'You' and 'I', 'Here' and 'Now': Spatial and Social Situatedness in Deixis

Beata Stawarska

Abstract

I examine the ordinary-language use of deictic terms, notably the personal, spatial and temporal markers 'I' and 'you', 'here' and 'now', in order to make manifest that their meaning is inextricably embedded within a pragmatic, perceptual and interpersonal situation. This inextricable embeddedness of deixis within the shared natural and social world suggests, I contend, an I–you connectedness at the heart of meaning and experience. The thesis of I–you connectedness extends to the larger claim about the situatedness of embodied perceivers within a shared perspectively configured milieu. This claim can be cast in terms of a *polycentric orientation* to the natural and social world, which provides a robust alternative to an egocentric conception of experience. I develop this claim via a renewed phenomenological reflection on speech, assisted by ordinary-language philosophy, as well as relevant contributions from empirical sociolinguistic studies and developmental psychology. These reflective and empirical perspectives help make a case for the primacy of socially and spatially situated experience, which departs from the received notion of an asocial and uprooted mind.

Keywords: interpersonal relations; polycentrism; deixis

In this paper, I propose to examine closely the ordinary-language use of utterances containing the so-called deictic or context-dependent terms, notably the personal, spatial and temporal markers 'I' and 'you', 'here' and 'now', in order to make manifest that their meaning is inextricably embedded within a pragmatic, perceptual and interpersonal situation. This inextricable embeddedness of deixis within the shared natural and social world where action and perception unfold suggests, I contend, an irrecusable I–you connectedness at the heart of meaning. The thesis of I–you connectedness is not, however, limited to linguistic meaning. It extends to the larger claim about the inalienable situatedness of embodied perceivers within a shared perspectively configured milieu which affords multiple viewpoints and orients the perceptual field by salient

landmarks as well as the perceivers' own bodies. This claim can be cast in terms of a *polycentric orientation* to the natural and social world, which provides a robust and productive alternative to an egocentric conception of experience. I propose to employ the concept of primary polycentrism, construed both in rich phenomenological and ordinary-language use terms, to illuminate the complex question of interpersonal relatedness within the shared world.

This strategy helps to advance the conversation about sociality beyond the limits of classical phenomenology. I contend that mainstream phenomenological approaches, however diverse they might be, have neglected to explore in sufficient depth the communicative structure of experience, in particular the phenomenological importance of the 'addressee', the inseparability of 'I' and 'you', and the nature of the alternation between them. This neglect of interpersonal relatedness is most clearly apparent within the transcendental phenomenology of consciousness. In this perspective, consciousness is construed in terms of a mentalistic first-person stance of purified experience, disengaged from other-personal stances, notably the second-person mode of address directed to a real, potential or imagined interlocutor. In other words, the transcendental conception of consciousness indexed to a solitary ego glosses over the ordinary context of speaking, thinking and writing, where meaning is generated in first-to-second person orientation to an interlocutor, who may be facing me and listening and speaking to me, or who may be implied as an imaginary converser and opponent in thought, or as the potential reader of my writing, which includes this paper written with a specific readership in mind. As a result, the transcendental conception of ego-bound consciousness neglects to account for the ways in which meaning is made within the sphere shared by I and you. This critique is not assuaged by Husserl's emphasis on transcendental *intersubjectivity*. As discussed at length elsewhere,[1] transcendental intersubjectivity multiplies ego-bound subjectivities while neglecting I–you connectedness. It thus yields an external, additive notion of an ego-collective, and not the requisite *relational* plurality that typifies communal life, and which is apparent within the ordinary pragmatics of pronominal discourse.

The social phenomenologist is therefore well advised to focus on living speech, especially the employment of deictic expressions which mark the interrelated speaker and addressee roles in discourse, in order to bring the thesis of primary I–you connectedness into relief. This turn to speech *in actu* is benefited not only by a renewed phenomenological reflection on social relatedness within the shared world, but also by relevant contributions from empirical sociolinguistic studies, as well as some references to psychological development. These empirical contributions help support the philosophical thesis of I–you connectedness by means of additional insights gleaned from the pragmatics of spoken language, as well as language acquisition in children. I hope that creatively combined, these reflective and empirical

perspectives will make a strong case for the primacy of socially and spatially situated experience, which departs from the received notion of an asocial and uprooted mind.

Deixis in Spatial and Social Contexts

Let me open the discussion with a brief survey of the deictic function in discourse. *Deixis* comes from the Greek 'to point' or 'to show' (Greek *deiknunai*), and thus suggests a direct existential relation between what is shown and what is used to show. In the context of speech, a deictic expression shows what is readily apparent to the participants in discourse (rather than referring to extra-discursive entities which are implied without being present). Specifically, deictic expressions relate utterances to the spatial and temporal coordinates of the act of discourse. They are equivalent to Husserl's *subjective and occasional expressions* discussed in the *Logical Investigations*, and are also known as *indexicals* in philosophical scholarship. Consider the definition offered by the French linguist Lyons, whose contributions to speech-based linguistics are especially pertinent to our purposes:

> By deixis is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee.

