit in the assertion that he went inside the White House to meet Clinton). But there is a subtler and potentially more damaging implication of her accusations, namely, that Capps is only pretending to be an unknowing outsider. In fact, he can be shown to have strong connections to the White House and, by implication, to politicians in the Democratic Party, through his daughter's position as George Stephanopolous' personal assistant.

When we look at Capps' earlier statement, shown in (7) below, however, we see that an alternative reading is possible, namely, one in which he is claiming that he has *never been a bureaucrat in Washington*.

(7) (8/15/96, San Luis Obispo, Public Debate)

Walter; What- what I'm trying to establish here is that the way we make these decisions in Washington ... reflect our values, not just our views about economy but our values about what we- what we prioritize in our society, ... see I really pain. Every time we talk about **bureaucrats in Washington** uh people tend to- to applaud. But it-it-it pains me deeply. **I've never been there. I don't know what it's like.** ((13:49)) I'm not sure it's going to work at all. I don't know what it's like. but I wish we had- confidence in our government. I wish we could- talk about government in positive

terms uh and- and- and not simply blame every problem in this country. on the government. [...]

Capps is here trying to force the audience to rethink the connotation of “bureaucrats in Washington” and the implications of the pervasive negative stereotype commonly held about such people. It is in this context that he claims that he has never been “there” and that he does not know “what it’s like.” It is only with this more restricted interpretation in mind – that he has never been “in that position” – that we can make sense of his subsequent remark “I’m not sure it’s going to work at all.” He seems to be referring to the possibility of being elected and having then to go to Washington “as a bureaucrat.”

In this case as well, we could argue that there are two different semantic interpretations of the same expression – *having been to Washington* – and it is only on the basis of such different interpretations that we can simultaneously make sense of the accuser’s criticism and of the claims made by the accused. However, as I mentioned earlier, the semantic analysis should not exhaust our search for the conditions that make competing interpretations of this kind not unusual in political discourse. We must ask: why are *we* able to see such semantic differences but not the participants themselves? And: why aren’t these misunderstandings resolved by the participants themselves or by others for them? I can think of two main reasons. The first has to do with aspects of the social organization of the events in which these kinds of attacks and criticisms appear. The second has to do with the adversarial nature of the political process and, perhaps, more deeply, with interactional mechanisms and cultural

expectations of the kind described by Deborah Tannen (1998) as “the argument culture.”¹⁸

By “aspects of the social organization” of political debates I mean the organization of turn-taking and the roles that different speakers are given and assume in using the floor. The debates from which I drew my examples are typically structured by an *exchange system* that differs radically from conversation (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), especially in terms of turn-allocation and turn-duration. In public debates, a speaker is given the floor for an extended period, sometimes for one or two minutes, without having to worry about other speakers intervening as they routinely do in the course of ordinary conversation. Moderators, who are in charge of managing the floor by allocating turns, monitoring their duration, and guiding the audience into proper behavior, rarely comment or encourage a candidate to further clarify a point or provide specific evidence for their claims. This means that the type of exchange system typical of public debates is not conducive to the kind of fine-tuning that is found in conversation. One consequence of this system is that it allows participants to attack without having to further define their accusations, or, in turn, to ignore an accusation or criticism made by a previous speaker. If necessary, those under attack can justify their lack of response on a variety of grounds including the limited time at their disposal and the need to use it to get across their “message” rather than using it to respond to criticism.

The second reason for the recurrence of the type of accusations illustrated above is that candidates are under considerable pressure to attack any opponent that might be seen as a serious threat to them. Subtle semantic differences can be ignored because the premium is on making the opponent look bad and

unreasonable rather than good and reasonable. Even a criticism based on a semantic distinction that should be obvious to most people can be useful if it can raise doubts about the integrity of a dangerous opponent. Candidates are particularly vulnerable in those areas that might make them appealing to a group of voters that others are trying to reach. These are *sacred areas* that must be guarded at all costs. In Wheeler's case, the sacred area is his identity as "an Independent." This is what distinguishes him from the candidates of the two main parties. He cannot share that identity with someone else and especially with Walter Capps, who is the candidate of one of the two major parties. Capps, on the other hand, adopts the term "independent" as a way of distinguishing himself from party ideologues. This was particularly important in a district that for fifty years had sent a Republican to Congress.

In the case of the cycle of exchanges between Capps and Seastrand, the stakes are equally high. The conflict expressed in excerpts (4)-(7) starts from an implicit paradox, namely, that both candidates recognize that to be a politician is a negative quality and yet they both aspire to being such a person (I will return to this issue later in the article). Capps indirectly accuses Seastrand of being a hypocrite for criticizing politicians while being one of them. Seastrand, in turn, indirectly accuses Capps of being disingenuous by wanting to sound an outsider whereas in fact he is already well acquainted with major figures in the Democratic Party. The reference to Capps going to visit President Clinton is particularly important for Seastrand because it constitutes a potential counterattack to Capps' frequent accusation that she takes her orders from Newt Gingrich¹⁹.

Self-Generated Struggle: The Personal Search for Existential Coherence

The struggle for coherence can also be self-generated. Exchanges like the previous ones make candidates keenly aware of their vulnerability in the public arena. However, candidates are also concerned with displaying or articulating their own individual sense of coherence. They may problematize their actions, comparing past, present and future decisions or experiences in search of an over-arching logic, a principle or series of principles that justify their choice to run for office or to take a particular stand on an issue. When candidates engage in such a self-generated discursive construction of their life choices, the coherence struggle becomes a *continuity* struggle. As Eric Erickson (1980:190) pointed out, a person's identity involves "an unconscious striving for a *continuity of personal character*" (italics in the original). As we shall see, for these candidates existential coherence is indeed built on continuity of personal character, as defined through specific actions or routine activities (e.g. the ones associated with one's profession outside of the political arena). Coherence is typically created in two ways: (1) by showing that things stay the same – one's beliefs have not really changed over time; or (2) by showing that things change in ways that reconfirm the continuity of some other feature – one's beliefs have changed but there is a logic in that change. Recognition of a temporal dimension in the construction of existential coherence is crucial for understating the notion of Self as an achievement and for capturing the process through which the political Self is formed. This includes the verbal acts which reveal, sometimes in more public, sometimes in more private contexts, the logic of a candidate's reasons for presenting a particular type of Self. In my data, three discursive strategies emerged in the construction of existential coherence: (1) narratives of belonging, (2) the

present as a “natural extension” of the past, and (3) exposing potential contradictions, which are then shown to be only apparent.

Strategy # 1: Narrative of belonging

The narrative of belonging is a subset of narratives of personal experience. In the narrative of belonging, a sequence of life events is presented in a linear fashion, implying “a single, closed, temporal, and causal path” (Ochs and Capps 2000:41), in order to show that a candidate has experienced events or has gone through states of mind that connect him or her emotionally and morally to the place and the people of the district. This strategy accomplishes this goal in a number of ways. First, it supports the view that, by having lived like others in the audience, the speaker-candidate is an “ordinary citizen,” which is a positive value in contemporary American politics. Second, this type of narrative is also (at times explicitly) introduced to establish the feasibility of the candidate as an ideal representative precisely because his or her potentially shared experiences recounted in the narrative define him or her as knowledgeable of what people in the district think and feel. In addition to the emphasis on shared “place” (e.g. “I have lived in the district for *n*-number of years”), narratives of belonging introduce putatively universal or quasi-universal life experiences (e.g. getting or being married, having children, sending children to school, seeing them grow, being exposed to traumatic events, taking care of one’s parents or grandparents). These common, if not universal, experiences help candidates connect to a large part of the audience. In particular, narratives of belonging work as coherence builders because they help candidates formulate a life history where temporally and spatially separate events and experiences can be

shown to have lead toward the realization of a kind of person that values being part of a particular community (*Gemeinschaft*) as opposed to society at large.

