

# First-Person Reference in Discourse: Aims and Strategies

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## 1. Introduction

'Focus on the Speaker' is a pertinent subject in the debates on discourse processing at the present moment, largely as a result of the availability of two major orientations concerning utterance meaning: the one that has remained close to Grice's original idea of meaning being inference-driven, and the one according to which meaning is better explained as the result of the addressee's inference from what has been uttered and in what circumstances.

Nevertheless, my contribution to the topic cuts across this Speaker Meaning/Addressee Meaning divide. In what follows, I focus on the first-person reference as applied in conversation, addressing the question of the meaning of markers of first-person reference, the most typical of which is the first-person pronoun such as the English 'I'. I assess the viability of applying the rigid *indexical/non-indexical* distinction to such markers, briefly discuss universal and culture-specific aspects to self-referring and, next, focusing on English, ask the question as to whether the English language has devices that are used uniquely and unambiguously for conveying self-reference in the most common sense, that of conveying 'cognitive access to oneself' (Chierchia 1989).

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents the cross-linguistic diversity of ways of self-referring and poses some questions for semantic and pragmatic theory that ensue from this diversity. Section 3 focuses on the various uses of the first-person singular pronoun 'I' on the one hand, and, on the other, on ways of self-referring in English

and the differences in meaning that such a choice affords. Section 4 proceeds to a discussion of attributing self-reference in what is called reports on *de se* beliefs. In discourse, information about self-attribution can be recovered from the speaker's overt self-referring; inferred from his/her behaviour; obtained as a result of reasoning from premises; guessed; assumed on various grounds (reliable or less reliable), and so forth. I discuss there the devices that discourse affords to unambiguously convey information on one's beliefs and other mental states about oneself. Here I also come back to the issue of intended, speaker's meaning vis-à-vis recovered, addressee's meaning, discussing the role of salient interpretations known in Default Semantics (Jaszczolt, e.g. 2005, 2010) as cognitive defaults. Section 5 concludes, suggesting pragmatic universals that underlie the diversity in expressing, and reporting, first-person reference.

## 2. *First-Person Reference and Cross-Cultural Diversity*

The received view in semantics is that the first-person singular pronoun 'I' is a *deictic*, or *indexical* expression, in the strong sense of 'indexical' in that it is associated with only one semantic role: that of the speaker or the writer. 'I am writing a paper for *Intercultural Pragmatics*' differs from 'The woman in a navy sweatshirt is writing a paper for *Intercultural Pragmatics*' precisely because while the first uses an indexical, arguably directly referring, expression for referring to me, the latter uses a definite description – a contextually referring one, with semantic content that is given *not* by associating the expression with a particular person for that context, but by associating the properties of being a woman and wearing a navy sweatshirt – with appropriate referents – a semanticist of the orientation paraphrased here would add: referents in relevant possible worlds.<sup>1</sup> Before producing examples from the English language that demonstrate that even this seemingly clear-cut distinction between indexicals and non-indexicals is in fact blurred, it is essential to look briefly elsewhere. It is

well known that in Japanese and Thai the first-person marker has the characteristics of both a pronoun and a noun. Pronouns and nouns, if these categories are to be distinguished at all, are not morphologically different there: like nouns, pronouns do not form a closed class; like nouns, they form the plural by adding a plural morpheme. The main reason for this is the compulsory expression of social deference, or honorification. Many other languages of Southeast and East Asia exhibit this characteristic, to mention only Burmese, Javanese, Khmer, Korean, Malay, or Vietnamese. Typically, across these languages, words for ‘slave’, ‘servant’, ‘royal slave’, ‘lord’s servant’, ‘Buddha’s servant’ are employed in the service of self-reference with self-denigration. Thai has been described as having twenty seven different forms for first person (Siewierska 2004: 228). In addition to the above, for example, female speaker can use the word for ‘mouse’ to refer to herself. Spatial deixis can also be used, for example in Thai *phǒm<sub>1</sub> nii<sub>2</sub>*, literally meaning ‘one male this’; Japanese *kotira*, Korean *yeogi*, and Vietnamese *hây*, literally ‘here’, can be used for self-reference. Another method of self-reference is the use of reflexives for this purpose, such as Japanese *zibun/jibun*, or Vietnamese *mình*. Finally, languages can also exhibit a conflation of means of expressing first- and second-person reference: one and the same marker can express self-reference in one context and second-person or reflexivity in others.<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, this plurality of forms can be explained as the result of the process of grammaticalization of lexical items. Grammaticalization has its external, social motivation in the considerations of politeness and face, normally self-denigration and other-anointment, characteristic of a hierarchical society. But the historical process of their formation does not undermine the fact that, assessed synchronically, these forms display the characteristics of both categories: nouns and pronouns. Moreover, it is not at all uncontroversial that the process of pronominalization can be subsumed under grammaticalization in that the first does not fulfil all of the definitional criteria of the latter. As Heine and Song (2011: 619) point out,

personal pronouns that develop from common nouns should exhibit the change from referential to non-referential function. But this, of course, is not the case:

‘Personal pronouns are invariably referential. Accordingly, in order to define the evolution of personal pronouns in terms of grammaticalization, an extended concept of grammaticalization is needed – one that parts with the stipulation that this process leads from referential to non-referential expressions.’

