



## FOR THEIR EYES ONLY

**Abstract:** *When and why do we need the indexical 'I'? Perry (1979) thinks that 'I' is an essential ingredient to the explanation and prediction of action. We need 'I' to classify the kind of belief that causes an agent to produce a new action. In his view, classifying the agent's belief in terms of 'I' makes sense because, when asked to explain her behavior, the agent will be disposed to say 'I'. Here, we argue that this dispositional assumption is problematic. The disposition to act according to an essential indexical and the disposition to make a speech act that contains 'I' are two very different things that are not always related. The most common circumstances in which we need to say 'I' to explain ourselves involve other agents: when we coordinate in joint actions or when we engage in self-talk to save face before the eyes of potential witnesses. Finally, we revisit Perry's famous messy shopper anecdote to offer a better story about why its main character is disposed to say 'I'.*

**Keywords:** *Essential indexical; Speech acts; Dispositions; Coordination; Self-talk.*

### 1. Introduction

Remember the messy shopper? He is the main character of the anecdote told by Perry (1979) about a time he followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing his cart around in pursuit of the shopper who was making a mess, only to find out that the sugar was coming from the torn sack inside his own cart. As Perry tells us, it was after he realized that *he*, John Perry, was the messy shopper that he stopped to fix the torn sack. According to his account, then, having the belief 'I am making a mess' caused Perry to change his conduct. He concluded that the 'I' in the acquired belief is an essential ingredient to the explanation of his new action, since, in replacing it by alternative designations – for instance, the definite description, 'the only bearded philosopher in a Safeway store west of the Mississippi', or the proper name, 'John Perry' –, we seem to no longer be able to account for his change in behavior – from pursuing the messy shopper to fixing the torn sack in his own cart.

The thesis of an essential indexical ingredient to the explanation of action also appears in a second story from the same text. It is the example of the tardy professor that abandons his office hurriedly at noon, after realizing that the department meeting scheduled for that day started at noon. Here too,

according to Perry, we need an indexical belief like ‘The department meeting starts at noon and noon is *now*’ to explain the change in the professor’s behavior.

In both cases, Perry describes the characters as “ready to say” or “disposed to utter” indexical sentences with the words ‘I’ and ‘now’.<sup>1</sup> This claim, call it *the dispositional assumption*, implies a relation between indexical beliefs and utterances with indexical expressions that, as we will argue in what follows, creates some difficulties for the position. Our point, essentially, is that the disposition to utter an indexical sentence is a disposition to perform a speech act and that changes in conduct need not be accompanied by speech acts that explain them. In other words, to make sense of the messy shopper’s action of fixing the torn sack as involving the first-person perspective (the essential ‘I’), we do not need to assume that he is disposed to explain or predict his own behavior by uttering the word ‘I’. Or at least Perry does not offer an explanation as to *why* we should assume that. In the best-case scenario, this appeal to a disposition to speak needs an additional story. Here, we offer such an additional story by considering two kinds of situations in which agents are disposed to utter ‘I’ to explain their own behavior: coordination in joint activities and cases of (save face) self-talk (Goffman 1978). We argue, in particular, that the best way to explain the messy shopper’s assumed disposition to say ‘I am making a mess’ is to take it as case of save face self-talk.

We begin our discussion, in the next section, by pointing out that the original formulation of the thesis of the essential indexical involves a dilemma. Though it purports to establish the ineliminability of indexicals in the explanation of action, the position ends up committing to a classificatory view that entails a third-person perspective in which ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ actually have no use. In section 3, we discuss two possible ways out of this dilemma: by appealing to the argument of the language of thought or to the disposition to utter indexical expressions. Perry seems to favor the last one. In sections 4 and 5, we hold that a dispositional solution to the dilemma requires an additional story about why agents are disposed to utter ‘I’, ‘here’ or ‘now’. We first consider situations of joint activities and then of self-talk, before we revisit the anecdote of the messy shopper.

