

Walk & Talk

Episode 1 – Obama and the future of language

Narcel Reedus and Joe Jowers

I remember back in communication Theory class. They were talking about how those things are gendered. There's The Stereotype that women are talking Shaggy and and I think it feeds back into a whole set of stereotypes like the strong silent type. And then, you know, you have these kind of even have these films that are associated like back in the 40s with women that just you know, the rig talk driven. So, I think that there is that kind of Sociological pattern.

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So, I think that there is that kind of sociological pattern. But going to this gender saying the book that I was reading, and I put down. The Secret Life of pronouns, they talked about that stereotype and what they did is they put a device, a recording device on men and women and counted. The number of words that they use in a day. And it came out to be about the same. Uh, uh, interesting. Very interesting. Yeah. So, we have this impression that doesn't, it's like, ah, yes.

Right, right. I remember I have to think about. I remember the woman's name in my uh, again to that class. Did you take any classes with? Dr. Stanbeck? Doctor Who Standbeck. Standbeck, you know, I don't remember. Dr. Standbeck. Uh, she was a black woman. She was the chair of the department. Communications departed, in Georgia, state, Georgia State.

So, I took a Communications Theory class with her, and I remember her introducing us. We had to read this article and see video by this woman named Gale Spender surprised that I remember her name, but she was an Australian woman who took a recorder with her everywhere. Um, she would record conversations. Of men, women and between men and women and that she would analyze the face. She came out with her very on the, the front edge of feminism and they showed how men would dominate conversations. And there was one, I remember in particular where she was, she was the actual one was speaking at a conference and she was talking about this issue about how men, you know, take over the conversation that you use more will sit and listen, more often. And there's this one guy who gets up and he starts to ask the question and she was like, wait a second. Are you actually going to do this and everyone started laughing because he was you know, exhibiting exactly the behavior. She was critiquing out. But, you know, I guess the fascinating thing other, that's anything was that she just would record all these conversations and then, go through them to break down the

patterns. Yeah, I think that uh that observation played out and one of Sheila's group. She is part of like a women real estate every uh organization and it's like women only right, but I think that anyone can come to a meeting but it's like run by women.

You have most of the speakers on women and sure enough, just this guy showed up in a meeting and he sort of, took over and we'll see, telling women, listening as a guest but then sort of injecting. Ah, uh, uh, oh, this is what you need to do, uh, kind of authoritative, Well, let me, let me show you maybe just, tell you women how it works and what to do blah blah blah, and it was annoying

I'd be in a conversation with someone, and I recognized that I had a thought to add to the conversation and that if I did not add it at that particular point in time, I would forget it. so, this was back. I was uh, what in my 30s? Yeah, I uh, I found that it really done with inter. Ah, I found that a difficult thing to do when I'm interviewing someone, a lot of times, uh, listening in uh, interviewing someone and I have this, I want to respond to that in that moment to what they're saying. And then, you know, at the moment goes, uh, um, like shit and sometimes I'll get stuck trying to remember that thought so I'm not listening anymore. Not language, but theories, I guess about fully listening to a person and not waiting for your turn to speak. you know, but it's like I uh, I have something I want to say about what you said. They have more than one thought. So, they'll say something really interesting. Like, oh, and so, when I kill this guy back in, you know, the 70's this that and the third, and then that happened, and this, and that. And so, now, you know, I have a farm and, you know, this like, well, wait a minute, I have something to say about the murder killing someone in part, right, but usually people will go on and on and not. The allow. You the opportunity to respond? Two, uh, one thing. So, maybe they're doing the same thing of like, let me get all of this out. This train of thought. Uh, oh, The other part of the conversation that really I find remarkable. Is that how unlike our written sentences are speeches getting students to go from their thoughts and what they say to the written page can be really difficult. Then way, I kind of remember struggling with that. I took this class at Clark and I had a really cool Professor who was in radio and we were doing radio stuff. And I think it's that when I first kind of noticed that as much as I kind of like the idea of writing and believed in novels and all this kind of stuff. I would get to this point where it felt like, It was difficult to find the words and I would be struggling there because I wanted to communicate this thing for class or whatever and I was just like ah, but I don't know how to say it, right?

I guess I could make a little clever thing. Didn't know how to say it. There's such a difference. Do you find? Ah, Then you find uh, writing more difficult or speaking. Is that what you're you? Try to explain to me now, if which, which do you find more difficult? Um, how do I explain that? There are times when more than before. I'll feel like I have just the right word and sometimes that manifests itself in poetry. Sometimes it manifests itself in a title for an idea. And then, you know that there's no it's almost like the question you asked doesn't exist in the universe. I'm trying to paint. It's more, like, I recognize difference between those two modes, but I will say, uh, you know, easier than the other.