Alternatively, we succumb to the intuition that pronominals and lexical expressions belong to one category, pace the received view on the semantics of indexicals. We can propose one of the following. First, we can stipulate that the indexical/non-indexical distinction in the domain of first-person reference is not a semantic universal but rather can be found only in some natural languages. This stipulation, however, would be of little use as its corroboration or falsification rests entirely on adopted theoretical assumptions. The stipulation can, of course, easily be supported with empirical evidence of the type mentioned above, so the onus of proof would be on the semanticist who would have to procure such a binary distinction – for example based on the function of the particular word in context. The latter is relatively easy to accomplish though. If the contextualist ideology is adopted, such context-dependence has its rightful place within the remit of semantic description. We would have to adopt the view that some expressions are *pragmatically ambiguous* between indexical and non-indexical ‘use’ and underdetermined with respect to the meaning that can be read off the morphosyntax. Next, we can adopt a stronger hypothesis, namely that there is no indexical/non-indexical dichotomy in the *system* of any language. Instead, there are only salient, default uses of expressions and the more unusual, context-driven ones, which leads to the assumption that there is a class of indexical expressions, such as first-person pronouns,

can be discriminated. Of course, the distinction will be present on the level of concepts, in that reference to the speaker, the addressee, the place, and the time of the exchange, or, simply, the I, the YOU, the HERE and the NOW are conveyed in most if not all cultures (see here Wierzbicka, e.g. 1996 on semantic universals). I return to this hypothesis in Section 3. In order to falsify our second hypothesis, there would have to be unambiguously discriminable expressions that function only as indexical markers of first-person reference. The scope of the necessary relevant research is vast but what I intend to contribute in what follows to give it a start is demonstrating, with reference to English, that to convey the concept I, the cognitive access to oneself, one cannot rely absolutely on any marker of first-person reference. Firstly, such markers cannot be clearly delimited, and secondly, even when we identify them, they are likely to have other functions as well. Put simply, when applied to English: (i) 'I' is not the only way of self-referring where some of these ways are not systematic, and, on the other hand, (ii) 'I' itself can (albeit occasionally) serve purposes other than self-referring. To repeat, languages with first-person markers that display both nominal and pronominal characteristics add a further overlay to this situation, suggesting that self-reference is a phenomenon that can be investigated only on the pragmatic level, the level of the analysis of discourse meaning.

Next, in addition to the conflation of the nominal with the pronominal, languages can arguably lack pronominal expressions altogether. It has been reported that Acoma of New Mexico and Wari' spoken in Brazil lack personal pronouns.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it has to be remembered that person markers, where they are available, may not be pronominal at all: person can be marked for example with morphologically bound markers of agreement. In what follows I focus on self-reference in English, with the aim to argue that if, even in English, which as a language with an arguably clear-cut category of indexical expressions to which 'I' belongs, we can't separate nominals and pronominals, then self-reference has to be considered a

pragmatic phenomenon, where cognitive access to oneself calls for a search for pragmatic strategies rather than systematic associations with grammatical categories such as pronouns or PRO. It will be proposed that the correct linguistic tier for talking about cognitive access to oneself is the pragmatic tier, the tier that includes, but is not confined to, pragmatic inference.

### 3. *Cognitive Access to Oneself*

David Kaplan (1989: 491) points out that uttering ‘I’ and pointing at someone else is ‘irrelevance or madness or what?’. But does the act of uttering ‘I’ always come with the self-attribution of properties? Or, even, does it always come with self-reference? In order to address this question we shall make use of Chierchia’s concept of ‘cognitive access to oneself’. Chierchia (1989: 28) proposes that the cognitive access to oneself is (i) ‘systematically excluded from the interpretation of (non-pronominal) referential expressions’; (ii) ‘systematically present in the interpretation of overt pronouns’; and (iii) ‘systematically and unambiguously associated with the interpretation of PRO the null subject of infinitives and gerunds’.<sup>4</sup> But, as I pointed out elsewhere (Jaszczolt forthcoming a), it is easy to produce counterexamples and counterarguments to this ‘systematic’ and ‘systematic and unambiguous’ association. The pronominal/non-pronominal distinction is a fuzzy one. To repeat, in Thai, one can use a word for ‘mouse’ in the function of first-person pronoun and, according to the judgement of consulted native speakers, the form acquires the function of a pure pronoun. Like any politeness device, honorifics are *expected* and ‘*default*’; it is their absence rather than their presence that is noticed. So, it seems that we could try to classify *uses* of expressions rather than their *forms* and come up with a clear distinction between pronominals and non-pronominals. However, then, it seems that the same principle would have to apply to English where (1) and (2) exemplify common, standard ways of achieving self-reference in the given context:

- (1) *Child to mother: Sammy wants a biscuit.*
- (2) *Mother to Sammy: Mummy will be with you in a minute.*

Both the proper name ‘Sammy’ and the role ‘mummy’ are used in the self-referring function. Using a description pertaining to a role is also common when one wants to convey specific implicatures. For example, in trying to help a colleague whose car broke down, John, who happens to be a car mechanic, may utter (3):

- (3) *Johnny to a friend: Johnny the car mechanic will fix it.*

Further, one can refer to oneself using metaphors that rely on mutually known characters or concepts, such as for example ‘Bob the Builder’, in order to emphasise one’s masonry skills as in (4).

- (4) *Don’t worry, Bob the Builder is here and will fix it.*

It seems that, *pace* Chierchia, conveying first-person reference is not so ‘systematically excluded’ from the interpretation of non-pronominal expressions. Instead, non-pronominals can be employed in the service of self-reference, and thereby normally in the service of conveying cognitive access to oneself, both in literal<sup>5</sup> and figurative language use.

Moving to Chierchia’s (ii), there are instances of shifted reference where it is legitimate to cancel the assumption that the speaker is using ‘I’ to convey self-awareness and thereby to convey the cognitive access to oneself in the situation described in the sentence.

Watching a home movie with a friend, I can comment on the scene in which I observe the person dropping her wallet as in (5):

- (5) *Look, in this scene I notice that I dropped my wallet. But I don't know it is me because I think it is a window, not a mirror. So, next, I am trying to find out how to open the window to shout to her (I mean, me!), 'Hey, you've dropped your wallet!'*

Shifts in temporal reference allow for the use of 'I' without such cognitive access to oneself at the time. Moreover, when one uses a predicate pertaining to a non-factive mental state as in (6), the intended effect is, arguably, not to report on one's own belief but to indicate a degree of detachment from what is asserted.