## 2. A dilemma from Kaplan

In his *Demonstratives* (1989), David Kaplan has two sorts of motivation for a special semantics for indexicals. The first one is based on the truth-conditional profile of sentences with such expressions: how they behave in

1 “Clearly and correctly, we want the tardy professor, when he finally sees he must be off to the meeting, to be ready to say „I believe that the time at which it is true that the meeting starts now is now.”” Perry 2000: 45. “We expect all good-hearted people in the state that leads them to say „I am making a mess“ to examine their grocery carts, no matter what belief they have in virtue of being in that state” Perry 2000: 39–40.

modal, past, future and counterfactual sentences<sup>2</sup> and what inferential patterns they authorize.<sup>3</sup> This is accounted for by his Logic of Demonstratives. The second kind of motivation concerns the cognitive significance of mental states represented by such sentences – following Kaplan himself, we may call it the “epistemological motivation”<sup>4</sup>. Actually, the apparatus developed for the semantic motivation is used to solve some puzzles related to the epistemological motivation, concerning the nature of our thoughts: in broad terms, the cognitive significance of a thought, in Kaplan’s account, corresponds to its character.<sup>5</sup>

After suggesting a solution to Frege’s Puzzle within his framework, Kaplan tries a “different line of argument”:

Now instead of arguing that character is what we would ordinarily call cognitive significance, let me just ask why we should be interested in the character under which we hold our various attitudes. Why should we be interested in that special kind of significance that is sensitive to the use of indexicals; ‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’, ‘that’ and the like? John Perry, in his stimulating paper “Frege on Demonstratives”, asks and answers this question.<sup>6</sup>

And then he quotes Perry:

Why should we care how someone apprehends a thought, so long as he does? I can only sketch the barest suggestion of an answer here. We use senses to individuate psychological states, in explaining and predicting action. It is the sense entertained and not the thought apprehended that is tied to human action.<sup>7</sup>

The point of view of the agent, including her grasp of what she thinks about here and now, is presented by Perry then as ineliminable in the explanation of action. However, there is an important difference between their aims: while Kaplan is talking about indexical *expressions*, Perry is interested in the account of our *beliefs* and *actions*. As he puts it in his 2020 book, he

<...> generalized Kaplan’s theory to beliefs. Just as there were sentences that could be used to say different things, by different people or at different times, there were *ways of believing* that constituted believing different things for different people or at different times.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Kaplan 1989: 498–500, 512–514.

3 Kaplan 1989: 522.

4 Kaplan 1989: 529.

5 Kaplan 1989: 529–540.

6 Kaplan 1989: 532.

7 Perry 2000: 23, also quoted in Kaplan 1989: 532.

8 Perry 2020: 10.

We are then after the *roles* of indexicals, to use Perry's vocabulary, not the meanings of indexical words: "What correspond to indexicals in our beliefs are not words with a special conventional meaning, but notions and ideas that are tied to what I call "epistemic and pragmatic roles."<sup>9</sup>

Roles "provide a way of organizing information that comes naturally to humans and is reflected in many ways in language."<sup>10</sup> It is a way to gather information about an object that is the current focus of attention which corresponds to an indexical belief. This object may be called "the index."<sup>11</sup> In order to track it in a scene, or to think about one's current location and time, or, indeed, to have a first-person perspective on a given situation, there is no need of a linguistic expression.<sup>12</sup> But mental indexicals, identified by their role, have a clear similarity with the meanings of indexical words. The disposition to utter an indexical sentence is a way to explain this similarity. This sort of account, however, is less than smooth.

Let us take a look at the messy shopper again: he believed the same singular proposition before and after realizing that he was making a mess – there is no change in *what* he believed. Saying that he believed the same thing all along is a way to classify his mental states that is useful for some purposes, for instance, if we want to keep track of the truth-conditions of his beliefs. Singular propositions are abstract structures useful to classify different agents, or the same agent at different moments of time, according to what is believed. Indexicals have a part to play here: in order to have the same belief across relevantly different contexts, one must believe it in different ways. Indexicals track precisely the different ways in which one may believe the same singular proposition in different contexts. This is Frege's point about demonstratives.<sup>13</sup> However, in order to explain behavior, these different ways to believe classify agents differently, as the tardy professor's anecdote shows:

As time passes, I go from the state corresponding to "The meeting will begin" to the one corresponding to "The meeting is beginning" and finally to "The meeting has begun." All along I believe of noon that it is when the meeting begins. But I believe it in different ways. And to these different ways of believing the same thing, different actions are appropriate: preparation, movement, apology.<sup>14</sup>

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9 Perry 2007: 518.

10 Korta and Perry 2011: 28.

11 "Sometimes when we are dealing with a lot of facts about numerous inter-related objects, one object will take center stage for a period of time, during which we focus on which objects stand in various relations to it, or, as we say, play various roles relative to it. We call this object 'the index.'" Korta and Perry 2011: 29.