I first became aware of narratives of belonging for political purposes while recording and then analyzing Walter Capps' speeches over the course of the first official day of his 1995-96 campaign, on November 14, 1995. The most striking and complete example of narratives of belonging is found in the first speech of that day, in Paso Robles. Capps delivered his speech to a small group of supporters and activists, most of them elderly or retired. He addressed them while standing in front of the entrance to the Paso Robles Public Library, without notes, podium or microphone (see Fig. 2). Most of what he said was, however, based on a written text that he had finished preparing the night before²⁰.

FIGURE 2 (“We stopped across the street”) Walter Capps speaking to his supporters in Paso Robles, California, on November 14, 1995.

The passage of his speech reproduced in (8) below took place after Capps made the announcement that he was running for office again and that this time he would win. The narrative of belonging is meant to provide evidence of the fact that he and his wife Lois have been in the district for a long time and therefore know the people in the district.²¹

(8) (Nov. 14, 1995, Paso Robles)

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=I 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.**

This particular narrative of belonging was introduced in the context of an "origin" narrative, which included the description of a trip from Oregon with a trailer full of belongings, perhaps an implicit reference to the famous "Oregon Trail"

story that American children learn in elementary school. The narrative is also spatio-temporally grounded to the specific location where Capps is speaking through the reference to a place “across the street” (see Figure 2) and to the date of his arrival, 1964. He provides further evidence of belonging by mentioning that his children were born and had gone to school in the 22nd district. In addition to being proof of his confidence in public institutions (indicated by the fact that he sent his children to public schools), this part of the narrative could also be interpreted as defining Capps as an ordinary citizen. He shares the experience of having lived in the same district while raising children with most of the people in the audience (who are about his age or older). This was an important component of Capps’ broader narrative of his candidacy. Quoting Thomas Jefferson, Capps often presented himself as the typical citizen-politician, who goes to Congress for a limited period of time to fulfill a sense of civic duty and then returns to his community to live the rest of his life among the people he had represented in Washington. Despite a ten month separation between the two speeches, the last line of the passage in (9) is almost identical to the last line of the passage in (8).

(9) (August 15, 1996; Debate, in San Luis Obispo, California)

Capps;   There’s lot’s of Thomas Jefferson in me. ... Thomas Jefferson believed ... that the person who represents the community in Congress ... should come from that community. Should be somebody from any walk of life. Could be a teacher. ... Could be a painter. Uh- a woman or a man. uh plumber or an attorney. Anyone. Would- would come. out of that community and serve for a- probably a brief period of time in Washington D.C.

Moderator;   Thirty seconds Walter.

Capps;   Okay. And then go back and live among **the people with whom you've lived your lives.**

An abbreviated version of the same narrative given in (8) was used by Capps on November 14, 1995, at two other stops on the same day, in San Luis Obispo and at Hancock College, in Santa Maria, but not at the fourth stop, at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California. At UCSB, he began to talk about how long he and Lois had been married but then switched to an elaborate series of (only partly successful) jokes, all of which were meant to stress his personal connection to the university rather than to the district.²² Nine months later, a more abbreviated narrative of belonging appeared in Capps' opening statement at a public debate in Santa Maria and, one week later, a slightly more elaborate version was used in a San Luis Obispo debate. The two versions are reproduced below in (10) and (11) respectively.

(10)   (August 9, 1996; Debate in Santa Maria)

Capps;   **we have lived in this district for thirty two years. uh-we've raised ... our children here. I've- I've been a member of the faculty at University of California at Santa Barbara ... uh- during that period of time. uh- I was also the director for the center for the study of democratic institutions. ... There's been some question about whether I've ever ... had to deal with the payroll. I was director of that. I've been department chair, ... [...]**

(11)   (August 15, 1996; Debate in San Luis Obispo; CD#1:19m:03s-19m:27s)

Capps;   **[...] I've been on the faculty at the University of California at Santa Barbara 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.
[...]

What remains of the original formulation given in (8) is that in both (10) and (11) Capps stressed his connection with the district through a reference to his children and his teaching at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In the first case (August 8, 1996), the narrative concluded with information about having being the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at UCSB, which was cited as evidence of his administrative experience. In the second case (August 15, 1996), Capps elaborated on information about where his three children went to college. This time his generalization that they all went to public school in the 22nd district could not be extended to state that they all went to public, that is, state-funded, colleges. In order for his statement to be true, Capps changed the generalization. In (11), he stated that they went to college “in California” (with the partial exception of the middle one, Todd, who went to UCSB first and then to Australia). Although in (10) and (11) his connection to the district had been modified, a certain affective tone of the original narrative was preserved. This was achieved through bringing into the public domain such dimensions of personal experience as his children’s upbringing and

achievements. In telling the audience where his children went to college, Capps' identity underwent a momentary and yet dramatic shift: from political candidate to proud father boasting about his children's achievements, including the position that his younger daughter Laura had at the White House (as George Stephanopolous' personal assistant).

For a while, I thought that the narrative of belonging was one of the rhetorical strategies that distinguished Capps from the other candidates. At further inspection, however, that hypothesis turned out to be wrong. During the public debate in Santa Maria organized by the Area Agency on Aging, on August 8, 1996, Independent Steven Wheeler produced a very elaborate narrative of belonging.²³ When the time came to introduce himself, as shown in Figure 3, Wheeler stood up (the only candidate to do so) and delivered the speech he had been working on in the isolation of his study at home and, as he recounted to me two years later, without the benefit of political consultants or advisors.²⁴

Figure 3. Independent candidate Steven Wheeler while delivering his two-minute opening statement at the public debate in Santa Maria, on August 8, 1996.

In a relatively elaborate narrative of personal experience, Wheeler linked sequentially different personal attributes and events to provide the audience with a glimpse of what would be likely interpreted by the audience as Wheeler's list of qualities that should qualify him as a serious candidate. Among them, the first two were (a) being a native Californian and (b) having lived in the district for an extended period of time (seventeen years). He indirectly reinforced his claim to be a "native" by informing the audience that he was a surfer and he was athletic (one can imagine other contexts or States of the Union where "being athletic" or being a surfer might not be judged to be an important quality for someone running for a Congressional seat). Wheeler also mentions events and situations in which he came in contact with people in the district and showed compassion towards them (e.g. by assisting them at the gas station or outside of grocery stores, or by helping people retrieve lost spouses at large gatherings). In turn, he presented the act of thirteen thousand registered voters signing petitions to put him on the ballot not as the condition but as the reason ("because [they] signed a petition") for his presence in the race for Congress.

