

## References:

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by such sentences? If such sentences inform us by nothing, what would be the best way to classify them? An astronaut who answers a question addressed to him by the scientists in the earthly bases: where are you now? By saying: “I am here” can't be said to have provided any answer at all. One might say it is not an answer because the astronaut is supposed to have an access to more information. That is true, and therefore, he will say something, let us say like: “I am on the moon surface now” or what so ever. But notice, this assertion is not as immune as the first one, because the astronaut might wrongly think himself to be on the moon's surface. But, he will never come out false if he only says: “I am here”. Does that mean that this kind of thought is empty<sup>9</sup>? I don't think so. I prefer to say that it is a non-informative thought in which the indexical is still *referring* even if not *describing*. In other words, the output data in the case of a ‘here-thought’ is nothing more than the input data which is nothing; because I need no information about where I am to be able to say “ I am here” in a meaningful sense, similarly, I reveal no information by asserting such a statement.

Probably, the best way to describe 'here-thoughts' is to describe them as dependent thoughts that can't exist if isolated from their dependence to 'I' thoughts, due to the dependence of the indexical 'here' to the first person pronoun. At the end of the day, 'here' means nothing more than “the place I exist in” and any attempt to define 'here' regardless of its connection to the first person indexical will end up by stripping 'here' from some of its intrinsic properties.

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<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to Prof. Edward Becker for his valuable discussion.

"Indexical dependence" allows for 'Here' thoughts to be understood as thoughts that depend in their existence on 'I' thoughts, this is what explains the fact that I need no information to be able to rightly assert a sentence like "I am here now" even if no information about the location is available, because such an assertion depends on its inseparable connection with 'I' assertions, the assertions that do not need any information to be rightly held. I can always make a successful reference to myself even in cases of amnesia, where I have no idea who I am or even what is my name. I can wake up in the hospital with a lost memory to find myself in a place that I don't know and still make a true reference to myself—even if totally unknown in this case- by saying ; "where am I ?" Similarly, I can always refer to the place I occupy by saying: "I am standing here in a place that I don't have any idea about". Of course, I can describe the place if I had some access to it but even if I couldn't figure out any of its properties, I can continue successfully referring to the place by using the indexical 'here'. What makes me able to do that is the indexical dependence of the indexical 'here' and the peculiarity that both 'I' and 'here' share, i.e., both of them are referring expressions and not to be understood as describing expressions, when purely used as indexicals.

What I am proposing in this paper is a reduction that explains in what sense a sentence like "I am here now" is always true, because 'here' means nothing more than " the place I occupy"; therefore and as long as 'I' is immune from error through misidentification and as long as I can make a successful self-reference regardless of the information I have of myself, similarly, I can always make true statements about the place I occupy. Because what matters is the 'I' reference, which is always fixed and not the 'here' dependent reference.

We still have to answer the question: to what degree can we consider non informative sentences like "I am here" in cases where I have no access to any description or information of the location as sentences that express genuine thoughts? Are there really any thoughts revealed

to this intuition I appeal to the unique relationship between 'I' and other indexicals, more precisely, I appeal to the primacy of the first person indexical. Let's consider the two following sentences;

(6) I am here

(7) The pen is here

While (6) seems to be immune from falsity, (7) doesn't hold the same immunity. It might be the case that I am hallucinating, or confusing the stick in front of me with my pen; as a result asserting (7) would be a case of asserting a false sentence. But what is the difference between (6) and (7)? This question can be answered by reducing the two sentences to their 'I' content and rewrite them after replacing 'here' by its semantical equivalent 'the place I occupy'. The two sentences can be rewritten as the following,

(8) I occupy the place I occupy.

(9) The pen occupies the place I occupy.

Obviously and trivially, (8) sounds more reliable and be less suspicious than (9); of course, it might still be open to argument by claiming that (8) might be wrong in other worlds, i.e., there might be other possible worlds in which I might not occupy the place I occupy but this doesn't mean that a sentence like (8) is not always true if not necessary true. Since what I am proposing to explain is the universal truth of a sentence like "I am here" and not the necessity of it I will rule out from my argument all the scenarios of the argument from other possible worlds.

Furthermore, 'Here' -I argue- can be reduced to the first person indexical and can only be understood in its connection with this indexical.

I can always identify 'Here' as "the place around me" or "the place where I exist". The same can be equally true for 'now', which I can define as "the period of time as I time it", for example, I might say: "we will start the meeting now" and leave the room for 3 seconds, 1 minute, or whatever I decide as can be referred to by using 'now'.<sup>5</sup>

A sentence like: "I am here" can be explained as: "I am in the place I occupy". Here, 'Here' has no other meaning than "the place I occupy", therefore, I need no information to be able to say "I am here" in a meaningful sense even if I have no idea about the place. A kid who stands in the darkness where he can't identify where he is by using any of his senses can answer his mother as she asks him: "where are you?" by saying: "I am here." Defiantly he doesn't inform much by saying: "I am here", nevertheless his answer is true.