12 For a distinction between indexicals in language and in thought, see Recanati 2012: 57–67

13 Frege 1956: 296 *apud* Perry 2000: 8.

14 Perry 2000: 49.

Sentences with indexicals classify ways of believing, whether we are interested in classifying the agent as having the same thought across contexts, or as behaving in different ways while having in mind the same thought: “We use sentences with indexicals or relativized propositions to individuate belief states, for the purposes of classifying believers in ways useful for explanation and prediction”.<sup>15</sup>

At first, one might feel tempted to say that sentences with indexicals are not *what* is believed, but *how* one believes. However, sentences are not mental states. We need to classify different ways of believing because different ways of having the same thought may lead to different actions. Actually, indexical sentences are useful for classificatory purposes, that is, to explain and predict action, as Perry says, precisely by tracking these ways of believing. How?

It is not entirely clear how we may hold this classificatory view of indexicals and, at the same time, claim that the words ‘I’, ‘here’, and ‘now’ are essential to the explanation of action, since the classificatory view makes sense only from a third-person point of view. The agent herself does not classify her own states in order to explain her behaviour (or at least not for the sake of explanation, as we will see below), and certainly not to predict her own actions. When words are used to classify “believers in ways useful for explanation and prediction”, there does not seem to be a word ‘I’, a word ‘now’, nor a word ‘here’.

Well, this is a bit far-fetched. A speaker may use ‘now’ and ‘here’ to talk about a context other than the context in which she finds herself. Consider this narrative of Alexander the Great’s conquests, around 331 BC:

Alexander now occupied Babylon, city and province; Mazaeus, who surrendered it, was confirmed as satrap in conjunction with a Macedonian troop commander, and quite exceptionally was granted the right to coin. As in Egypt, the local priesthood was encouraged. Susa, the capital, also surrendered, releasing huge treasures amounting to 50,000 gold talents; here Alexander established Darius’s family in comfort. Crushing the mountain tribe of the Ouxians, he now pressed on over the Zagros range into Persia proper and, successfully turning the Pass of the Persian Gates, held by the satrap Ariobarzanes, he entered Persepolis and Pasargadae.<sup>16</sup>

In this paragraph, ‘now’ occurs twice, and ‘here’, once. They refer to Alexander’s time and location, and not to the writer’s. There is a shift in the context of interpretation, and ‘here’ and ‘now’ are used to explain Alexander’s actions.<sup>17</sup> That only goes to show that words are used in different ways, and, in this use, they are irrelevant to Perry’s argument: the writer is certainly not engaged in

15 Perry 2000: 47–48.

16 Extracted from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-the-Great>. Accessed in May, 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

17 For more on this kind of context shifting, see Recanati 2000: 211–258; Perry 2001: 76–80.

any action in 331 BC<sup>18</sup>. When they seem to be essential to the explanation of action, as in the stories of the messy shopper and the tardy professor, ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ seem to have no use. To sum up, the dilemma is that there is no room for ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ in a classificatory view of indexicals, and the argument is supposed to establish, precisely, the ineliminability of indexicals. There seems to be two alternative paths.

### 3. Placing indexicals

The first way out is to associate the linguistic character of an expression with a psychological mode of presentation. In section XX of his *Demonstratives*, Kaplan asks how we can make an indirect discourse report of an indexical belief, or a report of an utterance of a sentence containing an indexical expression. His answer is that when I say 1., in reporting, for example, ‘My God! It’s my pants that are on fire’, I am reporting a belief that the agent has under the character of ‘I’.

1. He thinks that his pants are on fire,

More, in Kaplan’s words, “<...> when you wonder, ‘Is that me?’ it is correct to report you as having wondered whether you are yourself. These transformations are traced to the indexical form of your inner discourse rather than to any particular referential intentions.”<sup>19</sup>

So, sentence 2 is a report of an indexical sentence in your “inner direct discourse”, 3:

2. You wonder whether you are yourself.
3. Is that me?

Kaplan expects this move to take care of the relational sense of propositional attitude reports discussed by Quine (1956)<sup>20</sup>, at least as far as indexicals are concerned. In his account, the relational sense of the report of an indexical belief is the indirect discourse counterpart of such a direct reference device in the “inner direct discourse” of the subject whose belief is reported. Such a move would avoid Quinean worries about such constructions<sup>21</sup>, since there

18 The point here is that utterances of indexical words, like ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’, do appear in explaining actions (in the sense of rationally reconstructing, justifying or narrating them and etc.), but “outside” of the contexts in which such actions are produced.