- (6) *I believe it is Tuesday today.*

This effect is even more conspicuous with the word order as in (7).

- (7) *It is Tuesday today I believe.*

It is important to notice that this is a standardised, or perhaps even a conventionalised, way of hedging the content of an assertion in English and therefore the role that first-person pronoun plays in it is not primarily to signal self-awareness, or cognitive access to oneself, but rather it functions as a mechanism, a discourse strategy, that allows the speaker to be truthful without improper commitment.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, a shift can take place from one agent to another in a situation where the aim is to achieve a *desired* first-person reference. In Corazza's (2004: 198) scenario a person

A writes a note ‘I am not here today’ and attaches it to B’s office door to inform that the occupier of that office, namely B, is not coming to work on that day. In order to explain the detachment of the reference of ‘I’ from the writer of the note, a detachment that is both intended by A and easily recovered by those passing by B’s door, Corazza (2004: 196) proposes a so-called conventional account: the contextual parameter that determines the referent of ‘I’ is ‘given by the *social or conventional setting* in which the utterance takes place’. Another option would be, as Predelli (2011) points out, to found the reference assignment on the *intention* of the author of the note or on the *recovery* of the author’s intention by the readers of the note.<sup>7</sup> Be that as it may, the detachment can easily be attested and it signals yet another complication for a grammar/lexicon-based account of externalising self-consciousness in discourse proposed by Chierchia.

The alleged correlation between pronouns and cognitive access gets even more murky. Kratzer (2009) brings in examples (8) and (9) to point out that first-person pronoun can have a non-referential, bound-variable interpretation:

(8) *I’m the only one around here who can take care of **my** children.*

(9) *Only I admitted what **I** did wrong.*

As she says, indexicals can be ‘fake’. Boldface ‘my’ and ‘I’ are semantically underspecified, their binders have to be established by taking their function into account. Admittedly, the phenomenon is rather restricted in that in many languages translations of such examples would call for the use of a reflexive pronoun in place of the boldface ‘my’ and ‘I’ but, nevertheless, the dissociation from self-referring and from reporting self-awareness can thereby be documented.

On the other hand, English employs other devices which, unlike the pronoun ‘I’, are not markers of self-reference by default but nevertheless can function as such in context. An element of self-reference is quite commonly present in the use of the generic ‘one’ in English. Moltmann (2010: 440) proposes the following interpretation of ‘one’ as used for example in (10):

(10) *One can hear the wolves from the veranda.*

‘Generic *one* is a pronoun that (...) expresses generalizing detached self-reference. It is a *first-person oriented generic pronoun*, in the sense that it does not stand for the speaker’s actual person, but rather for a range of individuals that the speaker identifies with or simulates.’

Similarly, she argues, the arbitrary (non-controlled) PRO as for example in (11) carries such detached self-reference.

(11) *It is scary PRO to hear the wolves from the veranda.*

The intuitive first-person relevance of the generic *one* varies from case to case. Moltmann tends to minimize the differences between possible uses of generic *one*, emphasising its common first-person orientation, but in fact the degree of ‘first-personhood’, so to speak, seems to range from very high where ‘one’ is virtually used in lieu of ‘I’, as for example, in sarcastic (12), uttered as a reflection on the speaker’s own circumstances, through deontic (13) issuing a reminder of a moral directive with a wider application, to a fairly detached (14)

stating the fact but not necessarily expressing the speaker's experience, desire, or any other form of association that Moltmann would call identification or simulation.

- (12) *One sometimes wonders if something called 'free time' exists at all.*
- (13) *One should not gossip behind people's backs.*
- (14) *One can take a lift to the top of the Empire State Building.*

It would be a little far-fetched to insist that the speaker puts himself/herself in the shoes of the person taking the lift to the Empire State Building by using the mental operation of pretence, simulation, or any other self-oriented strategy. Nevertheless, the evidence for the gradation of first-personhood notwithstanding, Moltmann is correct that 'one' can be deployed on occasions in lieu of 'I' and *function as* a kind of a first-person, albeit with the purpose of genericity and detachment. It is a common discourse strategy to convey, albeit strongly or weakly, the cognitive access to oneself.

Finally, the cognitive access to oneself is also attenuated in counterfactuals. As Moltmann (2010: 453) points out, the 'if I were you' constructions do not require of the speaker that he/she consider him/herself identical with the addressee but merely emphasise second-person oriented advice, as in (15).

- (15) *If I were you I would wait a couple of days before issuing a complaint.*

But if it is so, then self-reference is employed in the service of other-reference and the question as to whether it conveys self-awareness, or cognitive access to oneself is irrelevant. Self-reference is used as a discourse strategy to issue an other-addressed message. Utterance (15) is clearly a polite form of conveying the content of (16).

(16) *Wait a couple of days before issuing a complaint.*

The constructions ‘if I were you’, or ‘in your place, I would...’ are better regarded as standardised ways of issuing addressee-oriented speech acts, mostly advice, recommendation, suggestion, etc. They are compositionally transparent, unlike the conventional exclamation ‘I say!’ or ‘I’ll be damned!’, but, like the latter, fall outside the range of devices used to convey the cognitive access to oneself.

This handful of examples amply demonstrates that the issue of conveying cognitive access to oneself is more complicated than just pairing grammatical categories with concepts. Non-pronominals can be used with the primary function of conveying self-reference with cognitive access, while, on the other hand, the pronominal ‘I’ can have a wide spectrum of uses, with a wide spectrum of relations to the cognitive access, all the way to not conveying such self-awareness (also known in the literature as reference *de se* or self-ascription) at all.

