

## GRAMMATICAL MODELS AND THE SELF

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The questions »Who are you?« and »Who is he?« have well established places in English conversation. Both take the same sort of answers, namely proper name or calling. Information which is available to the interrogator in the situation and implied by the context cannot properly be offered in answer. So while »Jane Smith« og »Your Avon representative« will do, »A woman« og »An Indian« will not. To answer »Myself« to the first question is at worst insolent and cheeky at best, while to give »Himself« in answer to the second is proper only in Ireland as a disclosure of his rank or calling.

The question »Who am I?« has appeared in the wake of the spread of the »identity« concept and the cultural practices and issues it is tied in with. The separation of individuality from social and geographical place, from relations and roles, seems at its most extreme in the United States. We will call this concept A-identity. Its problematic character comes out in the fact that the »Who am I?« question can be taken two ways.

i. »Which person am I?« This must take the answer »Myself« by reason of the indexical force of »I«. The necessity here is hard since the required answer is not a report of an inevitable empirical discovery but is a consequence of the grammar of token reflexive expressions. This feature of the grammar of self-referential questions can be clearly seen in the conditions for my giving myself the answer »Rom Harré«. This must be an answer to a different question, namely »What is this person usually *called*?« Indexical force is conserved in the grammar of »this«. The identity of personhood involved in the grammar of first person indexicals we will call L-identity.

ii. »What sort of person am I?« can take a huge variety of answers depending on context, for instance the kind of interrogation that is under way. There are great differences in the focus of interest in such »person predicaments« as getting a mortgage, being under arrest for spying, and so on. Much will depend on the sort of interrogator who is putting the questions (tough or tender), the culturally available categories in terms of which answers are regarded as legitimate and so on. This way of taking the question is typical of empirical studies of A-identity. It is this identity that is at issue in identity crises. Such crises would scarcely be occasions of significance if it were not for the presumed conservation of and continuity of L-identity.

G.H. Mead's famous distinction between the »I« and the »me« of personhood is, I believe, exactly the distinction between L-identity and A-identity.

Mead took the »I« aspect for granted and was concerned to emphasize the social construction of the »me«. We hope to show that it is not implausible to take both L- and A-identity as socially constructed, the former in the very conditions of learning the language in which issues about A-identity could be raised.

*a. Avowals*

We owe to Wittgenstein the observation that first person statements in which a mental state is predicated of »I« are very different from third person statements predicating the very same property of someone else. His famous study of the way pain-talk is made possible shows that to say »I am in pain« is not to make a testable empirical statement about myself and my feelings. The criterial phenomena which are involved in those public practices through which the uses of the word »pain« are determined are behavioural. But the word »pain« does not denote pain behaviour. The conditions for the possibility of learning to use a word like »pain« are such that the first person utterance is to be taken as a substitute for or complement to a natural expression of pain. It is an avowal, not an assertion. If I say I am in pain when I am not, the statement is to be judged as a misleading (immoral) avowal rather than as a false description. It is more like an insincere promise that it is like a lie. It is not that the former reading excludes the latter as renders it empty. The fact that logically I cannot experience your pain does not show that I cannot understand what you mean. My ability to judge the sincerity of your avowal is a matter of my understanding of character, circumstances and so on. I do not stand there paralyzed with doubt because I am not feeling your discomfort. So my acceptance of your utterance cannot be by virtue of my having checked it against what it purports to describe. It follows from this that it is impossible for infants to have learned how to use words that refer to private sensations by ostensive reference to those feelings. Unlike colours there are no public samples of pain. So it must be to the role of pain avowals in a form of life that we must look for the conditions under which they come to have a meaning for us.

Since avowals are not statements ascribing properties to substances the grammatical subject »I« cannot be being used to denote such a substance. (We mean »substance« here in the traditional philosophers' sense of that which has properties. Substances may be individual such as Mt Everest, »mass« such as water). The use of »I« must be indexical, that is it must tie the avowal to the speaker picked out from all contextually available persons, as the one who is responsible for what has been said. Of course in the case of a sincere avowal there is indeed a state of discomfort being felt by the person who is complaining. But the primary sense of the utterance is as the illocutionary force of a complaint (plea for help, etc.) not as a description of an inner state.