Hmm. No, I wouldn't say that. They're equally difficult. You don't even know anything like they're difficult. And now you're with post with this question, uh can't prioritize think that I had all the other too much problems are talking to people. I don't think I have that much. Uh, well, I mean, I guess you could say that getting to the point where I write that essay that might be difficult.

You know, because I have a bunch of essay ideas for story ideas that I'd never get out. So, I guess I'm thinking of that as difficult to yet another another level. Now, I think that there are a lot of times that I'm aware. Now, that as I come to, like the Precision at which you can use words. You know, when I'm writing, I might be thinking of a thought and I say, oh I want the right word. What is that right word and I can't find it. So I'll put in the word that's in the general Ballpark and try to go on so that it doesn't stop me from the flow.

But at on, uh, on a tangential sort of matter, I think this whole easy hard dichotomy is a very interesting one that I wanted to explore an essay for a while now. And I haven't gotten, uh, I guess I haven't gotten. Uh, ah, The Insight that. Beyond takes me beyond the initial thought. Ah, yeah, but you know, I want to relate it to technology and how technology makes things easier or more difficult and we, uh, some some, in some ways. Assume that. Uh, oh this got easier. And we forget that, you know, well, yeah, sort of but when you have to go through seven more steps, is it really easy? Anyway, I just kind of a tangent. Yeah, and it seems like it's a long long way, uh, not really answering the the question.

I read a little article about a guy that is suing. recall election and the recall is, , I think the entire city is voting in the recall, When he was elected into office, only the, the people in his district voted him in but now the entire city can vote them out. Interesting. So he's suing against that. Uh, yeah. Yeah. And so first, the name was, ah, Sha Sha, uh, Lin do something Harris. I immediately thought this was a well, first of all, uh, new. This is a black person and I thought this is a

And so they happen to be audio, click on the audio, all these commercials. Then I heard the guy speak and it was a guy, first of all, that surprised me. But then he was like on point, there were no arms, those stutters. He was very direct. Chris didn't run on and I was impressed. I was like,

I want to speak every time I open my mouth when that happens and you're not struggling to find the words. I think there's a different level of respect that people go. Uh, oh this nigger. Oh, okay. Well, you know I see what I'm dealing with here. There's an interesting thing about that too, though. I think there's some push back to that. What feels natural? For instance, to look at Pete. Bouge.

To me. He's the kind of guy that, you know, you feel like he's got the right word at every point. It uh, feels like his sentences. Must stop exactly where he wants, um, to. And then you have somebody like, ah, yeah, Trump who, doesn't put together an English sentence in any kind of ride yet. I think it's because of that, that the quote unquote,

every man white guy feels like, oh, I can relate to this guy. I think that we do that in our culture to with a lot of folks. oh here's one. My students. They got on me the other day.

was commenting on the caption of the photograph and the student had put in quotes and ungrammatical phrase. She used is where she was supposed to use our And I commented on that in class in quotes. Yeah. Boats like this is, he was quoting somebody, that's it. I commented on that in class and this happened. The time that I saw that. It was like, maybe a month ago. So, I don't remember what my comments to the student work. They were probably something like, if you're going to put something, um, quote, we need to know where that reference is turns out. That was a very iconic well-known phrase that I wasn't aware of. And the student turned to me and said, uh, ah, comes Jazz. You don't know that as from the help and I'm like, oh no, I didn't know that and she was like, how can you not know that?

You know, then she quoted the uh, oh you is smart, you is kind. Yes. That's the one I've seen the movie, but I don't remember that quote and they were just astounded that I couldn't. I didn't know that as far as she said they were, like, it's a mean it's all over the place. Um, like I'm sorry. I missed. It is It is they they Taking that out and made it, A reason why they don't like the film. It's because who doesn't like the um, it's sort of highlighting. Uh, well, there's up. There was a backlash that film Uh, uh, like they're people who didn't like the film medium, one of them being the other person. And that's probably why I don't remember it because I kind of dismissed it, but I think the point was that, that, that ungrammatical - connects with a lot of people I believe, you know, when they recognize that there's a speech pattern that they use, they're like, okay. Yeah, that's cool. Yeah. Well, I mean, I agree with that but my push back to your

Which bag would be the people that sort of gravitated to. And I like the way you used the word, the phrase, word salad of Trump. These are low information uneducated. Narrow-minded low vocabulary, why, folks? So that would not be my audience. I'm not necessarily trying to connect to the people in a general sense. Someone tells you that, Mexicans are rapists and it's like yeah. Well, that's not the uh the numbers in terms of getting more people.