Category (iii) concerns the null subject PRO as in (17) and (18).

(17) *Liz remembers PRO putting the book back on the shelf.*

(18) *Liz wants PRO to read Pride and Prejudice.*

But even in this category there is variation. When we alter (18) to, say, (19), we can easily imagine the scenarios on which the cognitive access to oneself is arguably no longer conveyed.

(19) *Liz wants PRO to be an expert on Jane Austen.*

Imagine that the speaker observes Liz reading various books by, and about, Jane Austen. Liz enjoys the books but it has never occurred to her that learning a lot about the author would make her an expert. There is no awareness on Liz's part that she wants to be an expert. When asked, it is likely that she would agree, but the thought had never crossed her mind. The 'systematic and unambiguous association' is thus put into question –albeit not equally for all verbs; 'remember', for example, is entrenched as a conveyer of self-awareness. But this entrenchment is not to do with PRO alone; it is principally to do with the meaning of the verb itself.

Interestingly, PRO in English has been juxtaposed with subjunctive constructions in Romanian. Romanian has two types of subjunctive: one triggered by the conjunction 'să' and the other by 'ca să'. It has been argued that the first one triggers obligatory *de se* reading as in (20).

- (20) *Maria vrea să mănânce fursecul.*  
 Maria wants-3Sg eat-3Sg cookie-the  
Maria wants to eat the cookie.

(from Folescu and Higginbotham, forthcoming).

However, on closer inspection, the subjunctive is no more an indicator of the cognitive access to oneself than the PRO in English in that *de se* is only triggered when certain verbs are present, such as 'want' or 'intend'. So, it is very likely that the *de se* interpretation in Romanian is normally associated with the verb type, like in English. And, just as in English, we can envisage a scenario in which the wish to eat the biscuit is not among Maria's extant mental states and therefore the cognitive access to oneself is not necessarily communicated. For example, Maria normally likes having a snack with her afternoon tea but does not have a

desire to eat that particular cookie. The scenario is rather difficult to manipulate but if we substituted, say, the scenario on which Maria refuses to help herself to a biscuit, followed by the hostess uttering (21), it is easy to see that cognitive access to oneself and PRO are not inseparably connected.

(21) *Maria wants to be slim.*

The speaker of (21) may not even intend to convey Maria's wish but merely generalize over Maria's eating habits. Self-ascription is normally inferred by an addressee of (21) but is not uniformly present.

It seems then that, also in English, the privileged status of first-person experience is associated not so much with grammatical constructions but, more importantly, with types of verbs. For example, constructions with gerundive complements to the verb 'remember' undeniably qualify as expressions of one's memory of an event rather than as reports on a remembered fact. As Higginbotham (2003) points out, the difference is a qualitative one: (22) has to correlate with one's own memory, even in cases when the exact details of the event happen to be somewhat misremembered.

(22) *I remember PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

On the other hand, arguably, (23) does not carry this *de se* status, associated with what is called in the philosophical literature 'immunity to error through misidentification': I may remember that the book was put on the shelf but be mistaken that it was I who did it.

(23) *I remember my putting this book on the shelf.*

Higginbotham's theoretical arguments notwithstanding, it seems that the claim that the construction 'remember +PRO' guarantees the *de se* interpretation should be empirically tested. From my pilot test on the contrast between (22) and (23) it appears that misremembering the agent may affect both constructions; I may misremember the event just as I may misremember the fact, especially when I am strongly involved in the event as an observer.<sup>8</sup> There is no doubt that there is a difference in meaning between (22) and (23) in that many people can remember *my* putting the book on the shelf/eating scrambled eggs for breakfast while only I can remember PRO doing it. So (23) cannot always be substituted with (22), as the difference between (24) and (25) demonstrates.

(24) *Tom and I remember my having scrambled eggs for breakfast on that day.*

(Relevant scenario: The speaker, but not necessarily Tom as well, had scrambled eggs for breakfast.)

(25) *Tom and I remember having scrambled eggs for breakfast on that day.*

(Relevant scenario: Both the speaker and Tom had scrambled eggs for breakfast.)

But on some occasions (23) is substitutable with (22). What is not widely acknowledged, however, although it is more revealing, is that the sense that (22) can carry is not always the 'clear *de se*' one but what we can call an 'attenuated *de se*', a sort of 'degree of remembrance', so to speak, that places it somewhere on the cline between *de se* and *de re*. It seems to be a pragmatic rather than a syntactic matter as to what reading of (22) is arrived at. Surely, remembering is not an all-or-nothing affair. And this is all what was in need of demonstrating in order to support our claim of the lack of an unambiguous and systematic link between PRO and *de se*. This situation of the lack of a clear *de re/de se* boundary is what

necessitates an empirical study into what exactly speakers can convey by PRO constructions, both in self-reports and in other-reports, as the discussion of the earlier examples (17)-(19) suggests.

What I call here ‘attenuated *de se*’ is directly related to the pragmatic strategy of weakening one’s commitment discussed above. In discussing (6) and (7), I pointed out that self-ascription of mental states, as in ‘I believe that...’ or ‘*p*, I believe’ is systematically employed in English as a pragmatic strategy of hedging the propositional content, thereby weakening the speaker’s commitment to what is being asserted. The use of a ‘I remember PRO +gerund...’ construction is frequently used to perform an analogous function but with the opposite effect, namely that of strengthening the claim. For example, instead of (26), the speaker utters (22), repeated below, normally in order to emphasise one’s memory of the event and thereby issue additional support for the factuality of the described event.

(26) *I put this book back on the shelf.*

(22) *I remember PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

On the other hand, ‘I believe’ or ‘I think’ attenuate the commitment, as in (27).