> (1977: p. 637)

Here are some examples. Demonstrative pronouns and adjectives like the English 'this' and 'that' are deictic expressions, and so are demonstrative adverbs, such as 'here' and 'there', and 'now' and 'then'. The first two pairs of expressions denote spatial proximity and distance with regard to the speaker's point of view at the time of the utterance, while the last pair denotes temporal proximity and distance with regard to the time of the utterance. While 'here' denotes the position occupied by the speaker at the time of the utterance, 'now' refers to the moment when the utterance is made. These spatial and temporal coordinates are therefore meaningful only if referred to by a speaker who is herself situated in the spatial and temporal context. Furthermore, the act of utterance is an event involving the speaker's living, breathing body. As Ryle (2000 [1949]: p. 179) reminds us, 'the moment at which "now" is breathed is the moment which it indicates', while 'here' indicates, if it functions in a deictic context, 'that particular place from which the speaker propagates the noise "here" into the surrounding air'.

Similarly, the uttered word 'I' indicates the particular person emitting the word 'I', while 'you' indicates the person to whom the utterance is directed.

Deictic expressions connect to the speaker's and addressee's communicating bodies, as well as to the context of the utterance. Deictic expressions involve speakers and hearers in a *situation*, taking this word in its original sense of being *in situ* or in a location. Needless to say, the location is not to be taken in a purely objective, geographical sense, but rather as the natural and social context of communicative practice shared, and in part created, by the interlocutors. At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that the context of utterance is not a purely linguistic formation generated *ex nihilo* by pronouncing appropriate spatial deictic terms. The interlocutors' embodied existence and perceptual skills, their ability to navigate the shared environment, to indicate things and to grasp the significance of indication by others, provide the attendant para-linguistic features of deixis, as well as the pre-linguistic conditions of the acquisition of deictic terms. Importantly, then, deixis is *not* to be narrowly construed as an exclusively linguistic category, for it denotes a social and corporeal expertise which harnesses and mobilizes our abilities to orient in a shared spatial environment using the repertoire of available perceptual and motor skills. That is why deixis in general and person deixis in particular cannot be accounted for in terms of syntax and semantics alone, but also requires explanation in terms embodied existence embedded in the shared natural and social world.

Egocentrism and Polycentrism

Lyons (1977) concludes from the speaker's involvement in spatial referencing that the deictic situation is *egocentric*, since the speaker relates everything to her perspective and casts herself in the role of ego (p. 638). The speaker's situated vantage point provides, in Lyons's words, the *zero-point* of the deictic space (p. 669), i.e., an absolute *here* which never acquires a plus value. Lyons approximates in this regard Husserl's notion developed in *Ideas II* (p. 166) that the body proper provides as an absolute *here* the zero-point of orientation for the pure ego. However, Lyons regards spatial situatedness expressly within the terms of the 'canonical situation of utterance' (p. 637), i.e., the face-to-face interaction between at least two participants of discourse, rather than mute solitary perception, and is thus able to bring the social aspect of spatial orientation to light. In Lyons's words, 'canonical situation of utterance'

> involves one–one, or one–many, signaling in the phonic medium along the vocal-auditory channel, with all the participants present in the same actual situation able to see one another and to perceive the associated non-vocal paralinguistic features of the utterances, and each assuming the role of sender and receiver in turn.

(p. 637)

The canonical situation of deixis thus throws a new light on spatial situatedness, and endows spatial categories with an inherently communicative value. Within this situation, I am explicitly reminded of situated perspectives other than my own. Significantly, I need to allow for an encounter with another perceiver/speaker, who addresses me as 'You, over there' and to which I may respond with 'Here I am.' If I fail to grasp this *here–there* reversal, and fail to understand that the demonstrative 'there' reverses into a 'here' following the change of speaker roles from the other to myself, I have not grasped the meaning of 'here' fully and am unable to use this deictic expression in the canonical situation of utterance. Similarly, if I have not grasped the *I–you* reversal and understood that the personal pronoun 'you' addressed to me by the speaker reverses into the pronoun 'I' in my response, I have not grasped the meaning of the first-person pronoun fully either. The canonical situation of spatial orientation and deixis discussed by Lyons thus ultimately undermines the primacy of an egocentric perspective, and helps to establish a *polycentric* orientation in its place.

The thesis of the primacy of polycentrism in spatial orientation to the shared world which I am advancing here is in agreement with Elmar Holenstein (1985). Holenstein argued that an egocentric construal of the perceiver's body, as in Husserl's emphasis on the first-person zero-point, ultimately fails to account for the actual mechanism of spatial orientation. Holenstein noted that the perceiver does not rely exclusively on her bodily location but also on the multiplicity of salient reference points and on the relations to her co-perceivers as she locomotes and orients in the spatial milieu. This multi-referentiality is evident even when no other perceiver is present in the perceptual field. When I am standing in the market square surrounded by houses, it is the square's centre, possibly accentuated by a clearly visibly monument, that provides the reference point with regard to which I orient myself, and not the other way round (p. 18). The reference point is likely to be housed in a dominant element of the perceptual field, whether because of its shape or because of its meaning. The body proper assumes this central referencing function only when it happens to occupy such a dominant position, and not by default (p. 19). Holenstein advocates therefore a *polycentric* givenness of experiential space over against the *egocentric* subjectivism espoused by Husserl. Such polycentrism is integral both to the navigation in the shared spatial environment *and* to the mastery of deictic terms such as *here–there* and *I–you*. Needless to say, the ability to use the landmark is contingent on a situated perspective occupied by an embodied perceiver. This does not, however, validate an egocentric subjectivist account. The latter neglects the socialized aspect of spatial situatedness, and ultimately fails to account for the phenomenon of situation and orientation within a shared world.