I spoke in a common dialect we would not be my, my goal where what if my goal would be. what if that demographic is the black people who don't have a lot of Education, who don't read a lot who don't analyze things, critically you want to connect with them. And in fact, you probably gather a lot of your hipness. From that demographic.

Hipness. This may be this may be true. But I think the difference is, what do they call it? there's a term for what I'm saying, and I when I'm thinking and I can't remember, it'll come to me.

Where are you turning on and off? speak to your uh your audience. So if your audience is, you know, regular folks, then you kind of sort of speak in that in that the document, but if you're speaking to, educated folks then you speak differently. I don't uh, Trump doesn't have that ability to turn it on and off. It's all, you know words. Ah, all that

gobbledygook. It doesn't make any sense. It's very subtle, like Obama would have these conversations. When he's talking to just regular plain black folks you can hear a difference. It's subtle. It's not like he's, saying something ungrammatical. But he's not using his lofty words, I believe, but I haven't really analyzed. I'm just making this Assumption of that. Well, that's what he's doing here is what I notice about him. I think his speech has noticeably deteriorated his ability to really. Yeah, he tends to have these hesitations and pauses that are much more pronounced than they were early in his career.

Okay, it feels like it's almost embarrassing. Um, Attention to some of his, you know, maybe I'll do that too. But I feel like you know the speaker that spoke when he wowed the Democratic National Convention back in 2006 or whatever. You know, that kind of breakout speech. So like 15 years ago and the way he talks down. to my ear. It's such can uh, considerable distance and ah, it surprises me. In fact, it's um points, uh kind of worried and bothered me. And this is the person who I respected as being an incredibly brilliant writer. I think his books are so well or his book when I read is so well written that, it just kind of pulled me over his side early on. but in one respect, I'm like, you know, whatever. That's to be a. Uh, yeah. No, it's to be expected that he doesn't sound like he did 15 years ago, right? Uh, it was on the campaign Trail, you know, he had a certain, as possible. And now, without those pressures. He's just talking Plus. You know, I'm assuming he's, uh, you know, 15 years older. I would talk it up to that. Now. It sounds like you're concerned. It's like, whoa, does he have Alzheimer's or Some kind of Medical issue that is affecting his speech I don't know. I can't, uh, I can't but that's what. Um, that's how you how you make it sound. It. Definitely is cross my mind. I mean, I don't know that he's so bad that it feels like any kind of dementia, but it's sometimes, his paws is and stammers or so to my ear. So pronounced that it did concern me and I felt like Go was waiting. Uh, uh, ah. Finish the sentence.

Alzheimer's, or some kind of Medical issue that is affecting his speech and I don't know, I can't, uh, I can't but that's what. Um, that's how you, how you make it sound. Ah, I mean, I don't know that he's so bad that it feels like any kind of dementia, but it's sometimes his pauses and stammers of. So to my ear so pronounced that it did concern me and I felt like, I was waiting in an embarrassed spot just to wait to hear him. Finish the sentence. I think that a lot of people would suggest. And have said at length that, ah, Writing helps us to think clearly and there's this idea that if you can put stuff down in this written way, which tends to be at this linear process. It has your thinking. Yeah, I think there's certainly a lot of ah feels like there's a lot of validity to ask me.

I think about that, in terms of how we used to write Marshall McLuhan goes on about how the technology of writing. You know, essentially. Use these terms at that point because this is a new term. But essentially what he was saying is that the process of writing and reading our brains. Just like the process of writing rewired Our Brains writing and reading and the kind of cognition. It takes to do those things since our brains up to work in a certain way. Which is very different from people who live in an oral

culture. And I know, even our Logics, are based on this linear process as opposed to the more. Ah. I don't know if I'm being a little stretchy, the argument too much, but the circular sort of process of thinking that someone does when you belong to an oral culture, uh, oral culture. there's a whole lot of writing about that. And that kind of informs.

The conversation around what's next for human beings? As we become less will, as we read less books, as we skim more, as we write less, as we depend on machines to do a lot of that heavy lifting.

You there, some kids that context so fast and then you look at what they tight and you know, there's no periods or commas.

There's no capitalized letters. They are going to think about the world differently than we do. Yeah, but Joe, I think we've had this kind of conversation before and you sound like an old man. It sounds like, you know, get off my lawn and it's like, um, I think that in a casual conversation. Between friends. Then, you know, that's to be expected. And I think that's okay. I don't think that they would necessarily turn in coursework that look like a text. Maybe, if you find, that really. Is that what you think? The case, uh, sir, step down, bitch, turn in work to you, that no periods. Uh, no mames capitalization.