(27) *I think I put this book back on the shelf.*

But notice that the ‘I think/believe’ and ‘I remember’ strategies don’t cancel each other; ‘I think’ takes scope over ‘I remember’, as in (28), and even more strongly in (29).

(28) *I think I remember PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

(29) *I remember, I think, PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

In sum, the question we have to address is whether it is correct to say that the semantic function of PRO is to identify the subject with the experiencer, thereby treating PRO as a kind of a ‘structural’ indexical. The fact that the primary intended function of such constructions is to attenuate or intensify the commitment signals that this analysis of PRO would be either inadequate, or at least would have to be supplemented with an adequate pragmatic account that would foreground the principal discourse function to which a PRO construction is put in such cases. For semanticists of a contextualist orientation (cf. Recanati 2010; Jaszczolt 2010), the first holds; for semantic minimalists, it is the latter. Next, Recanati (2007: 178) points out one more problem with the allegedly indexical PRO. He distinguishes between what we can call self-ascription with self-awareness (which he calls ‘explicit *de se*’) and self-ascription where the associated concept of the self, and thereby the identification of the target of the ascription of the properties with oneself, do not surface in any conscious state of the subject (which he calls ‘implicit *de se*’).<sup>9</sup> Recanati uses this distinction to argue against Higginbotham’s view of PRO as a ‘mental indexical’ and in order to address the question of ‘immunity to error through misidentification’ discussed in the philosophical literature on *de se*. What concerns us here in the analysis of discourse strategies that use first-person reference is a slightly different issue which, by the way, reveals a problem both with the indexical PRO view and with Recanati’s proposal of the implicit/explicit *de se* distinction. Compare again (22), (26)-(28), all repeated below. I have now ordered these examples on the scale that reflects the speaker’s commitment to the described event, namely that he/she put the (deictically given) book back on the shelf.<sup>10</sup>

(27) *I think I put this book back on the shelf.*

(28) *I think I remember PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

(26) *I put this book back on the shelf.*

(22) *I remember PRO putting this book back on the shelf.*

Let us begin with problems with Chierchia's (i). The action of placing the book on the shelf is asserted in (26) without much emphasis put on the speaker; the speaker does not give any indication of consciously emphasising the cognitive access to him/herself. Otherwise, the speaker would have uttered something to the effect of (30).

(30) *This book was definitely put back on the shelf, I did it myself.*

So, on Recanati's distinction, (26) most likely pertains to an implicit *de se*; self-awareness is there but is not consciously attended to. But what about the other examples? Here the distinction gets into trouble if we try to apply it to pragmatic content. It does not get into trouble on Recanati's own account where a level intermediate between utterance content and sentence meaning is distinguished. But for our account it is rendered quite inadequate in that we have tacitly opted for a view that pragmatic strategies in which an expression or a construction are systematically employed, and therefore the strategies which dictate the primary content of an utterance, cannot be kept separate from the semantics of this expression – in this case from the semantics of first-person reference.<sup>11</sup> Uttering (27), (28) or (22) all come with some degree of explicit identification, albeit attenuated in that 'I think' or 'I remember' are used here in their role of discourse strategies of hedging or otherwise manipulating the propositional content. Recanati does not discuss such cases; he talks about the widely discussed examples of self-identification while watching oneself in the mirror where one makes a third-person attribution, followed by explicit self-identification as in our

earlier ‘dropped wallet example’ (5). That scene could also be reported as in (31), where Recanati’s explicit self-identification (emphasised below) takes place.

(31) *I was watching a guy on the other side of the glass door who dropped a wallet. But soon realised that he looked very much like me and it occurred to me that it was a mirror and **I was that guy.***

In sum, assessing the conversational impact of the set of examples (22), (26)-(28), it seems that conscious awareness is present in them to different degrees rather than as a binary, all-or-nothing characteristic.

Moreover, the problems with Chierchia’s proposal of the indexical PRO are well emphasised by the above cline of commitment from (27) to (22). The relevant examples there are (28) and (22) where the PRO construction is used principally as a pragmatic strategy to manipulate the degree of commitment to the described event.

Yet another piece of evidence in support of my argument of the semantic pertinence of attenuation in first-person ascription comes from Moore’s Paradox involving self-ascription of properties. Atlas (2007) aptly observes that sentences of the type (32) resemble in form Moore’s Paradox (exemplified in (33) below) but do not give rise to the paradox.

(32) *I believe that I was re-elected governor of California, but I was not.*

(from Atlas 2007: 128).

(33) *? It’s raining but I don’t believe it.*

As he points out, in order for the paradox to arise, first-person reference in (32) would have to be performed by using the reflexive ‘I myself’ rather than merely the pronoun ‘I’. Atlas

leaves the discussion of first-person and Moore's Paradox at that. But we can take it a bit further here. It seems that the case in (32) clearly fits in our discussion of attenuation as a discourse strategy: the rationale for using the 'I believe' clause is precisely the forthcoming denial of the fact in 'but I was not'.