If an utterance is sincere there is such a state. To understand the force of a third person psychological statement such as »He is feeling nauseous« we need another of Wittgenstein's distinctions, that between symptoms and criteria. There cannot be criteria for third person pain ascriptions, since I can never be acquainted with his pain as a feeling. But his groans and his avowals that stand in for or supplement his groans are my grounds for the third person statement. They are symptoms of his discomfort. And on the basis of them I can properly make my (defeasible) statement about him. Compare this case with a conversation about his nose. Comments upon it turn on the properties of a public object to which all speakers, including himself, have access. In this case we might talk about criteria, even of his nose as a sample instance of aquilinity.

*b. Epistemic commentary*

If self-consciousness is the capacity to ascribe states to myself as mine then we would expect there to be more complex grammatical forms available by means of which more complex thought patterns than avowals could be managed. Let us take as an example »I think I hear the phone«. Typically such complex sentences take epistemic verbs in the first clause, such as »think«, »know«, »believe« and so on. They serve to express assessments of the epistemic quality of the avowals which have been or could be made by means of the embedded clause. In these clauses typically verbs of perception and of action appear. »I know that I put the key in the top drawer« is a sentence which when used in an actual context indexes an epistemic attitude to a certain avowal to the speaker of the moment. How are we to understand the embedded clause within the whole complex speech-act?

Wittgenstein's general warning against the influence of unexamined grammatical models should alert us to the possibility that forms like »I think he hid the photo in his sock« serve as covert models for our interpretation of statements like that above which iterate the »I«. There are two beings and one, the speaker, is commenting upon an action or attribute of the other. It is my contention that the third person statement form does indeed influence our interpretations of the first person statement, encouraging the belief that there »must« be a referent for the embedded »I« just as there is a referent for the embedded »he«. It is to this being that the properties commented upon by the public person as speaker are ascribed, by that public speaker. And so the concept of »inner self« or »transcendental ego« gets a purchase. But everything depends here on the force of the third person embedded statement as the grammatical model for the understanding of the first person statement. But if we return to the thought expressed in the distinction between avowals and descriptions the model loses some of its attraction. There seems to be no good ground for supposing that embedding an avowal in another avowal changes its status. To follow out this observation let us look

at another case of embedding, that of a strong performative within a qualifying context. The order »You'll do this« can be embedded in a first person context to give us such an utterance as »I hope you'll do this?«. The latter is also an order though a qualified one, perhaps even mild enough to be counted as just a request. But there is no temptation to suppose that something radical has overtaken the embedded clause. In particular it has not become a description of what the interlocutor was told. The context is not, as one might say, performatively opaque.

### *Indexial opacity*

While simple first person indexicality is a feature of many languages, though not, we believe, of Japanese, the grammatical possibilities for self commentary very widely. English permits a free iteration of pronouns in sentences of the form

Pronoun 1 + Epistemic verb (that) pronoun 2 + avowal.

Epistemic verbs include »think«, »believe«, »feel«, »hope«, »fear«, »guess« and many others. These verbs are used to express assessments of the quality of the embedded statements, according to some relevant norm or standard. But the conversational use of such assessments may not be as simple as mere contributions to a kind of quasi-empirical debate. In looking into these uses the ultimate target is the achievement of a plausible description of the role of the pronouns in the use of such sentence forms. Are they, if first person, just co-indexical? I shall discuss two cases, weakened performatives and qualified perceptual claims.

#### 1. An utterance like

»I'm going to be sick« I

can be read as a prediction, grounded perhaps on the awareness of feelings of nausea. More importantly, for conversational purposes, it often has the illocutionary force of a warning, and sometimes it should even be read as a threat. Heard the first way it is an avowal assessable for its sincerity or insincerity, while heard as a warning it is subject to felicity conditions including conventions of propriety. It seems reasonable to include the sincerity conditions of the utterance as an avowal amongst the felicity conditions for the utterance as a performative. The utterance

»I think I'm going to be sick« II

would usually be heard as a qualified avowal and a weakened performative.