(12) (August 8, 1996; Debate in Santa Maria; Steven Wheeler delivers the entire speech standing, alternating between quickly glancing down at his notes and looking up at the audience)

Wheeler; [...] Since most of you don't know me I'm gonna start by ... telling you about my personal and professional background. **I'm a native Californian and I've lived in this district for seventeen years.** I'm a certified public accountant. I owned and operated my own practice in Santa Barbara for the past fourteen 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. ... I'm married, my wife's name is Laura, and I have three children, Stephanie, Jared and Brian. ... **I've 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.

Audience; ((chuckles))

Wheeler; uhm I have a black belt in martial arts. ... I keep a journal. And **I've coached my son's s- soccer team over the last three years.**

I'm here because over thirteen thousand people signed a petition to put my name on the ballot. This was truly a rewarding experience and it brought me ... to every city in the 22nd district. It provided me an opportunity to meet people from all walks of life, ... and it gave me an opportunity to engage in discussions with people, and to learn about what their concerns about the issues are in this country today. ...

During this process, ... I helped people put gas in their cars, ... I held their- groceries, I held their shopping carts. I watched their children and their pets, and I even helped locate lost spouses ... in large crowds in special events. ... It w(a)s truly a rewarding experience. [...]

Like Capps in the excerpts (7), (9) and (10), Wheeler was here justifying his run for Congress by claiming his life connections to the geographical area and to its inhabitants. He did so by invoking public and private aspects of his life that presented him as an “ordinary” person – he talked about his own practice, his wife and his children – who also cared about people outside of his family. He had, in other words, a sense of civic duty.

Grammar plays an important role in the ways narratives of belonging unfold. The sense of connection to the place and its people is constructed in part through verb forms and with adverbial phrases that give a sense of continuity by building a bridge from the past into the present. To accomplish this, both Capps and Wheeler used simple present perfective (and more rarely present perfective progressive) usually in conjunction with temporal and spatial adverbial phrases. Following are some examples extracted from Capps’ and Wheeler’s narratives cited above:

(13) Simple Present Perfective (+ Time/Space Adverbial)

- 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*²⁵.
- 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*
- f. 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*.

(14) Present Perfective Progressive (+Space/Time Adverbial)

a. I've also been surfing *since I was eleven*.

At close inspection, in the other candidates' speeches we do not find narratives of belonging of the type illustrated in (8), (10) and (11) for Capps and in (12) for Wheeler. We also find that two of the candidates, during an entire debate, did not produce any narratives of personal experience.

In the three debates I recorded and in one organized and hosted by KEYT in the last month of the campaign, the incumbent, Andrea Seastrand, mentioned some aspects of her personal life that were linked to the discursive context and had potential emotional appeal (e.g. her husband's struggle with cancer, her feelings toward her two adopted children). She also mentioned being the granddaughter of Polish immigrants and briefly recounted getting together with "wonderful citizens" in the district to discuss Medicare, but she did not construct temporally ordered personal narratives that directly or indirectly proved her connections to the district over an extended period of time. Having won the support of the majority of the voters in the last election, she might have felt free to assume that she already had a relationship of belonging with the voters. However, familiarity versus lack of familiarity with the voters cannot explain why Dick Porter, from the Reform Party, during his first appearance in San Luis Obispo, on August 15, 1996, did not give any information about his origins or connections with the district. Instead he spent most of his introduction time

talking about his party. When he did provide a brief biographical sketch, at his second debate, at the League of Women Voters, on October 7, 1996, Porter presented the information in a grammatical form quite different from what I illustrated above for Capps' and Wheeler's narratives. One of the most striking features of his biographical narrative is the repeated use of verb-elliptical utterances for seven consecutive utterances. Whereas Capps and Wheeler repeatedly employed finite verb forms, including the perfective forms summarized in (13) and (14) above, Porter chose to recount those aspects of his biography that he judged relevant to his presentation of Self in a time-less fashion. This type of grammatical framing was accompanied by a matter-of-fact tone that rather than conveying pride or pleasure for the potential connections with the experience of audience members, suggested different goals, like, for example, the attempt to compress as much information as possible in the shortest possible time. The list-quality to his narrative made it appear that he was reading from a form. His mention of military service suggests a possible experiential source for the unusual grammar of his biographical information. Following is Porter's narrative (I have used separate lines to graphically approximate the list-like of character of his delivery).

(15) (October 7, 1996; Debate at The League of Women Voters in Santa Barbara)

Porter; Thank you.

uh I am Dick Porter,

uh native Californian, from San Simeon, North of here ((looks down as if reading))

u:h military service in the. U.S. Army West of here in the Pacific

uh education South of here Bachelor and Masters from. USC
 and doctorate from. UCLA.
 profession educator.
 uh=over twenty years service in California public schools
 currently self employed as an education consultant.
 now I am mostly: ... student. of political systems and government.
 I'm running for Congress. now as a candidate, ...
 uh my primary concerns and concerns. uh of the Reform Party.
 [...]

Another candidate, the Libertarian David Bersohn, used personal narratives with biographical information in both debates he attended. For example, he told the audience that he had lived in the area since 1987, but he spent more time telling the audience that he grew up elsewhere (in NYC) and went to school in other states rather than elaborating on his connections with people in the district. His explicit connection between his background and the campaign was that his law degree should come in handy if he were to be elected.

(16) (August 9, 1996; Debate in Santa Maria, California)

Bersohn; [...] So I really appreciate being included today. uhm- my name is David Bersohn and you can repeat that to get the name recognition out there. I don't have a multi-million dollar campaign chest so I have to plug for myself here. uhm- (.) I'm uh libertarian. **I'm 43 years old. I've lived in the area here since 1987. I currently live in Arroyo Grande.** ... I'm a homeowner. um- single. uh- I grew up at (? ?) upstate New York. Grew up in New York City.

uhm- I went to college in Ohio, uh- a major in economics and uh- I **also have a law degree from Columbia University so I hope I'll be able to make my way through the thick of the thousand page bills that seem to have went through congress these days.**

Two months later, in the debate at the League of Women Voters in Santa Barbara, the date of Bersohn's arrival to California and the fact that he was living in a rural town in the district were discussed later in the personal narrative, after an even more elaborate description of growing up in New York and going to Oberlain College and Columbia University.

(17) (October 7, 1996; Debate at The League of Women Voters in Santa Barbara)

Bersohn; Hi. My name is David Bersohn. I am the Libertarian Party candidate. I'll give you a short introduction to myself. uhm I grew up in New York City, first Up State New York. and Down State in the Bronx and Brooklyn. uhm ... I went to:- ... Oberlain College where I got a BA uh majored in economics ... after that I got a: doctorate in jurisprudence from Columbia University School of Law which I hope will- uh allow me to read my way through some of those thousands of page bills that emanate from Congress these days. uhm. **moved to California in 1987. I've lived in (rural) Arroyo Grande since 1991,** uh my primary occupation uh is- (that) as an artist. [...]