19 Kaplan 1989: 554.

20 For Quine, there are two readings (which correspond to different reports of states of mind) of ambiguous natural language sentences containing psychological verbs, like ‘believe’: notional and relational. When the relational reading is true, there is someone to whom the belief is related, via the token relational state of mind in question (Crawford 2008). The same does not hold for the notional reading.

21 The worry here is that relational reports are not referentially transparent – as shown in the example (from the same text) of Ralph believing of Bernard J. Ortcutt that he is both a spy and the community’s pillar –, so the singular term is not purely referential (as

is no “near-contrary” in the vicinity of 3, given that a subject cannot think of herself using an indexical and fail to recognize that she is thinking of herself.

This solution could also solve our problem if we assumed that an indexical that classifies a mental state from a third-person point of view has a counterpart in the language of thought of the agent. As Kaplan puts it, “if this is correct, and if indexicals are featured in the language of thought, then we have a solution to Quine’s puzzle.”<sup>22</sup> But he is not entirely convinced of the truth of the antecedent, for at least three reasons:

First, there is no real syntax of the language of thought. <...> Second, in containing images, sounds, odors, etc., thought is richer than the language of report. <...> Third, thought ranges from the completely explicit (inner speech) to the entirely implicit (unconscious beliefs which explain actions) and through a variety of occurrent and dispositional forms.<sup>23</sup>

One may be more optimistic about the syntax of the language of thought, and that responding to the first worry will take care of the other two.<sup>24</sup> Well, maybe so, but this is no answer to the dilemma about the dispositional assumption.

Before taking up this problem, let us bear in mind that Perry himself is not entirely comfortable with reading the structure of thought off the structure of language. Indeed, for him, at least as far as indexicals are concerned, this is a misinterpretation that follows from two mistaken assumptions: that for a sentence to be used to classify belief states, it should be the object of the belief, and that since indexicals “*seemed* essential to *expressing* certain thoughts,” they are necessary “for *having* those thoughts.”<sup>25</sup> As we saw in the previous section, in order to explain our actions, we need to track the causal roles of beliefs, and not the meanings of words.

As we also saw in the previous section, in Perry, indexicals enter the story via the dispositional assumption:

That we individuate belief states in this way doubtless has something to do with the fact that one criterion for being in the states we postulate – at least for articulate, sincere adults – is being disposed to utter the indexical sentence in question.<sup>26</sup>

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attested via substitution *salva veritate*), and we cannot conclude any relation between the subject having the belief and the object of the belief – e.g., Ralph and Bernard J. Ortcutt.

22 Kaplan 1989: 553.

23 Kaplan 1989: 556; on the second reason, see Kaplan 1968: 201.

24 In this respect, see, in particular, Corazza 2004.

25 Perry 1997: 19*n*.

26 Perry 2000: 39–40.

The fact that an agent is disposed to utter a sentence with an indexical in certain circumstances explains why her action is classified by that sentence. Should the messy shopper decide to say anything as he realizes that he is making a mess himself, he will utter a sentence like 4:

4. *I am making a mess!*

But is it correct to say that the messy shopper is disposed to utter 4 as he rearranges his sack in his cart?

#### 4. When are we disposed to utter an indexical sentence? A coordination view

When are we disposed to utter a first-person sentence *as we act*? Here is a situation in which the utterance of a first-person sentence seems natural:

Suppose that Heinrich and Andrea are going for a walk together. <...> Suppose now that Heinrich suddenly claps his hands to his brow and says “Oh No!” and, without further ado, starts walking rapidly away from Andrea. Andrea may not be disappointed that he has gone. Barring special background understandings, however, she will understand that <...> the manner of going involved a *mistake*. It is a mistake by the fact that they were walking together. Heinrich’s walking away will not have this effect if he first says to Andrea “I’ve just remembered I am supposed to be at the doctor’s office in ten minutes!” and receives the reply “Go quickly, then!”<sup>27</sup>

In this story, Heinrich says 5 to Andrea:

5. I’ve just remembered I am supposed to be at the doctor’s office in ten minutes!

He is certainly not predicting his action. Is he explaining it to Andrea? Maybe so, but why? He certainly does not explain each of his actions to his friend. In Margaret Gilbert’s account, Heinrich is committed to continue in his joint activity with Andrea, and his utterance of 5 is a way to ask permission to leave this activity, not simply to inform her of his intention.<sup>28</sup>

There are two different acts, requiring distinct accounts: the act of walking away from Andrea and the act of saying something to her. Gilbert provides an explanation for the speech act of uttering 5: he explains why he has to walk away from her because he has assumed the commitment to have a walk with her, and breaking such commitment requires an explanation. The use of a first-person pronoun is explained by its role in the coordination of a joint action.