The general theory of language upon which this discussion ultimately rests requires that both speaker intention and hearer uptake should be required for the speech act to be complete. Of course it is the public displays that are meant, so that in a certain sense this way of understanding language is based on a speaker-speaker duality rather than a speaker-hearer. The latter presents the second partner as passive and his or her act as psychological in the sense of subjective.

In uttering II the sincerity conditions involve both the awareness of feelings of nausea and the actual reflection on the feeling, its quality, intensity, probable duration and even its possible cause. A nasty feeling which comes on when one is trapped in a car being raced round the curves of a winding country road is thereby in part identified. In short it would be improper to utter II unless one had actually considered one's own condition and judged it to be just short of peremptory. But how do I know how to make such an assessment? It must surely involve some competence in and practice of cognitive skills over and above those which are needed to be able to call out utterance I as a warning or complaint. It seems reasonable to assume that these cognitive skills are none other than those involved in any descriptive claim about persons, that is they involve as a model, the logical grammar of third person psychological ascriptions, which as Wittgenstein showed in the Private Language Argument, involve primary psychonomic language games, with which the symptoms *v.* criteria distinction is properly controlled. Does that distinction pass over into the first person grammar of the embedded statement in II? This seems odd since it is the subjective feeling of nausea that prompts the warning from the speaker, not the greenish hue of his or her complexion. Notice that if the worst comes to the worst it is the whole public embodied person who actually »throws up«.

The first point to notice in assessing the propriety of using the third person case as a model for the embedded first person case is that in learning to use expressions like »... is going to be sick« public occasions rather than private feelings must be primary (or perhaps it would be better to say »paramount«). This does not preclude the obvious fact that I can come to learn to judge the propriety of issuing my warning on the basis of how I feel. It precludes only the idea that the meaning of »... is going to be sick« is a feeling of nausea. Schachter's work on obesity demonstrates that a person can use »I'm hungry«, say as a request or as a complaint, perfectly competently, who has never experienced or at any rate identified that gnawing feeling that often accompanies the like declaration in those cultures where the refrigerator is not an ever open cornucopia of goodies. It follows that as far as the sincerity conditions of the avowal are concerned, nauseous feelings are symptoms and not criteria. Thus the logical structure of the embedded avowal and the third person ascription are the same, but the application of the symptom/criterion distinction is reversed. For the third person case the public behaviour is symptomatic (though it is the content of the primary

language game that ensures the expression has a meaning in public discourse) and what would be criterial, namely the private feelings, is precluded from playing a role in the truth conditions, though it is that which the expression denotes. In the first person case the private feelings are symptomatic, and what would be criterial, that is public behaviour, is precluded from playing a role in the truth conditions.

In both cases, embedded first person and simple third person, a property is being ascribed to an individual being. It follows that the model for our understanding of the embedded statement II is indeed

»He is going to be sick«

While this statement does have illocutionary force (it too may be a warning) the dominant sense is as a prediction. Thus while II, *as a whole*, is a weakened performative, the embedded statement, having the same apparent form as I, has the dominant sense of a qualified prediction. »It«, the sentence, is no longer the vehicle for a performative utterance, as it was when used as I. It has become a predictive ascription of a property to an individual being.

It follows that the role of »I 2« in

»I 1 think I 2'm going to be sick«

is not the same as that of I 1. While both serve to pick out the speaker they do so with respect to different aspects. »I 1« indexes the avowal II to the speaker, and thereby locates the point of moral responsibility for what has been said at the person who spoke. But »I 2« denotes the speaker as an individual being, the bearer of properties. Both nausea and vomiting are attributes. But are they attributes of the very same being? Is the public person indexed by the initial pronoun the very same being as is denoted by the first embedded »I«? I shall call utterances of the type of I first order avowals and of the type of II second order avowals. But an answer to the question must await further analysis.

2. By a qualified perceptual claim I mean an utterance like

»I 1'm quite sure that I 2 can feel a draft« III

Most conversational declarations do have some performative force. This example, imagined as uttered in some concrete context, is no exception. As a complaint it has many of the properties of the overtly performative utterances discussed above. It has long been recognized that since any sentence can be used to perform some socially significant act in the appropriate

conversational context there are no intrinsic properties of a sentence that are necessary to its being able to be used performatively. Nevertheless there are some sentences, such as »Don't you dare do that again«, which seems peculiarly well adapted to such uses.