Consider that the egocentric conception of space in terms of an irreversible 'here' promotes the paradoxical scenario of an aspatial and unsituated

category enabling the navigation of the shared world. It is puzzling just how a spatially configured environment would be constituted by a viewpoint that is not itself subject to spatial configurations. This unsituated viewpoint of the absolute 'here' may provide an appropriate *locum* for the transcendental irreversible I, but it does not capture the body-situated-in-the-shared-world. It ultimately distorts the ordinary conception of spatial deixis as it is used in ordinary practice, where the alternation between the 'here' of my body for me and the 'there' of my body for others, as well as the interrelation between my own and the others' situated viewpoints, is easily granted and regarded as primary.

It follows that, in a non-transcendental polycentric perspective on spatial orientation and deixis, the *here/there* and *I/you* reversals are interconnected. The perceptual/navigational space exists on a continuum with the deictic space of interpersonal discourse; speakers are situated in this shared space. The pronoun 'I' plays the double role of indicating the speaker *role* and *perspective*, i.e., the location from which the speaker addresses another in discourse. Gurwitsch (1977 [1950]) notes, following Humboldt, that 'I' and 'you' form an invariant system of relations realized between addresser and addressee in every actual case of speech. 'I' and 'you' designate therefore the places occupied by members within this relational system, and 'place' needs to be taken here in the literal sense of spatial location occupied, as well as actively co-constituted, by the interlocutors. The *here/there* indicators of location bear a profound affinity with the *I/you* indicators of the speaker/addressee roles occupied in discourse. This intuition is confirmed by Humboldt's study of languages (1907), in which adverbs of place have emerged in close relation to personal pronouns, lending support to their common origin. There is also empirical evidence that a polycentric orientation in space provides a necessary condition for the mastery of *I/you* pronouns in children (Loveland, 1984; Ricard, Girouard and Gouin Decarie (1999). The meaning of the personal deictic terms turns out therefore to exceed the meta-linguistic and intra-linguistic role of indicating the speaker/addressee roles in discourse, and to include also the pre-linguistic and para-linguistic situatedness in the shared spatially configured field, as expressed by the spatial deixis of *here/there*.

Polycentrism and Person Deixis

Let us consider person deixis in some more detail, so as to make the thesis of the primacy of polycentrism over egocentrism more robust. The best way to characterize personal pronouns in their deictic role is by means of the *shifter* category. 'Shifter' was introduced by Jespersen (1922: p. 123) and taken up by Jakobson (1990) as a handy term for words whose meaning differs according to the situation and can be applied to one thing at one time, and a different thing at another. Examples are 'enemy' and 'home',

whose referents shift depending on the speaker and the situation, but most importantly, the personal pronouns. Their referents are not assigned in a fixed fashion but fluctuate according to the evolving conversational context. Who the pronoun 'I' refers to depends on who takes up the active speech role at a given point in time. Its reference is therefore fixed in *performative* rather than *truth-conditional* terms. As Lyons put it, 'It is [the speaker's] performance of [this particular deictic] role, and not the truth of any presupposed identifying proposition which determines the correct reference of "I"' (1977: p. 645). With reference identified in terms of a performance, the first-person pronoun harks back to the original meaning of the word *persona*, which was 'mask' in Latin and was used to translate the Greek word for 'dramatic character' or 'role' in the theatre. However, insofar as personal pronouns function as shifters in the conversational context, they are not bound to a single persona but are interchanged between the interlocutors as the conversation progresses and the addressor/addressee roles reverse.

In somewhat more technical terms, adopted by Jakobson (1990) from Peirce's classification of signs, shifters are hybrids that combine the functions of a *symbol* and an *index*. According to Peirce, a symbol such as the English word *red* is associated with the represented object by a *conventional rule*, while an index, such as the act of pointing, is in *existential relation* with the object it represents. Consider the first-person pronoun in this context. On the one hand, the sign 'I' represents its object by being associated to it 'by a conventional rule', and so different languages or 'codes' assign the same meaning to different words, such as the Latin *ego*, English *I*, German *Ich*, French *je* … On the other hand, the sign 'I' represents its object by 'being in existential relation with it' – the word 'I' points to or indicates the person making the utterance. As an indexical symbol, a shifter is therefore an element of the 'code' (or language) whose meaning cannot be defined independently of the 'message' (or speech-act/utterance), and must therefore be thematized in terms of a speech situation. Jakobson notes also that 'every shifter … possesses its own general meaning' (p. 388), 'I' standing for the addresser and 'you' for the addressee of the message to which it belongs. Contra the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, the word 'I' does not designate 'a different person in each case … by means of a new meaning' (ibid.).[2] Instead, each shifter possesses its own general meaning, dependent exclusively on the role taken up by the person in dialogic interaction. This generality of meaning enables personal pronouns to serve their primary function in natural languages: to manage dialogic roles regardless of individual differences.

Successful management of dialogic roles depends directly on a minimal content being carried by personal deictic terms. Typically, first- and second-person pronouns provide no clues regarding the person's race and gender, social status, physical characteristics, etc. If a person knocking on the door

responds to 'Who is it?' with a laconic 'It is I/me!', the host has no means of identifying the visitor from the content of their utterance alone, and may only hope for non-verbal clues such as the tone of voice to discern the visitor's identity. Such semantic poverty in personal pronouns is striking compared to the relative semantic richness of other lexical units, for example nouns and noun phrases, which enable us to paint a fairly detailed picture of a given individual's life. It is this semantic poverty, however, that enables the pronouns to serve as indicators of speech roles in an undiscriminating manner. As Bhat (2004: p. 42) notes, personal pronouns successfully fulfil their function of being the same for all speakers or addressees because they are not burdened with information specific to the individuals who enact those roles. Not everyone can be described as the twenty-first-century. Queen of England or the world's first light-weight boxing champion; in principle, in a non-hierarchical society everyone can, however, take up the speaker role and address another in second-person terms. The pronouns 'I' and 'you' are literally democratic in that they facilitate equal representation of all speakers and listeners within public discourse, whether or not such representation actually takes place.