To conclude at this point, self-referring that involves cognitive access to oneself defies any attempt to fit it squarely into the mould of a single, systematic morphosyntactic device. Instead, the device standardly used for this purpose in English, the first-person singular pronoun, can have other uses as well, and devices that specialise for other uses, such as common nouns and proper names, can adopt the function of reference *de se*. This state of affairs in language use suggests that formal semantics that relies on the rigid distinction such as that between an indexical and non-indexical expression (Kaplan 1989, or recently e.g. Wechsler 2010) is in need of substantial rethinking and revision in order to take this conversational fact into account. Personal pronoun 'I' has been traditionally considered in the philosophy of language to be a so-called 'essential indexical' (e.g. Perry 1979) in that it cannot be replaced with a context-free description with a semantic content that would perform exactly the same function. Wechsler (2010: 342, my emphasis), for example, comments that '[f]irst-person pronouns appear to be unique among linguistic expressions, in that they carry the force of speaker self-ascription in their *inherent conventional semantics*'.<sup>12</sup> As I demonstrated above, this is true if we emphasise the importance of the caveat 'conventional' semantics. But this caveat already blurs the mapping between the devices of a language system and the meanings conveyed by these devices and thereby points to the necessity of a contextualist, pragmatics-rich approach to meaning. A fortiori, Wechsler's (2010: 349) association of self-ascription with the pronoun as quoted below only holds within the remit of this 'conventional semantics' and does not acknowledge different strategies for self-reference on the one hand, and non-conventional uses of 'I' on the other: 'THE SELF-

ASCRPTION MONOPOLY: Only as a consequence of grammatically specified self-ascription can a pronoun be knowingly used to refer to a speaker or addressee.’

Moreover, while discussing self-attribution of properties, it has to be remembered that the problem lies not only in the presence or absence of cognitive access to oneself (reference *de se* vs. reference *de re to oneself*) but also in the quality of this cognitive access. There are various kinds of unconscious misapprehension that can be induced by held assumptions as to what is preferred rationally or morally. There is experimental evidence that people’s self-concept is correlated with the currently held objectives. In other words, we perceive ourselves differently, depending on what we aim to achieve and what we believe to be the best route to achieve this aim. For example, if we believe that an intuitive judgement will lead us to a success in an important practical task, then we consider ourselves to be intuition-driven agents, whether or not it is really the case (see e.g. Augustinova *et al.* 2011). Such a self-image can differ from situation to situation, and therefore need not result in a coherent self-concept across times. Instead, there is a series of the so-called ‘working self-concepts’. Applied to discourse processing, this shows that reporting on self-attribution in discourse faces not only the challenge of discriminating between reports on *de se* beliefs and on beliefs *de re about oneself*, but also the challenge of reporting on the mental representation of oneself which is subjective through and through. It would take knowing a fair deal about the person’s desires, objectives, and current state of self-assessment to get the report right. This pragmatic perspective on reporting on self-ascription is frequently neglected in philosophical literature (but, on the contrary, it is emphasised in experimental cognitive science) and is the topic to which I turn in the next section.

#### *4. Attributing Self-Reference in Discourse and the Subjective/Intersubjective Controversy*

Attributing self-reference to others is straightforward in situations where conventions and standard, justifiable presumptions apply. But where they do not, attribution becomes tricky. Let us consider example (5) again, repeated below.

- (5) *Look, in this scene I notice that I dropped my wallet. But I don't know it is me because I think it is a window, not a mirror. So, next, I am trying to find out how to open the window to shout to her (I mean, me!), 'Hey, you've dropped your wallet!'*

An observer can report as in (34).

- (34) *In that scene, Tom thinks he dropped his wallet.*<sup>13</sup>

But, by convention, coreference produced by the anaphoric dependence of 'his' on 'Tom' would suggest that Tom is aware that he was the agent and that the wallet was his. This is of course not the case. So, if the reporter is to avoid unintentional misleading, such a presumption of a thought *de se* has to be cancelled as, for example, in (35) or (36), which alter it into a report *de re about oneself*.

- (35) *In that scene, Tom thinks, in a sense, that he dropped his wallet but he doesn't know he is watching himself in the mirror rather than watching someone else through a glass.*
- (36) *Tom thinks that the guy in front of him dropped his wallet but since he doesn't know it is a mirror, he doesn't know he is watching himself.*<sup>14</sup>

In (35) and (36), coreference does not come with self-awareness, although the speaker uses an epistemic-attitude predicate ‘think’ that pertains to an intentional state and some indicators of coreference. This is an unconventional situation but not an impossible one to describe. As Stalnaker (2008) points out, we normally get it right: we know when we are thinking of ourselves, and accordingly the English language has a device for reporting *de se* attitudes as in (34). But what is interesting is that when things are not ordinary, as in (5), there is no difficulty with finding a way to describe the problem periphrastically, as exemplified in (35) and (36). It is so, Stalnaker claims, because mental states are parts of the external world and can be observed, reported on, compared, and so forth:

‘When the way the world actually is diverges from the way the subject takes it to be with respect to the identity and nature of things, and in particular when he or she conflates distinct things, or thinks of one thing as two, or when the changes in the world as it is diverge from changes in the world as it is taken to be, we may find it difficult to characterize a world according to the thinker that is apt for describing that person’s cognitive capacities and dispositions. *But our descriptive resources are rich and flexible, and in context, we can usually find a way. What counts as a correct description of the world according to the thinker may depend on the attributor’s context.*’

Stalnaker (2008: 131, my emphasis).<sup>15</sup>

Self-awareness is an important concept in discussing the status of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge does not require external evidence; it is, in this sense, ‘baseless’ (see the discussion in Cassam 2009); self-awareness does not come from external, observational evidence. But self-knowledge can be explained; for example, I know that I have a headache

and I can explain this by pointing to the fact that I can feel the pain. So, it follows that when we express self-awareness, as in saying ‘I have a headache’, we express something that is more than just a mental picture of ourselves; we express knowledge, that is (arguably) a justified belief, that does not differ as much in its properties from knowing something about other people as some philosophers would lead us to think. This is, of course, a tangential question for pragmatic theory that deals with linguistic strategies of conveying self-awareness but, nevertheless, it is important to point out that self-awareness is not necessarily some clandestine concept that would call for a special, lexicalised or grammatical, concept. So, perhaps the fact that languages do not unequivocally lexicalise self-awareness in the first-person marker but, at best, merely have a marker, such as the first-person singular pronoun, which *normally* conveys it, is in itself evidence in support of this, not so subjective after all, status of self-knowledge.