The data presented so far suggest that candidates varied considerably as to whether they used personal narratives in their public speeches and whether they used it to build what I call “narratives of belonging.” If, as I have been suggesting, the latter are part of a set of strategies to build existential coherence, differences across candidates could be at least in part related to their awareness of the coherence struggle, that is, in this case, their need to show that they have come to the decision to run for political office as part of a series of experiences, which includes life events shared with people in the district. Do these narratives of belonging help establish a positive relationship with the audience? Have voters come to expect them in candidates’ public presentations? These are difficult questions to answer under any circumstances and even more difficult in my case given the small sample of candidates and events. However, there is some evidence that voters responded more positively to Wheeler’s message than to Porter’s and Bersohn’s. In addition to the fact that, of the three, Wheeler received more votes on Election Day (as shown in Table 1), he was also more successful in terms of immediate feedback from the audience. His introductory speeches, despite the presence of large contingents of supporters for Seastrand and Capps, received a generous applause at all three of the debates I recorded, whereas Porter’s and Bersohn’s introductory speeches did not fare as well. Porter’s introductory speeches, on August 15, 1996 and October 7, 1996, were not followed by applause. Bersohn’s introductory speech was followed by applause in only one of the two debates in which he participated. All other candidates’ introductory speeches, including those of the Independent Wheeler and the one speech by the representative of the Natural Law Party, were followed by applause (see Appendix B).²⁶

Strategy # 2: The Present as a Natural Extension of the Past

Another strategy for constructing existential coherence through continuity is to make any present decision, including the decision to run for office, a “natural extension” of some past experience. An example of this strategy has been documented by political scientist Richard Fenno, who, in describing Senator John Glenn’s view of his own political career, wrote:

Glenn sees politics as a public service. For him, the decision to enter politics was **a natural extension** of what he had been doing all of his adult life -- serving his country. Running for the Senate was the political equivalent of signing up for one more hitch in the marines. (Fenno 1996:23) (emphasis mine)

Fenno captures here the gist of a perspective on one’s political career choice that is also found in the data I collected, but only in Capps’ and Wheeler’s speeches. As shown in (18) below, Capps presented his decision to run for Congress as an extension of his teaching at UCSB, especially teaching his very large and popular course on the Vietnam War.

(18) (San Luis Obispo Debate; August 15, 1996; CD#1:19m:34s-20m:09s)

Capps;   [...] I got into the politics **as a kind of extension** of the ... teaching that I’d been doing. ... uh the- the courses that I teach. [...] I got into politics **as an extension** ... of the work that I’ve done on the- ... impact of the Vietnam War, the class that I teach ... that’s been featured three times on [the television program] Sixty Minutes, ... I have- testified before congressional committees on three occasions.

As apparent from the last sentence in this excerpt, teaching experience was conceived and presented as *one* of the past experiences that better qualified Capps for the position he hoped to be elected to. Having testified before congressional committees was another item in Capps' list to build his case.

In the case of Steven Wheeler, we find an example in his speeches where his "natural extension" narrative was pushed further back in time to include his ancestors. In (19), he framed his choice to run for the U.S. Congress as part of a "family destiny" of altruistic, public service.

(19) (August 15, 1996; San Luis Obispo)

Wheeler; [...] most of you don't know me uhm- ... and I believe that I am here ... as a part of a family destiny. And I'd like to tell you a little bit about my family. My grandfather ... formed a chapter of the United Mine Workers in the 1930s in Kentucky. He was thrown in jail ... several times in that process. uhm- he was uh written about in songs by George Davis the singing miner whose works are in the Smithsonian. ... My father served in three wars. He started out in World War Two ... as an enlisted man. He ended up as a chief warrant officer (for/four)- he had two tours of duty at Vietnam. and ... **I'm here because I feel it's time to do my public service ... to this community and to this country ... and this is how I've chosen to do it.**

Consistent with the notion of the struggle for existential coherence, in (19) we see Wheeler building himself up as someone whose personal characteristics include, but are not limited to, being a descendant of a line of (male) ancestors who do things not

in their own interest but in the interest of their community (from the community of co-workers to that of the entire nation).

Strategy #3: Exposing and reconciling potential contradictions

A third strategy in constructing coherence of the Self is to bring out and make explicit a potential contradiction in order to show that it is not a contradiction. By so doing, candidates may respond to a direct, indirect, or potential criticism by others. I will briefly discuss two cases.

Sometimes candidates seemed satisfied to simply point out a potential contradiction and state that it is not a contradiction, offering no rationale for such a move. This was the case, for example, in the passage found in excerpt (20) below, where Independent Steven Wheeler asserted that he saw no contradiction between being simultaneously pro-business and pro-environment. He then proceeded to list a series of other positions that voters might see as canceling each other out, namely: (i) balancing the budget, (ii) maintaining a strong military and (iii) not cutting social services (here represented by students, seniors, and “working people” making “large sacrifices”).

(20) (August 9, 1996; Santa Maria Debate)

Wheeler: [...] As a certified public accountant, what I bring to the table is a platform of fiscally conservative, yet socially moderate. and responsible positions on issues. ... **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.** ((looks down)) ... ((looks up)) I believe that we can balance the budget, ... maintain a strong military, ... without requiring our seniors. our students. and our working people to make

large sacrifices. We can do this simply by eliminating, wasteful. pork barrel.

A candidate may also choose to bring out a potential contradiction in order to offer a solution. This was the case when Capps addressed what he perceived as a potential paradox of his candidacy: reconciling his positive view of academic life with many voters' negative views of politics. By asking voters for their support, Capps felt that he might have been seen as implying that he was looking for a change of career. He wanted to be a Congressman instead of a University Professor. Capps, however, knew that such a goal could be seen as problematic because in contemporary American public discourse being a "politician" has a negative connotation (see excerpt [21] below). But Capps was also aware that being a professor, in turn, could be seen in a negative light in the political context because it came with the connotation of being detached from mainstream America and the life of ordinary citizens – as captured in the phrase "being Ivory Tower." His solution was to operate on several discursive and argumentative levels at the same time. While praising the academic profession and himself as a member – partly in order to boost his record and partly to prove that he was not ashamed or tired of it – he presented himself as a "reluctant candidate," a non-professional politician (and also, as we saw before, an "independent" thinker), who would go to Washington to do his civic duty as part of a vocational calling. The first time this integrated model of the Self is found in my data is on November 14, 1995, in Capps' speech at the third stop of the first day of campaigning, at Hancock College, near Santa Maria, in front of a mixed

audience, which included the instructor and the students in a political science class, political supporters, and representatives of the local media.

(21) (November 14, 1995; inside of a classroom at Hancock College, Santa Maria)

Capps;   Why would somebody who is enjoying a career- you know- I still write books. I still do research. I still teach. Why would somebody who's doing that, ... want to run for public office? The reason is very very simple. ... In that I think it isn't simply enough to study, ... the process. There comes a time in a person's life, when. by opportunity, by privilege, by vocation, by request from others, ... it's time ... to ... assume the responsibility of- of representative leadership. Because this is exactly the way that Thomas Jefferson talked about it.. [...]. So rather than saying, ... and rather than talking about **politicians- which is a negative thing**. And I guess if I'm now a politician I'll have to admit to that. I'd like to say **elected citizen**. An elected citizen ... responding ... to a kind of vocational call. **And I can also tell you that I- I wasn't thrilled to be doing this in the beginning because I so much enjoy what I am doing.**

The same attempt to recognize the contrast between academic life and politics without putting down either one of them is found ten months later in the campaign. This excerpt reproduces the part of a speech that is immediately prior to the segment in excerpt (18).