Setting aside illocutionary force and studying III as a token utterance, say uttered in the course of settling in to a tent on a camping trip, it is worth noting that »There's a draft«, »I can feel a draft« and »I'm quite sure I can feel a draft« all have the same empirical content. How do they differ? The existential claim does not include any reference to the grounds on which it is made. It could have been based, as in a well known double glazing advertisement, on the movement of a falling feather, of the flickering of the candle flames. But the first order avowal does indicate the grounds for the judgement, some feeling. It might have been a chilly sensation in the neck. The second order presents an epistemic comment on the first order avowal, in this case indicating the quality of the sensory evidence.

Again in this case there does seem to be a difference in pronominal role of »I« in the first and second order avowals, along the same lines as those apparent in the case of the stronger and weaker performatives. It seems that the only difference between the two cases is that of the relative balance between the locutionary and illocutionary force of the utterances in an imagined concrete situation of use. These examples are selections from a close knit family of language games in which the resources of the English language are used to perform social acts constitutive of a form of life in which individual responsibility for one's sayings (as doings) is taken for granted. In Japan the organization of responsibility is rather different. Token reflexive expressions in Japanese do not just anchor a speech act to a speaker. They are group indexicals tying what has been said to the group of which the speaker is, in that act of speaking, the spokesperson. This is the »me-group« while the person or persons addressed are referred to by the use of terms which index a »you-group«. Which group is indexed for responsibility can usually be determined from context. However, there are some person denoting words which make explicit the identity of the me-group. For instance when it is the speaker's family that is to be denoted an expression meaning »house« stands in for where in English a pronoun would be used. The choice of expression from a complex repertoire of person denoting terms is motivated by the relative standing and prestige of the me-group and the you-group of that occasion of speaking.

If the capacity to reflect upon and assess one's acts, be they linguistic or behavioural, is a universal characteristic of mankind, inculcated through the people making practices of each and every society, how can a Japanese manage to express the results of such a self-examination? The group indexicality of the token reflexive expressions of the Japanese language is patently an obstacle. Anthropologists have described a variety of devices by which social practices of individual self-examination have flourished amongst the Japa-

nese. These bear some similarity to those employed by those amongst us who are too shy or embarrassed to ask advice or risk criticism in *propria persona*. But the Japanese practices are, of course, founded in an apparently different psychology. At this point very interesting possibilities for cross-cultural research programmes open out. If, as I have argued, one's sense of moral responsibility is tied in to the ways in which one can talk (and hence think) about oneself, the study of the language games of self appraisal typical of different linguistic cultures, will be an excellent route into an understanding of the diversity of ways human beings can have and be selves.

(c) In exploring the contrast between the first and third person uses of »psychological« predicates I have left the logical grammar of the second person unanalyzed. The pronoun »you« can be used for both third and first person reference, so the mere presence of the lexical item »wai-oh-you« is not enough to show that a second person use is intended. There remains then the second person *use* of some pronoun or other, and for convenience I shall cite examples in which the lexical item »you« is used to carry second person reference. What are some of the actual uses of this and other similarly functioning devices? Consider how one might use »You're afraid«. Offhand I can think of only one context of use, namely that in which the speaker expresses his or her astonishment and admonishes the addressee. »Are you (too) tired?« is quite often not used to request information about how the addressee feels but a device to make room for a non-demeaning escape from some plan or prior commitment. Indeed I cannot think of any cases outside a medical consulting room, in which second person denoting devices are used in statements that are simply descriptive. As so often seems to happen when we turn to try to think of examples of people speaking illocutionary and perlocutionary forces, that is the social power and social effect of what is said, seem to be the dominant categories in which to explain the point of an utterance. What does this show about the grammar of »you«? I submit that this puts acts of reference to a second person into the same category as that of the first person, namely as an indexical device for locating non-descriptive speech acts in conversation space - - the array of responsible people.