Further theoretical support for classifying first-person markers together with non-indexicals comes, albeit indirectly, from Stalnaker’s (2008: 130) argument that self-knowledge has to mean viewing ourselves not from our internal world but rather, so to speak, from the outside. We know our thoughts when we are able to position ourselves in the external world:

‘Our thoughts are something like internal sentences to which we have access because they are part of the internal mental world. But (this is the externalist part) these mental sentences, individuated by their content, have essential properties that are extrinsic to the mind, and so are not accessible to the person who is thinking the thought.’

Accessing our own thoughts is directly connected with placing ourselves in the world: we act on these thoughts, and we act correctly and successfully when our representation of the world is accurate rather than imaginary.

A different argument for the objective value of first-person knowledge comes from Chalmers' emphasis that first-person experience is normally replicable by others. He points out that although, naturally, individual experiences are directly accessible only by the experiencer and in this sense cannot be shared, they are nevertheless publicly available in that they can be compared with those of others and in this sense replicated: '...it is usually straightforward to cross-validate observations with reports from many subjects' (Chalmers 2010: 53). This is an important point that provides a supportive argument from cognitive science for our claim in the domain of linguistic semantics that expressions of self-ascription need not qualitatively differ from those of other-ascription.

Carruthers' (2011) Interpretive Sensory-Access Theory of Self-Knowledge also sides with those for whom self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds is governed by the same mechanisms of the same *mindreading faculty*. According to Carruthers, we learn about our own mental states in the same way as we learn about other people's thoughts, beliefs, fears, etc. He argues that it is an illusion that our own minds are transparent to us; sensory input allows us to attribute attitudes to ourselves but the sensory input does not give this information ready-made; it has to be interpreted. It is true that it is often easier to self-ascribe attitudes than to ascribe them to others but this is so, he argues, because we tend to have access to more sensory data in the case of self-ascription. This is a quantitative rather than a qualitative difference; self-ascription and other-ascription are essentially the same, and both are subject to errors of interpretation (albeit normally unconscious) and deficits in evidence. There is only one step from there to claiming that the use of language, and in particular the meaning speakers associate with linguistic devices of first-person reference, reflects the

mindreading faculty. In fact, some cognitive scientists entertain an even stronger hypothesis that language mediates such attribution, not only reflects it.

In themselves, of course, neither Stalnaker's arguments for externalism, nor Chalmers' argument for intersubjective availability, nor Carruthers' identification of the mechanisms of self-knowledge with those of other-knowledge will suffice for making the case for rebutting the privileged status of first-person indexicals and defending the pragmatic, as opposed to lexical or grammatical, picture of expressing cognitive access to oneself. But they place our linguistic argument in the context of a wider defence of the view that perhaps self-ascription has more in common with other-ascription than traditional defenders of impenetrability of first-person experience would make one believe.<sup>16</sup> We don't seem to have special, privileged access to ourselves just as we don't have special access to our mental states; it is relatively easy to demonstrate theoretically that believing something to be the case does not guarantee iteration to 'believing that one believes', contrary to the (outgoing) received view.<sup>17</sup> As a result, it is no surprise that while analysing natural language discourse we find reporting on other minds less of a puzzle than the extant semantic accounts of the *de se/de re* ambiguity present it as.

##### *5. Conclusion: First-Person Reference and Pragmatic Universals*

Further to the scrutiny of examples and theories conducted here, it appears that reference to oneself is achieved in discourse through a complex process that involves both morphosyntactic and pragmatic means. I have argued that neither first-person pronoun in English nor the PRO construction convey *systematically and unambiguously* cognitive access to oneself. They can be credited with conveying it by convention but not on the grounds of the morphosyntactic properties. Although it is documented that children's self-awareness develops in conjunction with their mastery of the use of first-person pronoun, in languages

where there is one (see e.g. Corazza 2004: 177), I hope to have demonstrated through various examples and argumentation that there is little of certainty that we can infer from the pronoun or from a grammatical construction alone. Conveying self-consciousness through self-referring is achieved through the interaction of means of expression that are available to the interactants. Pragmatic means, notably the reliance on salient meaning of the pronouns or constructions on the one hand, and on pragmatic inference on the other, are indispensable among those means. So, while it is undeniable that the first-person pronoun is normally issued with self-awareness pertaining to the situation talked about by the speaker, we have seen plausible scenarios where it need not be so. Similarly, while PRO normally signals such cognitive access to the self, there are scenarios where this default does not apply. It goes without saying that reporting on *de se* attitudes is even more reliant on pragmatic means as we only have there what the received view recognises as *quasi-indexicals*. In short, strategies used to convey first-person reference (i) use diversified means and (ii) are used with a variety of different intentions. The analysis demonstrates that this diversity escapes any attempt of bringing the semantics of first-person reference and the morphosyntactic level of language description and that such attempts are doomed to fail.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, it appears that acts of self-referring come with different degrees of communicated self-awareness as well as different degrees of communicated commitment to self-ascription of properties and self-attribution of mental states. They are also used to perform different functions, in some of which first-person reference plays a secondary role, like for example self-ascription of mental states used for the purpose of attenuating commitment.