Their semantic poverty implies that personal pronouns are dissociated from their specific referents. They do not designate anything particular about the speaker and the addressee; Benveniste even went as far as to claim that the pronouns 'I' and 'you' refer exclusively to the 'reality of discourse' and that persons are linguistically constituted entities. '"Ego" is he who *says* "ego"' (1971: p. 224). Holenstein (1985: pp. 59–67) therefore calls the pronoun 'I' a metalinguistic expression – the 'I' turns back to the speaker of the utterance in which it occurs. Hence the pronoun 'I' boasts a 'guaranteed reference' – it reliably indicates the speaker in the production of the utterance in which it occurs. This guaranteed indication and inherent reflexivity of the pronoun 'I' has been misconstrued in the modern and the idealist traditions as indubitable proof of the existence of a thinking substance attainable in the first-person singular only. Holenstein counters that the certainty afforded by the pronoun 'I' is not that of a *Cogito* – an absolute and ineffable standpoint of pure thought; instead, the pronoun 'I' facilitates the performative production of the speaker as the ineradicable subject of speech-acts. So the correct use and understanding of the word 'I' do not document an introspective insight into the Cartesian theatre of thought but rather 'practical mastery of one's own relativity and of the reversibility of standpoints and roles which one assumes as a member of a community' (p. 68). Rather than being a testament to egocentrism and to the absolute zero-point of orientation in the deictic space, the pronoun 'I' therefore evidences the existence of a communicative space with a vibrant polycentric orientation, where each individual speaker role is performed relative to other speakers via a continuing reversal of addresser/addressee roles and perspectives. The construct of an absolute here-point adopted by

the ego covers over this plurality of perspectives and deprives the pronoun 'I' of the communicative potential it ordinarily possesses.

The communicative conception of the pronoun 'I' is at odds with the notion that the first-person marker is indicative of what is unmistakably *my own*. This conception is typically substantiated by the fact that the pronoun 'I', *in my use of it*, indicates consistently and exclusively nobody but me. Other pronouns, it is said, such as 'you' or 'she', may indicate different people at different times.[3] However, this egocentric conception unduly privileges the philosopher's own use of the pronoun, and covers over the ordinary linguistic fact that personal pronouns are intelligible for speakers and hearers alike. If the pronoun 'I' were ego-bound, then it would fail to function efficiently as a shifter and the back-and-forth movement of a conversation would be brought to a halt. However, the word 'I' is generally intelligible to the members of a linguistic community, whether it is uttered or heard; it belongs to the realm of shared understanding and resonates in the public space of speech, rather than being a subjective possession.

Person Deixis and Anscombe on the First Person

The preceding analysis of person deixis is in general agreement with G. E. M. Anscombe's classic essay 'The First Person' (1991 [1975]), even though I believe that the author does not fully appreciate the philosophical implications of the first-person pronoun's grammar. In this essay, Anscombe challenges Descartes for using the 'I' pronoun as if it were a name for a disembodied mind. She reminds the reader that Descartes's meditations in the first person need to be distinguished from a third-person inquiry. An inquiry in the third person could be compatible with ignorance that one is its object. For example, 'When John Smith spoke of John Horatio Auberon Smith (named in a will perhaps) he was speaking of himself, but he did not know this' is a possible situation (p. 72). However, a reference in the first person, using the 'I' pronoun, is such that the object reached by it is necessarily identical with oneself (the 'guaranteed reference' of Holenstein). Surely, as Anscombe is quick to point out, the discourse of 'object reaching' suggests that the pronoun 'I' could be treated as a quasi-name and that it functions syntactically as a proper name. This is problematic, she notes, considering that every English speaker uses that quasi-name, whereas one expects that a name would single out individuals from a crowd. Construing the 'I' as a name would thus result in an equivalent of a Monty Python sketch where the name Bruce refers to just every philosopher at the table. However, she notes further, even if all individuals carried the same name, there would still remain a difference between the first-person pronoun and proper names in that 'each one uses the name "I" only to speak of himself'. Is that to say that those she terms 'our logicians', who regard the pronoun

'I' as a proper name, happen to have dim eyes (p. 73)? Anscombe answers in the affirmative.

Contrary to the belief that the 'I' pronoun can be modelled on a proper name (in agreement with its derivation from *pro-nomen*), i.e., 'a singular term whose role is to make a reference' (p. 76), Anscombe argues that 'I' is not a referring expression at all. Problematic consequences follow from the logicians' unexamined assumption that the pronoun 'I' *is* a referring expression – typically, a commitment to the Cartesian ego as the sole referent of the word 'I'. However, such a commitment produces the '*intolerable difficulty* of requiring an identification of the same referent in different "I"-thoughts' (p. 77, my italics), i.e., of locating a stable subject among the first-person acts which come and go. It was Hume who testified most famously to the impossibility of locating such a persistent mental self, and Sartre followed in his footsteps by declaring the ego transcendent rather than transcendental.[4] In line with these authors, Anscombe submits that 'There is no such thing [as the "I"]' (p. 79) and that the mental ego is a 'grammatical illusion' (p. 81). This illusion has the misfortune of fuelling endless debates about the exact status of this mute and invisible subject and how we can thematize it without objectification. To be sure, Anscombe does not doubt the possibility of identifying different 'I'-thoughts as belonging to the same human being. However, she sees no need to posit an ego to get the job done. This reidentification may be an acquired ability to give a narrative account of what one has done – an ability learnt from others and, in part at least, for the sake of others to whom one tells the story of one's life.[5]