(22) (San Luis Obispo Public Debate; August 15, 1996)

Capps;   [...] I've been accused of being ... Ivory Tower. ... uhm which I think is insulting to:: the entire teaching profession but- ... I- I don't

think I'm very Ivory Tower. ... Although in some ways I wish I were. ... Because there's a- that's a great tradition as well- to be able to take a look at- at what's going on in society and make sense of it. ... But I got into politics as an extension ... of the work that I've done on the- ... impact of the Vietnam War, [...]

As illustrated in (9) above., for Capps, the potential conflict between academia and politics could be reconciled by adopting what he characterized as Jefferson's conceptualization of the politician-citizen. In fact, the image of the ordinary citizen who goes to serve in Congress as a civic duty and then returns to the community from which he came was particularly powerful for Capps precisely because it allowed him to reconcile his multiple identities, providing a script that would help him construct the coherence of Self that he was aiming at. But Jefferson was not his only model, in part because he was concerned with the spiritual side of his persona, the same side that attracted him to religious studies. This search for other models is made explicit in an exchange with a local reporter on May 5, 1996, while George Stephanopolous was in town to support Capps at a fund-raising event. In response to the reporter's question about what Stephanopolous brought to his campaign, Capps mentioned their common backgrounds in the study of theology and the fact that Stephanopolous' father and uncle were Orthodox priests. To honor that connection, Capps proudly announced that he decided to do something unusual in politics and quote in his speech a Greek theologian, John Chrysostom, "who talked about the compatibility of our beliefs and our politics."

(23) (Santa Barbara, outside a private home where a fund-raising event hosting George Stephanopolous is taking place; May 5, 1996)

- Reporter; alright. and what does someone like-uh-George bring to your campaign?
- Capps; mhm. uhm-
- Reporter; you have him here and-
- Capps; Well uhm you know these-I didn't even know him. I didn't know him until two years ago. but ... George- uh George is a student of theology. I don't know if you knew.
- Reporter; no, I didn't.
- Capps; But his father was an orthodox priest. A Greek orthodox priest. his uncle is an orthodox priest. he studied theology at Oxford. And he knew me-I don't know how-before he got into this politics thing. and I knew that he had this interest in religion so tonight when I get to talk, I'm gonna do a thing that no politician has ever done. I'm gonna start off by quoting John Chrysostom
[...]
- Capps; A fifth century Greek orthodox theologian who talked about **the compatibility of our beliefs and our politics**. And that's where George and I- we bond. [...]

In his concern for this particular type of existential coherence – what he calls, in (23) above “the compatibility of our beliefs and our politics” – , Capps was probably unique and we might even speculate that it was such a concern that made him appealing to at least some of the voters. At the same time, his articulation of his doubts and possible solutions, just like his articulation of the reasons he gave to explain why people should vote for him, provide a glimpse into what other

candidates may think and feel but not express in ways that are accessible in the public record.

Conclusions

Through an examination of the talk produced during a campaign for the U.S. Congress, I have argued that some of the candidates' rhetorical strategies can be understood in terms of their common struggle to create and sustain a sense of coherence of their persona or Self. I proposed to think of this process as a "struggle" not only because it involves "attacks" by opponents and others, but also because the candidates must find ways to represent their own unique ideas while reaching out to the most diverse audiences. Due to their concern with issues of truth and consistency, the construction of existential coherence becomes an important aspect of the discursive construction of a candidate as a moral person in the Kantian sense of someone who should be the "object of respect" (Kant 1785).

I have here proposed to think of the coherence struggle as other- or self-generated. In the cases in which it was other-generated, it typically took shape in public debates, where candidates were either directly or indirectly criticized by their opponents for lacking coherence (e.g. for contradicting themselves or lying). By examining two cases of such criticisms, one regarding the claim to be an "independent" candidate and the other regarding the claim of "not having been to Washington," I demonstrated that such accusations make sense only within a narrow interpretation of the terms in questions as opposed to a broader or pragmatically different interpretation. Each party could feel justified in his or her

position (e.g. to be a just accuser or unjustly accused) by avoiding the issue of the difference of interpretation.

In the cases in which the struggle for coherence was self-generated, candidates seemed to respond to a perceived need to justify a number of decisions, including (i) the decision to run for office; (ii) the decision to run in a particular district; and (iii) the decision to take stances that might appear contradictory. Their public presentation of Self, including the particular way in which they discursively constructed their life-history and their position in relationship to the voters, can be seen as a response to a number of issues that they feel the need to resolve.

Out of the possible discursive strategies used by the candidates I recorded, I chose to concentrate on three, namely: (1) narrative of belonging, (2) the present as a natural extension of the past, and (3) the explicit exposition and solution of potential contradictions in the candidate's decisions. All three strategies, but especially the first two, include narratives of personal experience, which some candidates seemed less interested in discussing publicly. Furthermore, candidates modified their discursive strategies over time and across types of situations. Walter Capps, for example, used more elaborate narratives of personal experience when addressing his supporters at the beginning of his campaign than later on, when he began to participate in public debates with his opponents and in front of a mixed audience. In contrast, Dick Porter, from the Reform Party, did not include any information about his biography or life experience in the first debate he participated in or in the two minute statement he delivered on KEYT (see Appendix B). During his second debate, however, he introduced the telegraphic bio-sketch I reproduced above in example (15).

Repeatedly, throughout this article, the data I presented demonstrate a similarity in discursive strategies between two candidates, namely, Capps and Wheeler. They were the only candidates in this study who produced what I called *narratives of belonging* and they were also the only ones who engaged in the other two strategies, that is, the *present as a natural extension of the past* and the discussion of potential contradictions in their positions or choices. This common and yet relatively unique cluster of features begins to make sense if we return to my earlier discussion of the term “independent”. Both Wheeler and Capps claimed to be “independent,” even though, as we saw, each emphasized a different meaning of the term. Wheeler wanted to be seen as an alternative to the two major parties and Capps wanted to be seen as a Democrat who could think on his own and was not taking orders from anyone else. All of the other candidates, albeit in different ways and to a different extent, were more concerned with presenting their politics in terms of the general goals and ideologies of their respective party.

Whereas the stress on personal history and independence made sense in Wheeler’s case, who was running as a previously unknown candidate and as in opposition to the Democrats and Republicans, which represented in his view “politics as usual” (as he said at the end of his introduction on August 8, 1996), the same stance was less obvious in the case of Capps, who was running as a Democrat and was backed by the Democratic leadership.

However, on a closer analysis, it becomes apparent that in order to win, Capps had to reach out to people who in previous years voted for the Republican candidate (Michael Huffington), given that no Democrat had won an election in fifty years. In addition, the campaign was taking place only a year after the

Republicans, under the banner of Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America," had gained control of the House of Representatives. Especially in the Fall of 1995 through the summer of 1996, Democrats had considerable doubts about whether President Clinton was going to be re-elected. Being associated with Clinton or his political platform was seen as problematic by Democratic strategists, especially during the first months of Capps' campaign. The advice of such strategists resonated with Capps' own convictions and personal history. Despite his continual attempts to cast himself as "a teacher," rather than "a Professor," at the same time he was reluctant to abandon his academic identity which included a successful career in the pursuit of original pedagogical ideas (as in his famous and highly successful course on the Vietnam War) and a number of complex research topics. He was proud to be the author or editor of 13 books on a range of subjects including the Vietnam War (Capps 1982, 1990), Native American religion, the "new religious right" (Capps 1990), and Thomas Merton and the monastic impulse (Capps 1976, 1983, 1989).