27 Gilbert 2014: 24–25.

28 Gilbert 2014: 25.

Does this account extend to Perry's messy shopper story? Well, if he is alone, he does not have to coordinate his actions with anybody. Probably, if the messy shopper decided to say anything, he would utter something like 4. But why should he say anything? Is he disposed to utter a sentence describing each of his actions? Addressed to whom? And why? The disposition to utter a sentence is the disposition to perform a certain kind of speech act, and is quite independent of the agent having an indexical sentence in his inner discourse. After all, even if having a thought is having a sentence in the inner discourse, no one is disposed to utter every sentence that corresponds to her current object of thought.

To bring home this point, let us take a look at John Campbell's remarks on the first-person perspective. Here is his analysis of a story by John Austin. One day, Austin decides to kill his donkey: he goes to the field, sees his donkey and shoots it. Unfortunately, he shot his neighbour's donkey instead. Here is Campbell's description of what happened (let us keep the same agent throughout the story – Campbell is speaking on behalf of Austin-the-shooter):

When I make a mistake, take a careful aim and fire at your donkey, I will say 'I am shooting my donkey', and this judgment really does involve an error of identification.<sup>29</sup>

Why did he utter this sentence? Addressed to whom? Does he describe to himself every action he is engaged in ('I'm reading a paper', 'Now, I will have a coffee' etc.)? Of course, there is a wrong judgment about the identity of the donkey that explains his action, but that doesn't mean we need to postulate that a first-person sentence was or would have been actually uttered. Contrast Campbell's story with Austin's:

You have a donkey, so have I, and they graze in the same field. The day comes when I conceive a dislike from mine. I go to shoot it, draw a bead on it, fire: the brute falls in its tracks. I inspect the victim, and find to my horror that it is *your* donkey. I appear on your doorstep with the remains and say – what? 'I say, old sport, I'm awfully sorry etc., I've shot your donkey *by accident*'?<sup>30</sup>

He only says something as he appears at his neighbour's doorstep and apologizes for his awful mistake. Of course, apologizing for shooting the donkey and shooting the donkey are two different acts. The circumstances in which the dispositional solution holds are not that of an agent realizing that the moment in which she finds herself is the time for her to do something, but the circumstances in which, on top of that, she is disposed to say to an audience that it is time for her to do something, or that she has done something. One may be disposed to shoot a donkey silently, and have no disposition for apologizing for that.

29 Campbell 2003: 162.

30 Austin 1979: 185*n*.

The distinction is even more striking in a second example from Campbell:

But this extreme view [that the referent of ‘I’ is a construct synthesized around uses of the first person] does not seem to be correct, as we can see if we reflect on, for example, the multiplicity of bases on which we make first-person judgements. There are many different bases that we use. There is my knowledge of what I am doing or am about to do, and my memory of my past life. There are such elementary phenomena as my sense of balance exercised when I think ‘I am about to fall over.’<sup>31</sup>

However, having a certain thought in mind is not the same thing as having in mind a sentence that expresses that thought. Think of the “swinging room” experiment:

Lee and Aronson placed 13- to 16-month-old toddlers in a “swinging room”. In this room, the floor was stationary, but the walls and ceiling could swing toward and away from the toddler. [...] Notice that this pattern is similar to the optic flow that occurs when moving forward, as when you are driving through a tunnel. Because the flow is associated with moving forward, it creates the impression in the observer that he or she is swaying forward. This causes the toddler to sway back to compensate.<sup>32</sup>

The toddler thinks she is about to fall over, but she has no disposition to utter ‘I am about to fall over’: children start to understand personal pronouns by the age of 18-months.<sup>33</sup> The experiment addresses the agent’s perspective on a scene, but the agent having a perspective is not equivalent to her disposition to utter a first-person sentence describing the scene from her vantage point. Of course, Campbell knows this and his analysis requires no sentence in the agent’s mind – except as perhaps a *façon de parler*.<sup>34</sup>

To recap then, the dispositional solution as applied to the messy shopper example seems incomplete without an additional story about why our character would need to perform a speech act aside from simply fixing the sugar sack in his cart. Since the messy shopper is not in a joint activity with a fellow shopper and he has no audience, why would he be disposed to utter anything?