Anscombe's claim that the pronoun 'I' does not refer and that the philosophical notion of a subject is a grammatical illusion will be less shocking if we supplement her argument with an important distinction between two modes of reference: denoting and indexing. Traditionally, 'denoting' is regarded as the manner in which names or definite descriptions pick out an extra-linguistic entity for both the speaker and the hearer. For example, the sentence 'Victoria is a swimmer' helps to pick a particular girl out of the group. However, the sentence 'This is Victoria' contains an indexical reference, because it is inextricably related to the moment of the utterance – for example to the event of introducing my friend Victoria to another guest at a dinner party. Consider this denoting/indexing distinction in the context of personal-pronoun use. Descartes believed that the 'I' serves to pick out an entity, the thinking thing, housed within the material body. Consequently, he interpreted the pronoun 'I' (handled as if it were a noun) as a denoting expression, a point that Anscombe disputes. However, to argue against an extra-linguistic referent is not to deny the pronoun 'I' indexical value. It is not to declare the pronoun 'I' a meaningless expression. The 'I' is not semantically empty for lack of external referent; it is, however, contextually bound, and its meaning is indissociable from the utterance – a point which Anscombe does not make, but which makes her argument more persuasive.

Recall from earlier discussion that as a shifter, the pronoun 'I' must be dissociated from its referent in order to fulfil its dialogic function of designating any speaker efficiently. The dissociation from the referent that Anscombe rightly insists upon in her discussion of the first-person stance is therefore a necessary feature built into the grammar of the pronoun 'I'; it needs to be brought into account to make the *de jure* and not merely *de facto* character of this pronoun's non-denoting character manifest. Supported with grammatical insights, Anscombe's argument carries more weight, for the pronoun 'I's lack of reference ceases to appear as a purely factual, however problem-ridden, occurrence. This strategy demonstrates the usefulness of bringing explicitly speech-based analysis into philosophical argument.

I–You Connectedness and the Community

I hope that armed with contributions from sociolinguistics, as well as phenomenological philosophy, I have shed new light on the inescapable situatedness of deictic expressions in a socially modulated spatial context. This argument replaces the usual starting point of classical phenomenological inquiry within the individualistic space occupied by the body of the perceiver with the notion of a social space occupied by a community of perceivers who are oriented towards their environment and towards one another via a multitude of situated perspectives. This polycentric perspective locates the meanings of both personal and spacial deixis within the context of interpersonal connectedness, which is especially salient in speech, but also manifest in perceptual co-orientation to a spatial environment, rather than within the field of egocentric consciousness, to be accessed within a purified mentalistic first-person stance, and at the exclusion of the connectedness to other personal stances. I am not therefore performing here a detached linguistic analysis of meaning; I look at the phenomenon of embodied communication in its usual context, and without an individualistic distortion. I employ insights from ordinary-language philosophy to disclose the interpersonal dimension of meaning, which may be occluded from a phenomenological inquiry of speech conducted typically in the first person.

Insights from ordinary-language philosophy also help to situate the interpersonal relatedness in the I–you mode within the context of communal life, or what would be cast in pronominal terms as the 'we' of larger social groups. Even though communal life may seem at first sight to exceed the I–you dynamics, it turns out, upon inquiry, that social plurality is contingent on first-to-second-person proximity. In order to see that point, consider first one of the unique features of first- and second-person markers in discourse which sets them apart from the third person. The feature in question is captured by the grammatical category of *number* (Bhat, 2004: p. 10). In the

case of the third-person pronoun, number denotes the plurality of referents. Hence 'they' is constituted by adding up instances of 'she' and/or 'he'. Plurality in the third-person pronoun is therefore of a straightforwardly *additive* kind. In the case of the first-person plural, the situation is more complex. It is not the case that 'we' denotes a plurality of 'I's. As numerous linguists, for example Jespersen (1924: p. 192), Benveniste (1971) and J. Lyons (1968: p. 277) have pointed out, the terminology used for describing the non-singular forms of both first- and second-person pronouns is misleading because these forms do not stand in the same type of relation to singular forms as *girls*, *telephones*, stand to *girl*, *telephone*. The word *girls* indicates several girls, but the pronoun 'we' does not indicate several 'I'-referents, i.e., speakers. 'We' indicates just one speaker, i.e., the speaker of the utterance in which it occurs, and one or more non-speakers. In its minimal form, the 'we' pronoun indicates the speaker and the addressee – as in *We are leaving*, where the referents are the one who makes the utterance and the one at whom the utterance is aimed. This is the so-called *inclusive* case of the first-person pronoun in non-singular use. It is also possible for the 'we' pronoun to be exclusive of the addressee – as in *We are leaving*, where the referents of the pronoun are the speaker and one or more non-speakers, who address another person or group and inform the addresser(s) of their imminent departure. This distinction between the inclusion and the exclusion of the addressee is not a distinction in *plurality*, but rather in the kind of *relation* established between the addresser and the addressee. Furthermore, the relation to the addressee is always involved in the utterance of the 'we' pronoun, whether the addressee is included or excluded from its referents. This demonstrates the intrinsically dialogic – rather than additive – character of plurality in the pronoun 'we': the pronoun 'we' is not founded on an external collective of the referents of the pronoun 'I' but rather on the *I–you* type of relation, even though it remains true that the speaker uttering 'we' speaks on more than her own behalf (she speaks on behalf of the addressee in the inclusive form and on the part of non-speakers who are not the addressee(s) in the exclusive form). It is only once this intrinsic relation between the speaker and the addressee is undercut that it becomes feasible to think of the 'we' pronoun as a sheer multiplicity of the referents of the pronoun 'I'.