It could be argued that it was at least in part because of his academic background that we find Capps to be self-reflective in his speeches. This assumption would make it difficult to use his rhetorical strategies as a representative example of what other, non-academic candidates do. However, there are two reasons to reject such an assumption and its most obvious implications. First, as I demonstrated in this article, Capps was not alone in some of his rhetorical choices: the Independent candidate Steven Wheeler used some of the very same discursive strategies used by Capps. Second, in examining my data, I found variation in rhetorical strategies across individuals and across situations. Even Capps modified his strategies over time and to accommodate

different audiences. Both sets of findings suggest that in addition to being confronted with unique individuals under unique circumstances, there are *types* of candidates, that are in part defined by *types* of rhetorical strategies. I did not expect to find the rhetorical strategies that I described and, as far as I know, they have not been described before. They are, therefore, a potentially important addition to the documentation of how human actors involved in competitive tasks such as political races use particular linguistic resources to construct the kind of Self that they, as well as voters, may approve of.

Appendix A: Transcription conventions

The excerpts presented in this article are transcribed according to a modified version of the conventions originally established by Gail Jefferson for the analysis of conversation (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974:731-4).

Capps;	name of speaker is separated from the rest by a semicolon (;) and one or more spaces.
<u>anybody</u>	underlining represents emphasis or contrastive stress.
NO!!	capital letters indicate high volume.
<u>job</u> =I mean	equal sign (=) stands for 'latching,' i.e. no hearable interval between two turns or between two utterances by the same speakers.
independent	boldface is used to highlight portions of the talk that are being discussed in the surrounding part of the article.

becau::se	colon (:) stands for lengthening of sound.
last time,	a comma indicates that the phrase ends with a rising intonation, e.g. the intonation found when speakers are projecting further talk or more items in a list.
I do.	a period stands for a falling intonation that suggests the possible end of a turn.
go // next	point in a party's turn where overlap by next speaker(s) starts.
(first of all)	talk between parentheses indicates an uncertain but reasonable guess at what might have been said.
(??)	question marks between parentheses indicate that a portion of talk could not be heard accurately and no guess was possible.
...	untimed pause.
((laughter))	double parentheses frame contextual information about the talk that follows.
[...]	a portion of the transcript was left out.

Appendix B: Political debates recorded and mentioned in the article, with list of political candidates.

<i>Date, Place and Host</i>	<i>Candidates who participated</i>
August 8, 1996, Santa Maria, organized by the Area Agency on Aging	1) David L. Bersohn (Libertarian) 2) Walter H. Capps (Democrat) 3) Andrea Seastrand (Republican) 4) Steven Wheeler (Independent)
August 15, 1996, San Luis Obispo, organized by the AARP	1) Walter H. Capps (Democrat) 2) Richard D. Porter (Reform Party) 3) Andrea Seastrand (Republican) 4) Steven Wheeler (Independent)
October 7, 1996, Santa Barbara, organized by the League of Women Voters	1) David L. Bersohn (Libertarian) 2) Walter H. Capps (Democrat) 3) Mr. Hospidar (Natural Law Party, standing in for candidate Dawn Tomastik) 4) Richard D. Porter (Reform Party) 5) Andrea Seastrand (Republican) 6) Steven Wheeler (Independent)
October 21, 1996, KEYT (broadcast version)	1) Walter H. Capps (Democrat) 2) Andrea Seastrand (Republican) Following the one hour debate between Capps and Streasand, there were 2 minute statements by three other candidates: 3) Steven Wheeler (Independent) 4) David L. Bersohn (Libertarian Party) 5) Richard D. Porter (Reform Party)

References

- Besnier, Niko (1990). Conflict Management, Gossip and Affective Meaning on Nukulaelae. *Disentangling: Conflict Discourse in the Pacific*. K. Watson-Gegeo and G. White, eds. Stanford, Stanford University Press: 290-334.
- Besnier, Niko (1994). "The Truth and Other Irrelevant Aspects of Nukulaelae Gossip." *Pacific Studies* 17(3): 1-39.
- Brenneis, Donald (1978). "The Matter of Talk: Political Performance in Bhatgaon." *Language in Society* 7: 159-170.
- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Capps, Walter H. (1976). *Hope Against Hope: Molton [i.e. Moltmann] to Merton in One Decade*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Capps, Walter H. (1982). *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Capps, Walter H. (1983). *The Monastic Impulse*. New York: Crossroad.
- Capps, Walter H., Ed. (1989). *Thomas Merton: Preview of the Asian Journey*. New York, Crossroad.
- Capps, Walter H. (1990). *The New religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and Politics*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.
- Capps, Walter H. (1990). *The Unfinished War : Vietnam and the American Conscience*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Capps, Walter H. (1991). *The Vietnam Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Clayman, Steven and John Heritage (2002). *The News Interview: Journalists and Public Figures on the Air*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Conte, Maria-Elizabeth (1988). *Condizioni di coerenza: Ricerche di linguistica testuale*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice.
- Duranti, Alessandro (1981). *The Samoan Fono: A Sociolinguistic Study*. Pacific Linguistics Monographs, Series B. Vol. 80. Canberra: Australian National University, Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies.
- Duranti, Alessandro (1984). "Intentions, Self, and Local Theories of Meaning: Words and Social Action in a Samoan Context." *Center for Human Information Processing Technical Report 122*: 1-22.
- Duranti, Alessandro (1992). "Language and Bodies in Social Space: Samoan Ceremonial Greetings." *American Anthropologist* 94: 657-91.
- Duranti, Alessandro (1993). Intentions, Self, and Responsibility: An Essay in Samoan Ethnopragmatics. *Responsibility and Evidence in Oral Discourse*. J. H. Hill and J. T. Irvine, eds. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 24-47.
- Duranti, Alessandro (2001). Intentionality. *Key Terms in Language and Culture*. A. Duranti, ed. Malden, MA, Blackwell: 129-31.
- Duranti, Alessandro (2003). The Voice of the Audience in Contemporary American Political Discourse. *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics. Linguistics, Language, and the Real World: Discourse and Beyond*. J. E. Alatis and D. Tannen, eds. Georgetown, Georgetown University Press: 114-136.
- Duranti, Alessandro and Donald Brenneis (1986). The Audience as Co-Author.

special issue of *Text* (6-3): 239-347.

Duranti, Alessandro and Elinor Ochs (1997). *Syncretic Literacy in a Samoan American Family. Discourse, Tools, and Reasoning: Situated Cognition and Technologically Supported Environments*. L. Resnick, R. Säljö, C. Pontecorvo and B. Burge, eds. Heidelberg, Germany, Springer-Verlag: 169-202.

Erikson, Erik H. (1980). *Identity and the Life Cycle. A Reissue*. New York: Norton & Company.

