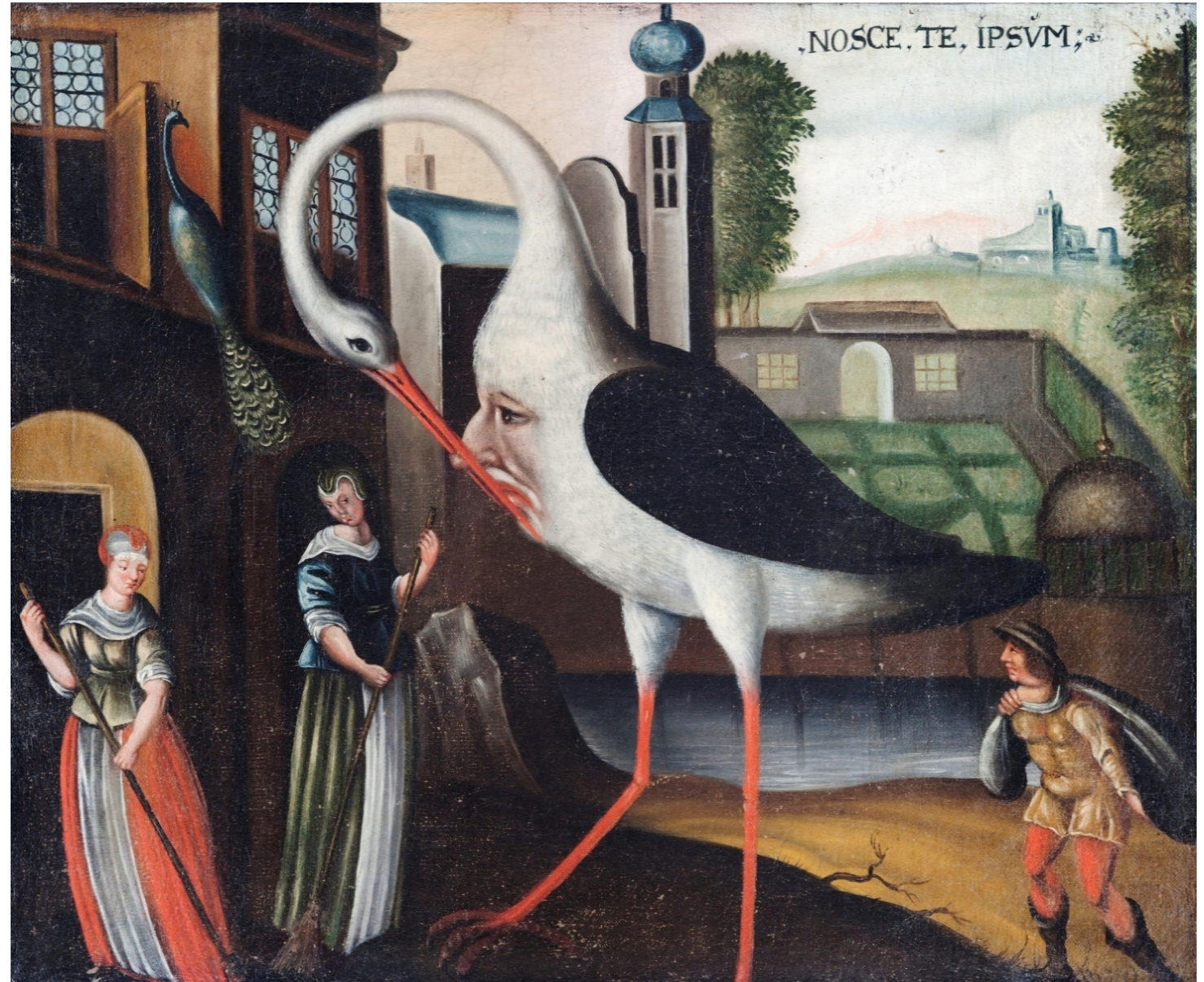


On the astonishing pervasiveness of the First-person

Denis Delfitto (Verona)
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Geneva, March 15



Måleri, allegorisk bild. Nosce te ipsum. Nyckelord: Stork, 1600-tal, Allegori, Exteriör, Folk, Fåglar, Föremålsbild

A sketchy roadmap

Pragmatic and analytic problems with the first-person

Solved problems and three hard remaining problems

An experiential layer of meaning in syntax as the re-interpretation of the speaker's coordinates

Towards an effective resolution of the hard problems



First-person and the Experience-layer of Meaning

- Common underlying issue:
the first-person involves a subjective dimension that cannot be captured analytically or pragmatically...
- ...but is part of the primitive ontology of natural language



First person:

A pragmatic and an analytic problem

- “I am wearing red shoes”
 - Meaning of “I” is context-dependent
 - Uttered by Gaetano -> Gaetano is wearing red shoes
 - Uttered by Denis -> Denis is wearing red shoes
 - Expresses a *de re* proposition
 - “I am speaking” is not a necessary proposition
 - ...although it is *de facto a priori*