One could object that there are cases in which the pronoun 'we' has more than just one speaker as its referent. A case cited by Jespersen (1924: p. 192) involves a body of men who in response to 'Who will join me?' respond in unison 'We all will.' Jespersen comments that despite the *de facto* plurality of speakers voicing the pronoun 'we', its meaning should be read as 'I will and all the others will (I presume).' Even though Jespersen's interpretation of the example seems correct, the example itself is somewhat contrived, as one rarely hears an extemporaneous 'we' uttered simultaneously by a group of people without prior consultation with the others (how would you know

that the others are going to join in?). Furthermore, even though the pronoun 'we' is used to express the opinions of many, it typically issues from a single mouth. Unlike the pronoun 'I', the pronoun 'we' is representative of its referents but not necessarily performed by its referents. That is why in some situations a referent may feel alienated from the inclusive 'we' produced by a spokesperson and feel that she herself is not represented in the utterances including this pronoun in a way that would be difficult to realize in the typical instance of the pronoun 'I'. To revise Rimbaud's classic statement, *we is an other*, at least sometimes. That is why a non-alienating 'we' is dependent upon continuing deliberative engagement within the I–you mode within the referent group; otherwise, the common 'we'-front risks being fractured by dissenting voices and the larger representational potential of the first-person plural may be lost. Needless to say, such deliberative engagements are possible as long as the one who speaks on behalf of others by means of 'we' listens to their speech too; the speaker's 'I' needs to reverse into the addressee's 'you' for the communal 'we' to be possible.

Consider how the problematic additive non-dialogic conception of plurality in the 'we' continues to inform the understanding of sociality in the classical phenomenological tradition, as if it sufficed to multiply monads to produce a community. In §54a of the *Crisis*, entitled 'We as Human Beings, and We as Ultimately Functioning-Accomplishing Subjects', Husserl raises the question of the constitution of intersubjectivity. He notes that a more careful than hitherto provided analysis of the ego brings up 'the phenomenon of the change of signification of [the form] "I" – just as I am saying "I" right now – into "other I's", into "all of us", *we who are many "I's"*, and among whom I am but *one* "I"' (1970 [1938]: p. 182, my italics). This change of signification should provide a transcendental meaning to the community as the more-than-one subject enacting the universal constitution. However, this conception of transcendental intersubjectivity as 'we who are many Is' rests on the misguided assumption that a community could be founded by adding up multiple referents of the 'I' pronoun to form the plural 'we'. As noted above, the pronoun 'we' is not a sum total of speakers who self-refer by means of the pronoun 'I'; there has to be an interpersonal relation of direct address for the pronoun *we* to arise, whether this relation is internal (the inclusive we) or external (the exclusive we) to the referents of the pronoun. In either case, the pronoun 'we' arises within a dialogic context, and such a context is missing within the transcendental conception of intersubjectivity. The latter operates with the widespread yet illusory notion that the referents of the 'I' pronoun add up like the referents of 'apples' or 'oranges' to form larger groups. If the phenomenologist took a closer look at grammar and personal-pronoun pragmatics, she would be better placed to appreciate that social groups are not simply produced by accumulating egos and that I–you connectedness is necessary to forge communities founded on mutual co-existence. It is the I–you relation rather than the lone

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I that provides the building block of sociality and the starting point of analysis for any social theory. As Martin Buber (1970) would put it, there is no I as such; I exists necessarily in relation. It is this interpersonal relation, regarded as primary rather than derived, that inescapably situates the self in a social context.

A Conversation with Castañeda

In the remaining part of this article, and by way of a conclusion, I propose to contrast the contributions from sociolinguistics and phenomenology discussed above with the thought of a philosopher – Hector-Neri Castañeda (1999) – who occupied himself extensively with person deixis, notably the first-person pronoun, but whose conclusions depart significantly from the evidence for the social and spatial situatedness of self set out in this paper. I propose to examine his approach in some detail, because it helps to contrast the polycentric view developed here with an egocentric one and, most importantly, to expose the *epistemic bias* which produces the egocentric perspective on personal reference. Even though this bias has a well-established history in philosophy, beginning with modernity, it distorts the conception of personhood in favour of an asocial and asituated self. As a result, it helps to make apparent the need for an alternative inquiry into personhood which is not driven by a quest for transparent knowledge but responds rather to the great complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon of personhood is complex because it is inherently embodied and embedded within the social and natural world. Consequently, it resists an instantaneous intuitive grasp – not because it is irrational or chaotic, but rather because it is thick with life and rich in meaning. A phenomenological inquiry into personhood needs therefore to resist the urge to reduce its complexity in favour of a self-transparency; rather it needs to preserve the multi-layered patterns which shape, organize and situate personhood within natural, social and linguistic contexts. It must therefore, as argued throughout this paper, adopt a multi-disciplinary focus on the phenomenon of personhood, and enrich individual reflection on experience with the understanding of the multiple ways in which the larger spatial and social world shapes individually accessible meaning and experience. I believe that Castañeda's otherwise insightful and instructive account of the pronoun I does not preserve this inherent complexity of personhood.