## 5. Self-talk and saving face

One plausible scenario in which the messy shopper could utter 4 is one of self-directed speech, that is, self-talk. Self-talk seemingly violates certain rules about why and how we talk, since paradigmatically, talking involves two

31 Campbell 1994: 135.

32 Goldstein 2007: 59.

33 Bloom 2000: 122.

34 See Campbell 1994: 141–142 on the same experiment.

or more agents – taking up roles as either the speaker or the hearer – who communicate in order to exchange information. This marks a strong contrast with self-talk, which, oddly enough, involves agents addressing themselves to share information that they already have.

One way to make sense of it is to abandon the idea that we talk to share information and consider, for example, cases in which we utter sentences just to manifest our inner discourse. In these cases, talking is typically meant to aid silent reasoning and enable mental organization. The agent is not sharing information *per se*, but rather organizing the information she already possesses by verbalizing certain thoughts and helping herself identify inferential relations. This “platonic” understanding of self-talk<sup>35</sup> allows us to explain self-directed utterances exhibited in problem-solving or planning, such as 6 below, said by a self-talker planning her actions for the day:

6. I will stop by the gas station and then go to class.

It is not clear though how this platonic understanding applies to the very common cases of self-talk associated to self-conscious behavior and self-encouragement, like in 7. and 8. below, respectively<sup>36</sup>.

7. What is wrong with me?  
8. I can do this!

Most literature on self-talk looks into psychology and cognitive development to explain these last cases. The reason is that it has been assumed by some prominent psychologists, like Vygotsky (1981)<sup>37</sup>, that self-talk plays a part in the internalization of social relationships. This assumption is supported by observations that overt self-talk though highly frequent in early years becomes gradually more restricted in adult life<sup>38</sup>, as individuals approach higher levels of sociability and begin to keep their inner dialogues more and more to themselves.

However, the platonic and the developmental perspectives give us just one part of the explanation, specifically pertaining to the socially acceptable cases of self-talk. They do not address why self-talk is typically inappropriate from a sociological as well as sociolinguistic standpoint. Indications of how to handle these worries can be found in Goffman (1978). As he remarks,

35 We will call this understanding ‘platonic’ in reference to Plato’s mention of inner dialogues in a somewhat similar sense in the *Theaetetus*.

36 Extracted from Holmberg (2010). As discussed by Holmberg, this kind of self-talk may also involve second-person pronouns.

37 As mentioned by both Goffman (1978) and Geurts (2018). Geurts, in particular, remarks that a more developmentally-oriented approach – than the purely platonic one – has the additional benefit of accounting for the continuity between self-talk and social talk according to a unified view of communication that is not centered on the idea of informational exchange.

38 Vicente and Martinez Manrique 2011.

adult lonely self-talk is taboo both because it violates the sender-recipient presupposition in communication, and because talking is paradigmatically a *situational* activity that involves the gathering and interaction of and between people. He defines a social situation as the “physical surroundings in which people gather to interact”<sup>39</sup>. For him, the most essential trait of a social situation is the “respectful aliveness” that one is expected to show *in* and *to* it. Hence, self-talk is a social impropriety because it reveals that the speaker is not really *in* the social situation but rather finds herself distracted by inward states.

Nonetheless, there will be cases in which self-talk in social gatherings is not only adequate, but expected<sup>40</sup>. Take one example inspired by Goffman. Imagine a situation in which two friends are walking together deeply engaged in conversation. One of them sees something shinning on the floor, something that looks like a coin. She stops to pick it up but after a closer inspection realizes that it is just the metallic lid of a yogurt bottle. She utters 9. to herself, and then returns to the conversation.

9. I thought it was a coin.

In Goffman’s analysis, this self-talker utters 9 to re-establish herself in the eyes of her witness as a competent person – “not to be trifled with”. She is *saving face*. Her comment is not being addressed to herself in order to exchange information, since she already has that piece of information. What her utterance really aims at is to justify her behavior: in uttering it, the self-talker blocks any doubt her friend might come to have regarding her rationality. As Goffman puts it, “an understandable reaction to an understood event”<sup>41</sup>.