Kaplan's logic of indexicals (Kaplan 1989)

- Two-dimensions of meaning:
 - Character (Context \rightarrow Content)
 - Content (Proposition)
- “I am wearing red shoes”
 - Character = $\{c: \text{Wears-red-shoes}(\text{speaker in } c)\}$
 - Content = $\text{Wears-red-shoes}(g)$



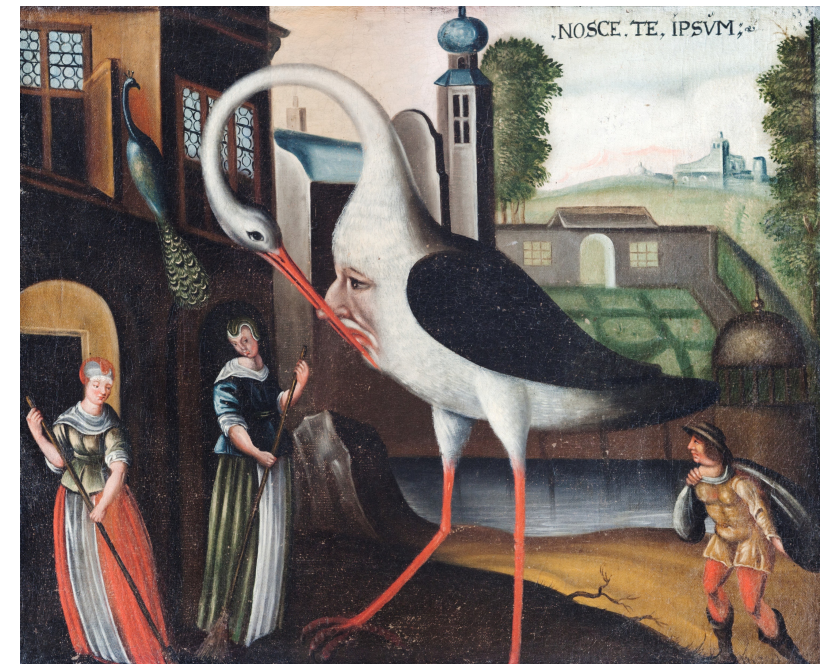
Problems solved

- “I” is context-dependent
 - It receives its content from the context through the mediation of its character
- “I” contributes *de re* propositions
 - Content of “I am wearing red shoes” = Wears-red-shoes(g)
- “I am speaking” has contingent content but necessary character
 - Character = {c: Speaks(speaker in c)}
 - Content = Speaks(g)



Three “hard” problems

- Immunity to error through misidentification (Wittgenstein 1958; Shoemaker 1968)
- Circularity/irreducibility of the first-person concept (Kripke 2011)
- Moore’s paradox (Moore 1942, 1944; Shoemaker 1994)
- Common underlying issue: the first-person involves a subjective dimension that cannot be captured analytically or pragmatically but requires a revision of long held philosophical assumptions about the self.



Immunity to error through misidentification (IEM)

- (a) “I am wearing red shoes”
- (b) “I feel cold”

- “surely someone is wearing red shoes, but are you sure it’s really you?”
- “surely someone is feeling cold, but are you sure it’s really you?”



Acquaintance and self-acquaintance predict errors

- (a) “I am wearing red shoes”
 - (b) “I feel cold”
 - (c) “He is wearing red shoes”
 - (d) “He is feeling cold”
-
- So, why is (b) “I feel cold” immune to error?



Cartesian solution

- (b) “I feel cold”
- The process of identification is not based on self-acquaintance but *introspection*
- If this is so, however, what is identified is not a *res* but a Cartesian ego (Anscombe 1975)



Wittgensteinian solution

- (b) “I feel cold”
- The sentence involves no reference at all (Anscombe 1975; Recanati 2012)
- “I” is an expletive:
 - (b) = “It feels cold”
- However,
 - Existential entailment (b) -> “Someone feels cold”
 - “I feel hungry” \neq “It feels hungry”
 - “I see red” \neq “It sees red”
- Plus, what about the referential uses of “I”?
 - “I am wearing red shoes” -> “Someone is wearing red shoes”



Circularity of Kaplan's semantics

- Frege: “I” presupposes a primitive and incommunicable “self-concept” that speakers tacitly express to themselves (Frege 1918-1919).
- Kaplan: No! The whole use of the word “I” can be captured by saying that a sentence containing “I” expresses a truth if and only if the rest of the sentence is actually true of the speaker using the word “I”.