As David Kaplan rightly observes a sentence like: "I am here now" can never be false, it will turn out to be always true. He says, '*One need only understand the meaning of "I am here now" to know that it cannot be uttered falsely*'.<sup>6</sup> But the continuity of the positive truth value that this sentence holds shouldn't derive us to falsely think that this sentence should always be necessary true, because '*it is not necessary that I be here now*'.<sup>7</sup>

However, our semantical intuition tells us that a sentence like "I am here now" turns out always to be true even when I have no clue about the place I am standing in<sup>8</sup>. In my explanation

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<sup>5</sup> "Now" can vastly conventionally vary from culture to culture. Some cultures can tolerate longer periods to be included in the referring power of this indexical than others. For example, in the Arabic culture, 'now' is more loosely used. A friend calling to say he is coming to visit now can be understood as referring to the time needed to arrive, even if this time can last for 1 hour.

<sup>6</sup> Kaplan, David, "*Demonstratives*", 1977, P 509, available online at <https://webspace.utexas.edu/wechsler/Kaplan-Demonstratives.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> "I am here now" can't be false. One can't truly say "I am not here now". This is true even in cases where we leave on the answer machine the reply "I am not here now", because at the time when a person records the message "I am not here now" the message is to be considered false at the time of recording it. "I am not here now" can be true as said by the answer machine but can never be true as said by the person who records it.

*objective descriptions, just as "I" was not.'*<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the indexical 'I' which was classified by Nunberg as being a 'strong indexical'<sup>4</sup> seems to have primacy over other indexicals. First; 'I' holds a permanent identity. 'I' as said by Z can refer only to Z. This is not the case for 'now' for example, which can be said to refer to different times or 'Here' which can be said to refer to different places. Other observations from the way we use different indexicals can be helpful. It is always rational to ask the question: what do you mean by 'here', or what do you mean by 'now', or to seek a further clarification after they are uttered, the same can't be equally applied to the first person pronoun. For example, let's suppose I have the habit of getting myself a cup of coffee before the class starts, but as I enter the class I see the professor in it, to make sure I will not miss anything I ask him when are we starting? Suppose he replied by saying: we are going to start now. As I hear his answer I cancel the idea of getting myself some coffee. To my surprise, the professor poses for a minute before starting, turns to his office to come back after 3 or 5 minutes holding his own coffee. At this minute, realizing I had missed a chance to bring my own coffee I regret not having asked him: what do you mean by now? The same can be said for sentences using 'Here'. For example, a sign that holds the sentence: "Smoking is not allowed here", might equally refer to the whole building, the room I am standing in, the corner or wherever he who put it had in mind when he placed the sign in the first place.

Rational questions can be asked regarding what is precisely meant by 'Here' and 'now' as used differently. However, similar questions can't be still rationally asked when it comes to the referring power of 'I' the first person indexical, which seems to refer in a more direct way. When one uses the first person to refer to himself he leaves no room for any further inquiries about the extent his usage might be applied to. However, this is not the end of the story, because it is not only true that 'I' refers in a direct way that indexicals like 'Here' and 'Now' can't compete with.

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<sup>3</sup> Perry, John, "The self", 1995, p4, available online at: <http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/453/PerrySelf.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Nunberg, Geoffrey, Indexicality and Deixis, *Linguistics and philosophy*, 16, 1993, p 32, available online at : [http://tudresden.de/die\\_tu\\_dresden/fakultaeten/philosophische\\_fakultaet/iph/thph/braeuer/lehre/bezugnahme\\_relevanz/Nunberg%20-%20IndexicalsandDeixis.pdf](http://tudresden.de/die_tu_dresden/fakultaeten/philosophische_fakultaet/iph/thph/braeuer/lehre/bezugnahme_relevanz/Nunberg%20-%20IndexicalsandDeixis.pdf)

call on that time or when I have a voice that he/she can recognize without the need for any other elaboration.

The first person indexical immunity can be transferred to sentences dependent on the self-reference for their existence. A sentence like: "I am here now" can't be false. But a sentence like "Abla is here" can be more open to argument. Let's suppose that professor X is used to make sure that all his students are there in class before he starts. Let's suppose that I was sitting there and I said as I heard my name: "I am here now". Intuitively, no one will be interested in arguing whether what I have said is false or true, because as long as I am saying that "I am here" it will keep coming true, simply because it is an assertion that is made solely by me. On the other hand a sentence that uses my name to refer to me can be more vulnerable to come out false, simply because it is a sentence that can be said by me or by anyone else. In the class example, someone might mistakenly say: "Abla is here" simply because he confused me with my friend who looks like me. In short, "I am here" is always true but "Abla is here" does not share with the first sentence the same peculiarity.