And we may exhibit a similar behavior in the absence of direct witnesses too. Consider another example from the same text:

An unaccompanied man – a single – is walking down the street past others. His general dress and manner have provided anyone who views him with evidence of his sobriety, innocent intent, suitable aliveness to the situation, and general social competency. His left foot strikes an obtruding piece of pavement and he stumbles. He instantly catches himself, rights himself more or less efficiently, and continues on. Theretofore, his competence at walking had been taken for granted by those who saw him, confirming their assessment of him in this connection. His tripping suddenly casts these imputations into doubt. Therefore, before he continues, he may well engage in some actions that have nothing to do with the laws of mechanics. The remedial

39 Goffman 1978: 790.

40 Perhaps the utterance of ‘I can’t believe it’, when one is informed of the death of a loved one is the best example. Here, self-involvement is considered reasonable and not a demonstration of lack of respectful aliveness in and to the situation (Goffman 1978).

41 Goffman 1978: 797.

work he performs is likely to be aimed at correcting the threat to his reputation, as well as his posture. (Goffman 1978:793)

Call this *the stumbling man example*. Imagine that, after tripping, the stumbling man briefly looks around with a shy smile, as he utters 10 to himself:

10. I almost fell.

Unlike self-talk of the self-directing type – as in 8, with the intention of encouragement – or manifestations of inner discourse in self-negotiating plans, as in 6, 10 reveals the agent's inclination to respond to the situation as a social situation even in the absence of an addressee<sup>42</sup>. That is, even if he is addressing his words to no one in particular, the stumbling man is likely to, in Goffman's words, "tell a story to the situation" by externalizing a certain narrative – which can even be non-verbal, such as examining the pavement or his footwear to see what caused him to stumble.

What is really distinctive in this example is the overt attempt to save face when confronted with a potential threat to one's reputation. Like 9, the utterance of 10 can be seen as an anticipatory move in case remedial action is necessary – even if talking to oneself is still a somewhat strange behavior. Goffman claims, for example, that: "when circumstances conspire to thrust us into a course of action whose appearance might raise questions about our moral character or self-respect we often prefer to be seen as self-talkers" (:796). So, we not only accept but expect something like 10 to be uttered by our clumsy character.

Some cases of save face talk will involve taboo words, like expletives, in the case of 'Damn!', or so-called response cries, like 'Oops!'<sup>43</sup>. The use of these expressions in self-talk too may serve to evidence that the agent is watchfully tracking her own movements in the social situation – although here she presents her rationality in terms of accountability for mistakes, failures and equivocations rather than in terms of remedial justification. In a save face emission of 'Oops!', for example, the agent's purpose is usually to insulate that specific behavior as an exception to her generally competent conduct. By recognizing a specific episode as an equivocation that warrants a 'Oops!', the agent saves face by trying to restore her image as a competent and respectable counterpart who is very much *in* the situation. Something similar happens with 'Damn!'; the main differences being that an inner state of frustration is also conveyed and that the expression has offensive potential. One can imagine the tardy professor talking to his brother in his office and then interrupting the conversation to utter something like 11 to himself.

42 Goffman (1978) develops the notion of embedment which can be understood roughly as "the lifting of a form of interaction out of its natural place and, and its employment in a special way" (:790). It is because of embedment – and ritual constraints – that agents respond to situations *qua* social situations even in the absence of potential addressees.

43 Goffman 1978: 800–806.

11. Damn! The meeting starts *now*.

And then running in the direction of the department's boardroom. Here, we have a mix of coordination and self-talk. The tardy professor breaks the joint activity. But in exhibiting frustration with himself in front of his colleague, he also evidences awareness of the fact that he failed to provide what the situation required of him. The unconcealed recognition of his own momentary incompetence has the effect of restoring his good image as a rational agent "overall"<sup>44</sup>.

Now, back to Goffman's stumbling man example, we believe that it resembles Perry's messy shopper story in many respects. Both characters are alone in potentially social (that is, public) environments – the street and a supermarket – and both come to realize that possible witnesses could perceive them as incompetent agents – clumsy, inattentive, laughable. Both seem disposed to utter 'I' – e.g., in 4 and 10 – to save face.

We also believe that the idea of a "save face speech act" helps us make sense of the dispositional assumption: John Perry, the shopper, will classify his action by using an indexical expression, namely 'I', not because he is constantly and indistinctly disposed to utter 'I' to predict and explain all of his thoughts and actions, but because making a mess at a Safeway store disposes him to say something for self-representational purposes. By uttering 4, he says to whoever happens to see the scene, that he was not making a mess on purpose, and that now that he sees that he is responsible for the trail of sugar on the floor, he will rearrange his sack.