Fenno, Richard F. Jr. (1996). *Senators on the Campaign Trail: The Politics of Representation*. Norman & London: The University of Oklahoma Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in Late Modern Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Goffman, Erving (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City NY: Doubleday.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

Hanks, William F. (1987). "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice." *American Ethnologist* 14(4): 668-692.

Haviland, John Beard (1977). *Gossip, Reputation, and Knowledge in Zinacantan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hill, Jane H. (2000). "Read My Article": Ideological Complexity and the Overdetermination of Promising in American Presidential Politics. *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics and Identities*. P. V. Kroskrity, ed. Santa Fe, NM, School of American Research Press: 259-91.

- Hultkrantz, Åke and Walter H. Capps (1976). *Seeing with a native eye : essays on native American religion*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kant, Immanuel (1785). *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Leipzig: Hartknoch.
- Mauss, Marcel (1938). "La Notion de Personne, Celle de "Moi"." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 68: 263-81. English translation in Mauss (1985).
- Mauss, Marcel (1985). A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self. *The Category of Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*. M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes, eds. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1-25.
- Medvedev, P.N. and M.M. Bakhtin (1985). *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University.
- Morgan, Marcyliena (1991). "Indirectness and Interpretation in African American Women's Discourse." *Pragmatics* 1(4): 421-51.
- Ochs, Elinor (2004). Narrative Lessons. *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*. A. Duranti, ed. Malden, MA, Blackwell: 269-89.
- Ochs, Elinor and Lisa Capps (2001). *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ochs, E. and C. Taylor (1992). Science at Dinner. *Text and Context: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Language Study*. C. Kramsch, ed. Lexington, Mass., D.C. Heath.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Z. (1982). "The Things We Do With Words: Ilongot Speech

- Acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy." *Language in Society* 11: 203-237.
- Rosen, Lawrence (1985). Intentionality and the Concept of the Person. *Criminal Justice*. Pennock and Chapman, eds. New York, New York University Press.
- Rosen, Lawrence, Ed. (1995). *Other Intentions: Cultural Context and the Attribution of Inner States*. Santa Fe, NM, School of American Research Press.
- Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974). "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation." *Language* 50: 696-735.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1991). Conversation Analysis and Socially Shared Cognition. *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition*. L. B. Resnick, J. M. Levine and S. D. Teasley, eds. Washington, DC, American Psychological Association: 150-71.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A., Gail Jefferson and Harvey Sacks (1977). "The Preference for Self-Correction in the Organization of Repair in Conversation." *Language* 53: 361-382.
- Stubbs, Michael (1983). *Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tannen, Deborah (1998). *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- van Dijk, Teun A. (1977). *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse*. London: Longman.
- Weltman, David and Michael Billig (2001). "The Political Psychology of Contemporary Anti-Politics: A Discursive Approach to the End-of-Ideology Era." *Political Psychology* 22(2): 367-82.

Widdowson, H.G. (1979). *Explorations in Applied Linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.

Wieneke, Bryant (2000). *Winning Without the Spin: A True Hero in American Politics*. Huntington, NY: Kroshka Books.

Wilson, John (2001). Political Discourse. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen and H. E. Hamilton, eds. Malden, MA, Blackwell: 398-415.

---

¹ The research on which this article is based was in part supported by two small grants from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1996-97 and 1997-98 and by a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship supplemented by funds from UCLA during the 1999-2000 academic year. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Discourse Lab in the Department of Anthropology at UCLA on June 2, 2004. I thank my colleagues and students for their generous feedback and comments. I am also indebted to Anjali Browning for her careful reading of my first draft and her useful editorial suggestions. Some of the data and ideas presented in this article were first introduced in a number of seminars, workshops and conferences at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," the Museo della Tolleranza in Rome, the University of Florence, and the University of California at Santa Barbara. I would like to thank the participants in those events for their engagement with this material and their comments.

A number of people made my 1995-96 project possible and a rewarding experience. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to the late Walter Capps and to his wife Lois Capps – now Rep. Lois Capps (D-California) – and to their extended family for letting me enter their home and giving me access to their lives as they experienced an extraordinary series of events. I am also very thankful to Walter's brother, Doug Capps, who was Walter's campaign manager in 1996 and who has continued over the years to be my liaison with the Capps family as I venture into the challenging process of writing what I learned from this project while also trying not to violate their privacy or their precious memories. Others members of the Capps-for-Congress campaign staff I could rely on for information included Bryant Wieneke, Steve Boyd, Thu Fong, and Lindsey Capps. After Walter Capps' death, I gained a better understanding of his academic background and further insights into his persona from my conversations with his colleague and friend Richard Hecht, Professor and former Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. I am also thankful to the 1995-96 Independent candidate Steven Wheeler, who, in June 1998, consented to meeting with me and to being interviewed. Among my research assistants, special thanks go to Jeff Storey who completed a first, rough transcription of the talk in most of my video tapes of the campaign and to Jennifer F. Reynolds and Sarah Meacham, both of whom did some additional transcription and recording. Sarah also helped me to organize press releases and other written material collected during the 1995-96 political campaign. This project was born out of conversations with Lisa Capps while she was a graduate student at UCLA. She remained a strong supporter of my efforts

---

to capture her father's adventure in politics after she accepted a position in Psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and even during the last year of her life, as she struggled with an incurable type of cancer. This article is dedicated to her memory.

² Several discourse analysts have made distinctions within what I am here generically calling "textual coherence." For example, Widdowson (1979) distinguishes between textual cohesion (between sentences) and textual coherence (between speech acts); in a related but distinct fashion, Conte (1988:29) distinguishes between what she calls "consistency," that is, the absence of contradictions, and coherence as the property of a series of utterances that are recognized as forming a whole. Bakhtin discusses the crucial role of the genre as a unit that provides guidance for performance and for interpretation of particular utterances through the process he calls "finalization" [*zavershenie*] – a concept related to the notion of semantic and pragmatic coherence (Bakhtin 1986; Medvedev/Bakhtin 1985). See also Hanks (1987).

³ See Haviland (1977), Besnier (1990, 1994).

⁴ Capps had a B.D. from the Augustana Theological Seminary, an STM from Yale University Divinity School (in 1961) and an M.A. (1963) and a Ph.D. (1965) also from Yale.

⁵ Capps' class was called "The Impact of the Vietnam War" and regularly enrolled 750-900 students. Capps also taught another very popular undergraduate course, "The Voice of the Stranger," which at times enrolled over 900 students (Richard Hecht, personal communication). The Vietnam course was also featured on "60 Minutes." According to a curriculum vitae Capps gave me

---

in 1995, he “was with the first group of American educators to visit Vietnam in 1991, to meet with representatives of the Ministry of Education and with selected faculty members at Ho Chi Minh City University and Hanoi University.”

⁶ One of Capps’ books is entitled *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience*. In the preface, Capps explains the logic behind such a title:

“The Vietnam war has been with me, it seems, my entire professional career. The very day I first arrived on campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara, as a young, new instructor was the day that President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The next several years saw extensive upheaval and pervasive conflict on our campus because so many believed so passionately that the war effort was morally wrong. After the war was brought to a close in 1975, I found myself in the company of men who had fought in the war, and who were manifestly troubled by this in addition to being confused by what they experienced when they returned home. I listened to them; and the more I heard the more I wanted to know.