Castañeda's central thesis developed in *The Phenomeno-Logic of the I: Essays on Self-Consciousness* is that the analysis of the first-person pronoun provides direct support for an inner private self. His thinking is therefore reminiscent of Husserl's postulate of the transcendental ego, construed as a linguistically neutral agency located by the phenomenological onlooker in the purified field of consciousness, which is equivocally expressed in the natural language by the pronoun 'I'. The phenomenologist therefore

proceeds from top to bottom. Castañeda's thinking goes in the opposite direction, from bottom to top, by deriving an egocentric mentalistic subject from the personal pronoun 'I'. Both derivations are fuelled by a pre-existing philosophical agenda of securing apodictic knowledge, as discussed below. Yet they also serve as a useful reminder that language alone cannot perform the task that linguists like Benveniste assign to it: that of creating personal marking *ex nihilo* by the sheer fact of uttering and comprehending personal pronouns. Castañeda is right that something more than linguistic competence is needed for developing personal identity, and that the sense of self (whether construed in individualist or social terms) exceeds its linguistic expression. However, he is wrong to posit an isolated transcendental subject to accommodate this need.

In agreement with the linguists discussed in this paper, as well as with Anscombe, Castañeda views the first-person pronoun as a unique expression which cannot be reduced to or replaced by names, definite descriptions and the third-person pronoun. For example, a philosopher might say 'The one who wrote this sentence about the transcendental ego is not very bright' to express a belief she would not express by 'I am not very bright', even though she wrote the sentence in question (say, on a misplaced scrap of paper later discovered at a friend's house). Contra the linguists, however, Castañeda does not think that it suffices to explain first-person reference as the reference to the speaker of the utterance in which it occurs. For the speaker must *thinkingly* refer to herself in order that she be able to use the little word *I* in the first place (1999: p. 256). Following Kant's Copernican Revolution, Castañeda argues that there is no direct word-to-world correlation without invoking the *thinker* whose internal self-reference provides a necessary condition of possibility of linguistic self-reference via personal pronouns. To argue otherwise would be to assign too much of a productive role to language and assume that the speaker's utterance of the first-person pronoun initiates self-reference *ex nihilo*. However, the person who says, for example, 'I am hungry' is not determining the I-referent *après coup*. Were such a search for the author of an utterance to be necessary, we would be at a loss to explain how I-references could ever get off the ground. It follows from Castañeda's argument that we need to presuppose a pre-existent reflexive self in order to account for how first-person reference ever gets initiated.

This pre-existent self must exhibit a special kind of reflexivity. Consider another example.[6] Oedipus may think or say that the slayer of Laius should be killed without realizing that he himself is the slayer. So even though Oedipus refers to himself when he speaks or thinks about the slayer of Laius, *he does not know it*. His self-reference lacks self-awareness. Similar examples abound in the literature. Borges may read a story about the man named Borges without being aware that he himself is the person featured in the story. When he does come to realize it, a new element is added to the story that does not have to do with its semantic content but with his reading

of the character in the first- rather than the third-person mode. What exactly does this new element consist in? According to Castañeda, it has to do with a reference to oneself *qua* self. It is a reference which has to do with the internal reflexivity of self-awareness, and it differs profoundly from any external encounters with oneself.

Castañeda distinguishes between two types of reflexive reference: an external 'pedestrian' and an internal 'exciting' one (p. 252). Let us begin with the pedestrian one. Seeing oneself in the mirror is a good example of external reflexive acts. For example, Ernst Mach, who notices 'a shabby old pedagogue' approaching him as he is boarding a tram, in fact sees his own reflection in a mirror, but does not recognize it as such. His demonstrative reference to the mirror image is not made in the first person, even though the *demonstrandum* stands in fact for the demonstrator himself. Such external encounters with oneself need to be neatly separated from the internal reflexive reference. The latter is realized in thought accompanied by self-awareness. Castañeda stresses that internal self-reference is of a *mental* or *thinking* kind – it is a conceptual ability which, for example, small children do not have (p. 4). This conceptual ability is only known from within. It is an index of subjectivity, realized within the episodes of self-consciousness. Unlike Descartes, Castañeda does not attribute an ontological substantive status to this transcendental self. He views it along the Kantian lines of the transcendental prefix, the 'I think that' of Kant's transcendental principle of the unity of apperception, which is beyond doubt. However, unlike Kant, and like Husserl, Castañeda does not consider the transcendental I to be a product of transcendental deduction (an *a priori* condition of experience), but rather a phenomenological datum (p. 215) located by the thinker during episodes of self-awareness. This transcendental ego is not, in Castañeda's view (unlike Husserl's), an enduring entity out of which particular instances of thought spring forth. There is rather a series of transcendental Is which are subjective particulars that exist with certainty during the thinking experience only (p. 247). Castañeda spells out this idea by means of the so-called I-guises: different thoughts which are the same as their corresponding I (p. 216).[7]