## 6. Back to the dispositional solution

We have, at this point, a new interpretation of the messy shopper story, or, more precisely, of his disposition to utter a sentence such as 4. A first account was that he has a token of this sentence in his mind, as he realizes the he was responsible for the mess. However, even if this is true, having a sentence in the language of thought doesn't explain the disposition to utter anything.

Another way to see the story is that this indexical sentence classifies his actions because he is disposed to utter 'I am making a mess,' whether or not it corresponds to a sentence in Mentalese tokened in his mind. But it is not clear that one is disposed to say aloud just any thought that explains one's behavior. Imagine that I am driving and realize that I have to turn right at the next corner. There is no reason to think that, as I realize that, I utter, or have a disposition to utter 'I will turn right now,' even if the thought that I will turn right now explains my actions.

44 In the original example, the tardy professor is alone in his office, probably behind closed doors. He would be disposed to self-talk most likely for the purpose of mental organization, as in the example of 6, and not to save face.

We may have another take on indexicals as classificatory devices. One way to follow this path is to accept some sort of structural similarity between indexical roles in thought and indexical meanings in language, along the lines suggested by Robert Matthews for the attribution of propositional attitudes.<sup>45</sup> Maybe so, but we still lack an explanation, if there is indeed any, of the disposition that the messy shopper has to say ‘I am making a mess.’

There are cases in which an agent may utter a sentence describing what she is doing in order to coordinate her actions with what her partner is doing, or with what her partner expects of her. The messy shopper, however, is not engaged in any joint action. Nevertheless, we think that the messy shopper *is* disposed to utter 4 not because he realizes what he was doing, but because, on top of that, what he was doing threatened his image as a competent agent. Interestingly, the story strikes us as plausible because of something that Perry doesn’t say: the only bearded philosopher in a Safeway store west of the Mississippi is *disposed* to utter 4 because of his clumsiness and the consequent need to save his face.

## 7. Concluding remarks

Indexicals classify mental states in order to explain and predict actions. We need to distinguish what is believed from how it is believed, and “we use indexicals to disclose *how* we believe; singular propositions get at *what* we believe.”<sup>46</sup> However, we cannot classify the way an agent thinks of a situation by the sentence she is disposed to utter: the disposition to do something is not the disposition to utter a sentence describing what one is doing. Indeed, arguing that indexicals are needed in the explanation and prediction of an action, and, thereby, that the words ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ are essential, leads to a dilemma: there is no room for ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’ in a classificatory view of indexicals, and the argument is supposed to establish, precisely, the ineliminability of indexicals.

We can avoid this dilemma and accept Perry’s solution by acknowledging that we are after the roles of indexical thoughts in our mental lives and that indexicals in language, inasmuch as they are part of the activity of explaining

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45 “One of the principal tasks for a measurement-theoretic construal of propositional attitude attributions is to specify the empirical structure of the attitudes that has its image in the representational structure just described. As is the case with other sorts of measure predicates, competent users of propositional attitude predicates are typically unable to specify this structure. It will therefore have to be reconstructed inferentially, from a consideration of (i) the empirical evidence on which attitude attributions are based and the *explanatory and predictive tasks to which they are put*, and (ii) the structure of our natural language representations of the attitudes, on the assumption that the relevant properties and relations of propositional attitudes about which we reason surrogatively using those representations are respected <...> by those representations.” Matthews 2007: 173 (italics added)

46 Perry 2020: 17.

and predicting actions, classify such roles. It is not difficult to disentangle this view from the link between indexical beliefs and the utterance of sentences with indexicals via the disposition to utter such sentences. In particular, as we go towards a more instrumental view of indexicals as classificatory devices, we are less tempted to accept the dispositional assumption. Already in the 1979 paper, Perry views indexicals as classificatory devices, and the dispositional assumption is not essential to his argument.

However, in Perry's story, there is something more interesting and somehow unexpected, or at least, to the best of our knowledge, unacknowledged so far. The messy shopper is, after all, disposed to utter 'I am making a mess', not because of his realization and change in behaviour – he could, after all, have changed his course of actions without uttering a word. He is disposed to utter this sentence because of his clumsy behaviour which threatens his image as a competent agent. This is a case in which, according to Goffman, self-talk is accepted, if not expected. In order to show that, in spite of the mess, he is a competent agent, he says 'I am making mess' or otherwise shows that he had not realized that he had a torn sack of sugar in his cart. He shows it to whoever happens to see the scene. For their eyes only.

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