Absolutely all the time. That is the common way to do it. I begged them to use grandma. Is it? I assigned him? I say, hey, don't turn the conditioning in unless you take it through grammarly. And basically they just won't do it. It's very consistent. I mean throughout the whole piece so I can see like I'm um, I'm totally amazed that your astounded. There's that's why I'm raising my voice. I'm just like I guess I guess I would I would like to see an example of, like you turn this into me in a college setting. This is not a tax.

Applying for a job. I have this a coverlet conversation with or their resume is all the time. I have this conversation with other teachers all the time. It's just a thing it really is.

Well, I mean you would know, I can't, I can't stand over here and say, you know, anything different and people they don't fight that. Well, either the ability to think critically is not they have to take a class an English class and pass this class and whatever. And it's a joke. It really is. It's like, nobody wants to take that class. They hate it. Do you remember taking grammar classes in college? Uh, kinda sorta, not really grammar English. Well because their journalism students, they have this extra level of things. They're supposed to pass before they graduate and most of the students, you know, there are certainly still, those students were going to succeed. No matter where they are and they can reason fairly well, but you know,

If uh, It feels like every single one of them needs to be just ripped out of school and say, hey, we're going to have an intensive, you're going to learn to think critically. Ah, you're going to learn to question. You're going to learn to make clear sentences mostly that's just doesn't happen. they write more like they speak than they talk and they are should as it written in a written, uh world. And this is these are journalism student. Yeah. Wow,

and in some ways I think they're the worst because there's something about journalism that appeals to students, who want to be verbose who see themselves as anchors. They get attracted to that sort of style. And they don't learn and there are disciplines every once in a while. I'll get students from other programs that take my photography class. And I'm always impressed that sometimes are the better students. They write better because uh, no, they've been forced to write papers of different type. it's it's remarkable. It really is.

Well, this is making me want to be a third grade English teacher. Yeah, well, ah, I see myself in front of a classroom of seven eight, nine year olds suit and tie dress nice speaking. Well, uh, okay. Yeah. you know, figuring out some some way of getting them engaged in Reading at words and language, because, some research I've read somewhere. It's like if they don't get it by the third grade that it affects everything else like that. You know, they don't get it. Yeah, and so I see that I don't, I I can't. A that I remembered anything special about, learning English growing up. Now. It was just a coincidence that I think my sixth grade teacher. Mr. Wilder. What love and adore was also my next door, neighbor, two doors down and he took us on trips. What? To DC and New York and all these different places. And he also gave us, you know, little jobs and took the skating. So he was like the man

So, I remember him and the Weekly Reader, but he was in my third grade English teacher, I would say that my our teachers were, you know, like Mrs. Clemons. I remember her as the librarian for our school. So, you know, I don't remember anything special about my what is it called? Is a formal education, but it must have been enough of the right. Stuff for me to stream together, you know, sentences in a halfway decent, decent way, and to think things, you know. But I, um, I tribute a lot of my, uh, critical thinking to my experience at Morris Brown College? And, you know, going to an HBCU? Well, I think critical thinking skills are at an all-time low and I think a lot of that critical thinking skill comes about because of writing and but not, I guess, I would say not just writing, but writing and the lack of teaching. The type, uh, I was thinking clearly that you would have to teach if you were in a society that depended on oral, for instance, and it gets back to this whole, this is the Paradigm for me. whole dialogue between Socrates and Plato or I shouldn't even put it that way. This whole ah, it's more like a myth because it's really a set of stories that Plato wrote dialogues that he wrote.

And, you know, clearly Socrates was the brilliant man of his day and his ability to command and or 8 must have been astounding. But he lived in that kind of changing era, where Greece went from oral to written culture and, you know, Western Civilization.

Gained this power but becoming a written civilization, you there are certainly other things other technologies that made Western technology ascendant, but you can certainly point to writing as being, you know, perhaps the principal one. So the power in which this technology, conquered the world is pretty amazing. I, uh, I didn't read the

dialogues, but I got an audiobook, uh, ironically enough. We're a philosopher, basically describes that whole process. And what Plato was saying, in the dialogues, that he wrote. Uh, yeah, you know, the name of this book, not that I'm going to go down that road. But ah, well, you want to let me know. I'll find it. No, okay. But you know, it's like I can see it in the what by the years that I've been teaching. I've seen it get worse. I've seen these very problems get worse.