The contrasts I have drawn between person referring systems can be expressed as a spectrum of distinctions displaying the extent to which personal identity is dependent on (understood in terms of) social role. Expressing the matter thus ties pronoun studies into the comparative anthropology of ethical systems. (C.-f. Wong (1985) for a useful critical survey). Geertz (1973) claims that in Bali an individual's social roles comprise the »substance of the self«. Westerners, he claims, though I would sharpen the reference somewhat to »speakers of English« are free to »focus on psychological traits as the heart of persona identity . . .« while the Balinese »focussing on social position, say that their role is the essence of their true selves.« So a person's duties and obligations, and what is reciprocally owed to him or her, depends on the social relations between the persons concerned, and so on their social



category. The ethical system of culture like Bali or traditional Japan or New Guinea (c.f. the ethnography of Read (1955)) does not recognize a context free moral individual with universal rights and duties and the sole power of executive decision and action.

This leads to a polarized continuum of concepts as to the nature of identity. Westerners (and in this context I think we must narrow that down to Americans) »concentrate on role-independent traits, desires and goals« or rather, to avoid begging the question, we should say *cultivate* such dispositions and powers. Thus Geertz describes a »bounded . . . distinctive whole . . . set contrastively against . . . its social and natural background.« Easterners, say Japanese, cultivate a system of role dependent dispositions and moral intuitions. In the light of such an ethnographic distinction it is not surprising that to speak English correctly and appositely in this or that situation does not require knowledge of actual or potential social relations among speakers, while that would be quite impossible with Japanese.

We are now in a position to see how both the »I« and the »me« are socially constructed. Practices of identity »production«, as for example described by Hadden and Lester (1978), are clearly social and *manifestly* culture bound. To learn an American or Balinese identity, in this sense, is not just to be taught a cluster of cultural conventions as to what one should or should not have as attributes, but above all the local forms of self attribution. The grammatical forms in which the practices of self reflection occur must also be acquired. Their cultural diversity is the best proof of the social origins of whatever sense of self each of us acquires as a member of his or her society.

### *The temptation to theorize*

In describing the »grammar« of these practices I have made use of two ontological concepts, that of the embodied speaker and that of an individual being with properties. Are they identical? »Westerners« organize their thoughts and feelings in contrast to their speakings and actings, as if they exist in distinct realms. Philosophers have gone so far as to extend this distinctiveness from an »as if« to the full blown assertion that there is a duality of substances in the complete and mature human being. There is the material substance, the embodied speaker located spatio-temporally in a world of speakers and many dumb objects. And there is the mental substance, that which has feelings, thoughts and other states as attributes, the Cartesian ego. To return to the distinction with which I began this paper, we must see that as well as A-identity there is L-identity for without it A-identity would be impossible. What is the nature of L-identity? Traditionally it is located in the Cartesian ego. My proposal for understanding L-identity would be to point to the variety of human practices of self reflection and commentary upon one's own act. This would bring out the importance of realizing that to take L-identity as arising from the persistence of mental substance is nothing but

the projection on to the world of the grammar of the first person. But to understand the practices of self assessment we need to suppose only that I 1 and I 2 of the second order avowals discussed above are co-indexical and nothing more.

But why should anyone be inclined to follow Descartes' theory? There could certainly be other ways of explaining typical grammars of the first person. Indeed why, since we have described these human practices, typical of human forms of life, do we need a theoretical explanation as well? By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body had given place to the idea of the immortality of the soul. The former was compatible with a unitary ontology of persons as embodied beings, with variety of capacities. The latter was overtly dualistic. The idea of human agency, which is bound up with the capacity for critical reflection on one's thoughts and actions, seemed to be incompatible with the physical nature of a deterministic body-machine. So it must be grounded elsewhere. Not only was a revision of Christianity in progress at this time, but a new political framework was emerging which also emphasized the separateness of people one from another and the individuality of the will. The independence of agent was tied to individual responsibility for action, and individual rights began to be formulated as opposed to the rights of groups and collectives. A fully historical oriented psychology would research not only into the structures of selfhood in contemporary cultures but would try to add a temporal dimension to locate the practices of modern people as moments in a complex history of changing forms of life and the language games which realize them.

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