What matters for my discussion is the immunity of the first person pronoun. There is no way in which I can use 'I' to refer to myself and fail in doing that. This idea is what Hector-Neri Castaneda referred to by saying, *'The first-person pronoun has what I have called an ontological priority over all names, contingent descriptions of objects, and all other indicators: a correct use of I cannot fail to refer to the entity to which it purports to refer; moreover, a correct use of I cannot fail to pick up the category of the entity to which it refers.'*<sup>2</sup>

As Perry rightly observes, the first person indexical shares other indexicals some properties, *'We use "now" and "today" to express our knowledge of what time it is, and "here" to express our knowledge of where we are. These locutions are not reducible to names or*

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<sup>2</sup> Hector-Neri Castaneda, *"On the phenomena- logic of the I"*, Essays on self consciousness, Indiana University Press, 1985, p 89.

(1) Is not the same as (2) even when it is said by me. Although they both might have the same meaning they still have different senses. Furthermore, it needs taking an additional reasoning step, or an additional move to be able to realize (2) which can come only after realizing (1); because I need first to realize that Abba is standing in front of the mirror, then I can link this information to my self - notion, i.e. I can realize that it is me who is standing in front of the mirror by realizing that I am Abba. In step (1) I assert what anyone else can assert, because the observation that Abba is standing in front of the mirror is something that anyone else can equally make; therefore, sentence (1) can be said by me or by anyone else, and still have the same meaning. Still true, it would sound awkward if I used my name instead of the indexical 'I' to refer to myself; but if I tried to do that, I will be referring to myself as anyone else might do. In other words, it would appear as if I am using another way to refer to myself, a way void of any self consciousness; because I will be asserting something that everyone else can assert. To be able to assert (2) I need to have a kind of self-consciousness. I will first need to link (1) to (2), the task which can't be done if not mediated by a third awareness, the kind of awareness that I can express by saying or thinking (3):

(3) I am Abba

In fact the first person pronoun forms a unique tool for making successful self- references. This type of reference seems to be error-free as well as irreplaceable. It is not only that a name can fail as a referring device instead of the indexical 'I'; sometimes, using 'I' instead of the name can also suffer from the same shortcoming. On the phone, I say: 'Hi, it is me'. In this case, I should either say my name- which is usually what takes place- or I will have a good chance of being unrecognized. Of course, there are cases in which such a behavior, i.e., of using 'I' instead of saying my name on the phone reveals my certainty that I will be recognized without even the need to say my name, such as if I believe that the person I am calling is already expecting my



'I' is the indexical we essentially use to express self-knowledge. It is unique in a way that it can't suffer under any circumstance from a failure of reference, or from an error through misidentification. 'I' as used by anyone will always refer to he who says it; this can be true even in cases of amnesia and memory-loss; because even in these extreme cases all what we lose are descriptions attached to the 'I' and not the ability to make a successful self-reference.

The term indexical came first to the philosophy of language from Charles Sanders Peirce. Some other familiar indexicals are: today, here, you, now..etc. As Hanks puts it: *'To say that any linguistic form is "indexical" is to say that it stands for its object neither by resemblance to it, nor by sheer convention, but by contiguity with it.'*<sup>1</sup>

Although there are many indexicals, 'I' is the indexical that forms the special irreplaceable device we use to refer to ourselves. Despite the fact that names can also be used for making successful self references, the many differences existing between the way according to 'I' can be used and the way names can be used raise doubts regarding the interchangeable semantical function of both devices.

Let's consider these two sentences;

(1) Abba is standing in front of the mirror.

(2) I am standing in front of the mirror

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<sup>1</sup> Hanks, William, Indexicality, 2000, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9(1-2):124-126. Copyright © 2000, American Anthropological Association. available online at:  
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# Indexical dependence

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## ملخص البحث

هذا البحث في فلسفة اللغة التحليلية معد لحل أحد الألغاز اللغوية المتعلقة بجملة كثيرة الاستخدام و التداول : "أنا هنا". كيف و لم تظل هذه الجملة صحيحة و على الدوام؟ بحيث لا يستطيع أحد القول مثلا "أنا لست موجودا هنا" دون أن يجانب الصواب. البحث يعتمد على التحليل اللغوي لجملة "أنا هنا" لحل هذا اللغز من خلال تسليط الضوء على العلاقة اللغوية بين مفهوم الأنا و التعبير اللغوي عنه، أي مفهوم الأنا المدرك و مفهوم التواجد المكاني لهذا الأنا المدرك. ينتهي البحث باستنتاج علاقة لغوية تبعية تربط التعبير "أنا هنا" بالتعبير "أنا" بوصف التعبير الثاني الحامل اللغوي للتعبير الأول. فهم هذه العلاقة اللغوية الخاصة كفيل بتفسير خصوصية استخدامنا للتعبير "أنا هنا".

## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explain why a problematic sentence like "I am here" is always true. I solve this linguistic riddle by suggesting what I call "*indexical dependence*." I argue that the indexical 'here' semantically functions as a dependent indexical to the first person pronoun, i.e., the indexical 'I', which explains the fixed truth value of the sentence: "I am here".

## Key words:

Indexicals, the first person pronoun, indexical dependence.