What is interesting about Castañeda's approach, and what sets him apart from transcendental phenomenology, is his express preoccupation with ordinary language. Castañeda claims to develop a material and experiential semantics for ordinary language (p. 226). He argues, quite rightly, that to investigate first-person reference one needs to study the living semantics and the pragmatics of first-person language (p. 234). However, his conclusion that what one refers to by means of the first-person pronoun is the internal/mentalistic/private self (p. 257) is not based on unprejudiced analysis of language use but rather on a pre-existing philosophical agenda. Had he looked into how the pronoun 'I' is employed in ordinary language, Castañeda would have noticed that it captures not only mental states (I am hungry, I am feeling sad) but also physical states (I weigh 130 pounds, I

am 6 feet tall). As Strawson (1966) pointed out, the pronoun 'I' does not discriminate between 'internal' and 'external' or public references; it carries both. To single out only a specific set of I-references which fit one's pre-existing assumption of a mentalistic subject is *not* to pay heed to the complexity of ordinary language and to the intrinsic ambiguity of the first-person pronoun, which resists being construed along the traditional subject–object binary. It is rather to follow the epistemic concern of securing the domain of knowledge immune to error through misidentification. After all, subjective I-thoughts are traditionally deemed to yield the kind of apodictic certainty that is not provided by references to oneself in the so-called external reflexivity: seeing one's expression in the mirror and referring to oneself by means of a definite expression like 'the slayer of Laius' contain the danger of misidentification. Similarly, the first-person statement of the type 'I weigh 140 pounds' could be invalidated by external evidence, such as reading the subject's real weight off the scales, while it is senseless to mount evidence against the person who confesses 'I am feeling sad.' This distinction between the statements subject to verification and those that are not motivates the isolation of an inner mental self as the locus of unshakeable knowledge. After all, in the spirit of Descartes's quest for indubitable truths, Castañeda is 'considering entities as they are thought of and referred to by a thinker putting her world together after the skeptical devastation brought about by the Mad Scientist, or the Evil Demon' (p. 224).

The transcendental self stands as an entity that survives this sceptical devastation and 'is putting the world together'. However, the self construed in the quest for apodicticity clearly conflicts with the self attained via ordinary-language analysis. For while the former is defined by the philosopher in purportedly unambiguous terms (certainty, interiority, privacy, mentality), the latter is notoriously ridden with ambiguity – it is internal *and* external, private *and* public, mental *and* mundane, and so it perpetually frustrates the traditional epistemic quest for absolute certainty and colours the supposedly transparent spiritual substance with the pigment of the sociolinguistic world. Rather than acknowledge and embrace this ambiguity inherent in the pronoun 'I', Castañeda prefers to project the unambiguous subject of the epistemic quest for apodicticity onto the phenomenon of ordinary language and to force it into the first person. By doing that, however, he loses his footing in the ordinary grammar of the pronoun 'I' and reverts to the intuitionist paradigm of transcendental philosophy.

Unsurprisingly, Castañeda contrasts and privileges the first-person reference (to an internal self) over the third-person reference to an external public façade which is available in equal measure to the self and the others. Consider this passage:

> What one thinks, *de dicto*, i.e., the internal content that one thinks, when one thinks in the first-person way, is entirely different from what

others think in the third person way. Yet a necessary and sufficient condition of being a person, or being fully a person, is to be able to think of oneself as *oneself*, in the first-person way. Others must perforce think of one in the third person way. This contrast is enormous and enormously important.

(p. 232)

What is strikingly missing from this opposition between first- and third-person reference is the second-person type of referentiality. Castañeda construes relations to others exclusively in the third-person mode, in terms of the external reflexivity noted above, while relations to oneself would follow the mode of internal reflexivity of the first-person stance. However, a philosopher keenly interested in ordinary language should note also the interconnectedness between the first and the second person. He should be aware of I–you reversibility, which makes it *de jure* impossible to thematize the pronoun 'I' in isolation from the pronoun 'you'. As discussed earlier, the speaker masters the pronoun 'I' fully if she understands its ever possible reversal to 'you' when addressed by others. The failure to comprehend such a reversal results in the concomitant failure to employ the pronoun 'I' for the purpose of self-reference. This is a big loss for Castañeda and other philosophers of subjectivity, for it means that the thinker who purportedly refers to nothing other than her internal/private self by means of the first-person pronoun would *de facto* be unable to employ the pronoun 'I' and to enact self-reference in language. Contra Castañeda, the pronoun 'I' does not simply point inwards, towards some ephemeral and evanescent cloud of self-awareness, but also towards the narrating self *and* towards the potential or present addressee. The pronoun 'I' is necessarily bi-directional. Caught in the I–you reversal, the first person is not internalized into an index of subjectivity unless it is forced to fit a pre-existent philosophical agenda. I conclude that the discussions of subjectivity which disregard the interconnectedness between first- and second-person reference, between *self-awareness* and *addressability*, profoundly misconstrue the nature of the self in terms of the individualist bias, despite the fact that they may draw on phenomenological evidence of some ineffable inner experience in the process. If such experience were to be had, it could not be attributed to a situated self and prefixed with the ordinary pronoun 'I'. The problem of self-awareness is ill-posed as long as the self is uprooted from its social situatedness, and disembedded from the spatial and temporal context where meanings are ordinarily fashioned and shared. Such an exile from the situation does not reinforce the self but rather abolishes it.

University of Oregon, USA

Notes

1   (Ohio University Press, forthcoming).
2   See also Husserl, 1970 [1900], Vol. 11, p. 27.
3   For example, Ryle (2000: p. 189) makes this point.
4   Needless to say, numerous others, like Kant, Fichte and Husserl, have employed transcendental reduction to posit a necessary egological subject of experience and knowledge.
5   Incidentally, this narrative quality of personal identity may throw light on the immense difficulty of retrieving the earliest childhood experiences, preceding the ability to tell and comprehend life stories.
6   From G. Evans (1994).
7   For additional similarities and differences between Castañeda and Husserl, see J. G. Hart in Castañeda (1999).

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