Important arguments in support of a pragmatic approach to first-person reference come from cognitive science. I have assessed some views that converge on the conclusion that the cognitive access to one's own mental states is not qualitatively different from the

cognitive access to other people's mental states. The difference is in the quantity of available evidence rather than in the type of access or type of the used processor (and its correlate in patterns of neuronal activation). These arguments are crucial for the discussion of strategies of self-reference in communication. The recent controversy in the literature concerning the concept of common ground and the interaction between utilising self-knowledge by the interactants and utilising assumed mutual knowledge (e.g. Kecskes and Zhang 2009) gains a plausible solution from the available evidence that, so to speak, we treat ourselves just as we treat others: we don't have transparent access to our knowledge, beliefs or wants. Kecskes and Zhang propose that the focus on the self, the egocentric knowledge of the speaker, the 'focus on the speaker' in the title of this collection, plays a much more important role in discourse than current pragmatic theories are prepared to admit. They say that the participants rely much more on 'their own knowledge rather than mutual knowledge' ((2009: 332). This proposal finds strong support in the externalist view of self-awareness defended above in that, if the access to one's own mental states and to the mental states of other interlocutors is qualitatively the same and is conducted by using the same processors in the brain, then it is plausible to assume that the 'focus on the self' and the 'focus on the other' can be subject to fluctuating trade-offs as conversation progresses: the speaker can start with imposing, so to speak, his/her own perspective, background information, etc, accepting them as shared (or perhaps simulating, assuming that they are shared), and slowly progress from this vantage point to adjusting the assumptions in view of what the addressee's own self-centered perspective brings into the process.

Perhaps, then, the facts that (i) the cognitive access to oneself has to be communicated in an elaborate, pragmatic-inference-mediated way, and also that (ii) it is communicated with different degrees of strength, testify that language *reflects* the imperfect knowledge we have of our minds. A stronger option, of course, would be to say that language not only reflects

this complicated state of self-awareness but also *participates in creating it*. But this is a topic for philosophy of mind rather than for linguistic pragmatics.

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*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> This is a rather impressionistic application of the idea of direct reference, employing Kaplan's (1989) content/character distinction, used in a way he uses it to discriminate indexicals and non-indexicals.

<sup>2</sup> For examples see Siewierska (2004) and Heine and Song (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Heine and Song (2011), after Jeffrey Heath.

<sup>4</sup> Chierchia also addresses long-distance reflexives, such as Chinese *ziji*, Japanese *zibun*, or Korean *caki*. But my argument can be constructed on the basis of English alone.

<sup>5</sup> In the traditional sense, but see Recanati 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Kauppinen (2010) shares this interpretation of first-person belief reports but appeals to Grice's maxim of Quantity for an explanation. But it is well acknowledged in the post-Gricean literature that Grice's original maxims should be replaced by more methodologically rigorous principle(s) or heuristic(s) and the ascription of this pragmatic strategy of hedging to a particular principle will not be discussed here. The readers are free to follow their own choice of one or another post-Gricean view.

<sup>7</sup> On the discussion of Kaplan's treatment of 'I am not here now' as an analytical falsehood and on some alternatives see also Predelli 2011.

<sup>8</sup> This argument rests on the premise that there are no good grounds for regarding 'remember' as a factive predicate. But see Higginbotham 2003.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction corresponds to that between personal and subpersonal mental states, see e.g. Carruthers (2011: 331).

<sup>10</sup> The exact placement of the examples on this scale, albeit intuitively available, would benefit from experimental corroboration though.

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<sup>11</sup> The principles for the composition of the main, intended meaning, even when it is not reflected in the logical form of the uttered sentence, are given in the radical contextualist framework of Default Semantics (e.g. Jaszczolt 2005, 2009, 2010). The current discussion can, however, be approached in its own right without assuming familiarity with that framework. The argument rests on a more general assumption that the meaning of first-person reference cannot be dissociated from the uses to which first-person reference is put in discourse.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also: ‘The pronoun *I* is grammatically specified for a SPEAKER to refer via her self-notion’ (Wechsler 2010: 346), where ‘notion’ is a mental representation of oneself (Crimmins 1992).

<sup>13</sup> The literature on reporting *de se* thoughts and on the special status of indexicals in such context is vast; for the seminal sources see Castañeda 1967; Lewis 1979; Perry 1979. In the current discussion I focus, however, on the fact of the blurred distinction between indexicals and non-indexicals that goes somewhat contrary to the spirit of the received view.

<sup>14</sup> Again, there have been various proposals concerning the semantics of *de se* attributions and the relations they bear to attributions *de re*. See for example Maier 2009; Schlenker 2003 and forthcoming; Higginbotham 2010; and my discussion in Jaszczolt forthcoming a. In this paper I am, however, concerned with the availability of conversational strategies for making first-person reference with cognitive access to oneself rather than with the underlying formal semantics (albeit the two are of course connected, which I discuss at length in Jaszczolt forthcoming a).

<sup>15</sup> See also Jaszczolt forthcoming b on the Stalnakerian vis-à-vis Gricean views on context.

<sup>16</sup> Again, the philosophical literature on this topic, centered around the pertinent question of the privacy of one’s own experience of pain, is ample but is tangential to our current linguistic-pragmatic aim. See e.g. Carruthers 2011 for an extensive overview of approaches

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and models. For an internalist view of the content of *de se* beliefs see Feit 2008. For Feit, contents of *de se* beliefs are properties understood as psychological entities, located in the head and determined by the subject's brain.

<sup>17</sup> This is a topic for a separate detailed inquiry and cannot be pursued here. Suffice it to say that Atlas (2007) addresses the issue of iteration of beliefs using, among others, the lack of omniscience assumption: it is common-sensically uncontroversial to assume that there are some true propositions that I don't believe. Let us make  $\Delta$  stand for such a proposition. Then, the pattern  $\Delta \wedge \neg \text{Bel}_I \Delta$  looks perfectly plausible, and if so, then the claim that we have privileged access to our beliefs is substantially weakened. For a defence of the contrary view (albeit not supported by knock-out argumentation) see Shoemaker (2009) and references discussed there.

<sup>18</sup> A recent example of such an attempt is Delfitto and Fiorin 2011 who propose to reduce the semantics of first-person reference to the syntactic level of DP.