[...] This title was selected to demonstrate that we were all in an intensely fluid state when it came to analysis and interpretation of the war. As difficult as this may be to acknowledge, we were just beginning to test some potentially useful methods and pathways to help make the war experience intelligible. [...]

(Capps 1990:ix).

⁷ This was made possible by the collaboration of a number of people in the campaign office, especially Bryant Winnecke who was in charge of scheduling.

This information was made available to me thanks to the approval given by the campaign manager, Doug Capps, Walter Capps' younger brother, who was then and has continued to be a great supporter of my project.

⁸ Fortunately, this resolution was never a problem with Walter Capps who never asked me to make copies of my tapes. Although I had originally planned to review some of the tapes with him in order to get his perspective on events and what was being said, it turned out that he was too busy to have time for such sessions during the campaign or after, when he went to Washington D.C. to serve his term in Congress.

⁹ "The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyles takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options." (Giddens 1991:5)

¹⁰ In the U.S., candidates for political office who do not want to run in a list of one of the existing parties (e.g. Democratic Party, Republican Party, Reform Party, Green Party, etc.) have the option of signing up with the "Independent Party," which allows them to run on their own personal platform.

¹¹ Federal rules require a very small number of signatures by registered voters to allow someone to be on the ballot. However, a number of signatures in the thousands helps candidates pay off part or all of the fee that they need to pay when they register to run for election.

---

¹² In writing about these particular TV spots, Bryant Wieneke, who worked closely with Walter Capps during the campaign, suggested that the phrase “independent, in touch, and in the mainstream” had been written by Democratic strategist Bill Carrick and was not something that Capps himself would have used.

The scripts [for the TV spots] came in from a highly competent, highly experienced professional by the name of Bill Carrick, and Doug, Cathy and Travis digested them.

In my opinion, they were very well done. They were completely positive and would stay that way for the duration of the campaign. Walter did not even mention Seastrand which was definitely a positive. The only part that made me cringe was the sound-bite at the end, when the announcer characterized Walter as “independent, in touch, and in the mainstream”. That part could have been in any candidate’s spot around the country; it just did not sound like something Walter would say about himself. (Wieneke 2000:133)

Although the entire phrase does not seem like something that Capps would have said or something that I recorded, Capps did use the term “independent” in talking about the candidate he wanted to be, as shown in example (2). More generally, the quote above raises the issue of the grounds on which to attribute authorship for what is said by and about a candidate for political office. It is difficult at times to distinguish between situations in which a speech (or script) writer inserted a term or phrase that he or she heard the candidate use and

---

situations in which a candidate might adopt a term or phrase originally written for him or about him by someone else.

¹³ This avoidance of direct confrontation with Wheeler was quite consistent throughout the campaign and it seemed part of a conscious decision made by Capps to minimize the potential impact of Wheeler's candidacy by avoiding making him into an interlocutor, someone whose opinions mattered.

¹⁴ I thank Keith Murphy for pointing this out to me after a talk I gave based on this material.

¹⁵ In the first case, *independent* is a predicate adjective and in the second case it is a modifier of a noun.

¹⁶ This means that in Wheeler's definition, "an independent" cannot be affiliated with the American Independent Party, which is a certified political party. This was confusing to some people, as shown by the fact that in the debate in Santa Barbara at the League of Women Voters, on October 7, 1996, the moderator erroneously introduced Wheeler as "of the Independent Party."

¹⁷ Morgan (1991:429) defines "baited indirectness" as any case in which "a speaker says something general which is taken by the audience to be specific or addressed to someone in particular because of contextual evidence."

¹⁸ "With politics as with law, our system is inherently adversarial in its structure, but in recent years a kind of antagonistic inflation has set in whereby opposition has become more extreme, and the adversarial nature of the system is being routinely abused." (Tannen 1998:96)

¹⁹ Both cases of other-generated struggle, that is, the one about being "(an) independent" and the one about being a Washington insider are closely related.

They point toward an “anti-politics” attitude in contemporary American politics that has some similarities with what in British politics has been called “The Third Way,” that is, the avoidance of explicit affiliation with the “Old Left” and the “New Right” (see Weltman and Billig 2001).

²⁰ He drew from this speech throughout the day at the various stops on the campaign trail. In San Luis Obispo, where he had a podium and a microphone, he read extensive portions of it.

²¹ Here is the segment immediately preceding the excerpt in (8):

Capps;   ((smiles, look away)) and I’m- how do- how do I know that? How
do I know we’re gonna win?

???;   ((laughter)) hehehe!

Capps;   well, you know, I can see it in your faces. (I mean)

Audience;   ((laughter))

Capps;   that I- and I- and I mean that totally because- because uh, Lois and I
... have lived here, [...]

²² Unfortunately, there is no room here to engage in a contextual analysis of the variants of the narrative of belonging during the first day of Capps’ 1995-96 campaign. A sense of the kind of direction I would want to take for such an analysis can be gathered from an earlier article of mine, where I analyzed Capps’ variants of the same joke throughout the first day of the campaign (Duranti 2003).

²³ An almost verbatim version of the same narrative also occupies a large portion of Wheeler’s two-minute statement at the end of the televised debate between

---

Walter Capps and Andrea Seastrand done at the KEYT headquarters, on October 21, 1996.

²⁴ From interview with Steven Wheeler, on June 25, 1998:

Duranti; [...] how did you prepare for that speech, how did you- ...

Wheeler; I:- uhm I: did it uh here. at the house. I believe. uh. and. ... I just (uh)
... uhm you know got on the computer and- an:: uh thought about
what I wanted to say and- and uh what seemed to be ... relevant in
terms of- ... of my campaign and what I thought that I had to offer, / /
you know to:

Duranti; right

Wheeler; uhm to the voters of the district / / uhm

Duranti; hu-hu

Wheeler; a:nd it seems like it was important to:: uhm talk uh about my
background a little bit.

Duranti; mh-mh.

Wheeler; and-uh ... [...] I didn't really have anyone advising me in terms of
what to say or what not to say.

²⁵ Although the spatial adverbial phrase *at Santa Barbara* is part of the standard way of distinguishing among different campus of the University of California, I believe that in this case it *also* works as a spatial qualifier given that Santa Barbara is the main urban center in the 22nd district.

²⁶ In the context of the present discussion, the applause received by the representative of the Natural Law Party is in need of an explanation given that

---

he read a statement about the general philosophy and program of the Natural Law Party without any personal narrative or any obvious attempt to connect to the people of the district through narratives of personal experience. It is perhaps relevant, however, that his statement ended with a general concern for the value of “coherence throughout society.”

(Debate at the League of Women Voters, Santa Barbara, October 7, 1996)

Hospidar; [...] We stand. for government. in accordance with natural law. which is the infinite organizing power of nature. ... we should solve problems at their basis by bringing individual lives in our national policy into greater harmony with the natural law through proven educational programs. ... through- natural preventive health care renewable energy. sustainable agriculture and other forward looking prevention oriented programs. and we wish to reverse the current epidemics of individual and social stress by establishing groups professionally engaged in creating coherence throughout society. Scientific research has demonstrated the effects of these programs.