Circularity of Kaplan's semantics

- First variant: “Any German should attribute, say, being in pain or being a logician to himself if and only if the German is in pain or is a logician, as Kaplan says. So I should do this”
- **How is the latter occurrence of “I” to be understood?**
- Second variant: “Frege should attribute a property to Frege using “ich” if and only if Frege has the property. But I am Frege, so I suppose that I should use the word “ich” if and only if Frege has the property”
- **How are the latter three occurrences of “I” to be understood?**



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Irreducibility of the first-person

- Perry (1979): There is something *essential* about indexical identification (also Lewis 1979)
- No (first-person free) property is a sufficient condition for one to identify an object as oneself
 1. I am making a mess
 2. The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess
 3. John Perry is making a mess
 4. He is making a mess



Moore's paradox

- It's raining but I don't believe it's raining
- Assertion of this statement is perceived as contradictory despite the fact that the two conjuncts can both be true at the same time (Moore 1942, 1944)
- Cf.
 - It's raining but she doesn't believe it's raining
 - It was raining but I didn't believe it was raining



Pragmatic solution

1. The speaker has asserted that it is raining but she doesn't believe it is raining
2. Given the Principle of Quality, if the speaker asserted p , the speaker believes that p
3. The speaker believes that it is raining but that she doesn't believe it is raining (due to 1 and 2)
4. If one believes a conjunction, then one believes each conjunct
5. The speaker believes that it's raining (due to 3 and 4)
6. The speaker believes that she doesn't believe it's raining (due to 3 and 4)
7. If one believes that p , then one believes that she believes that p (principle of 'awareness of belief')
8. The speaker believes that she believes that it's raining (due to 5 and 7)
9. 6 and 8 are contradictory, hence whenever a speaker asserts that it is raining but she doesn't believe it is raining she is bound to hold inconsistent beliefs.



Pragmatic solution

1. The speaker has asserted that it is raining but she doesn't believe it is raining
2. Given the Principle of Quality, **if the speaker ASSERTED p, the speaker BELIEVES that p**
3. The speaker believes that it is raining but that she doesn't believe it is raining (due to 1 and 2)
4. If one believes a conjunction, then one believes each conjunct
5. The speaker believes that it's raining (due to 3 and 4)
6. The speaker believes that she doesn't believe it's raining (due to 3 and 4)
7. If one believes that p, then one believes that she believes that p (**principle of 'awareness of belief'**)
8. The speaker believes that she believes that it's raining (due to 5 and 7)
9. 6 and 8 are contradictory, hence whenever a speaker asserts that it is raining but she doesn't believe it is raining she is bound to hold inconsistent beliefs.



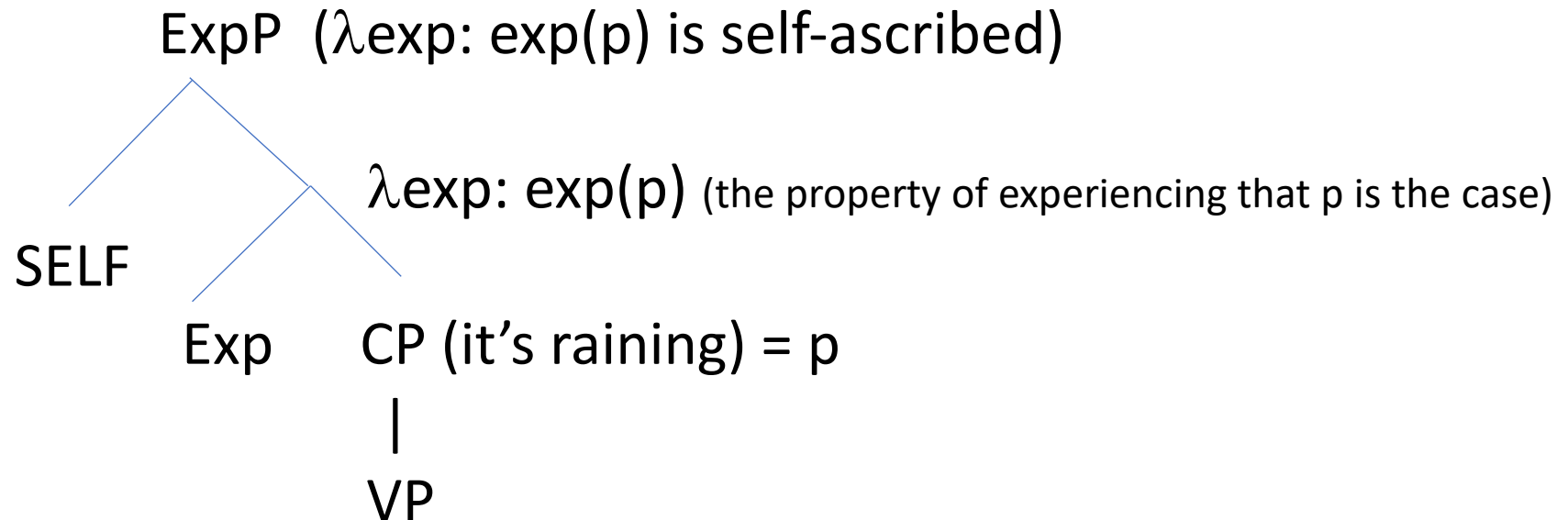
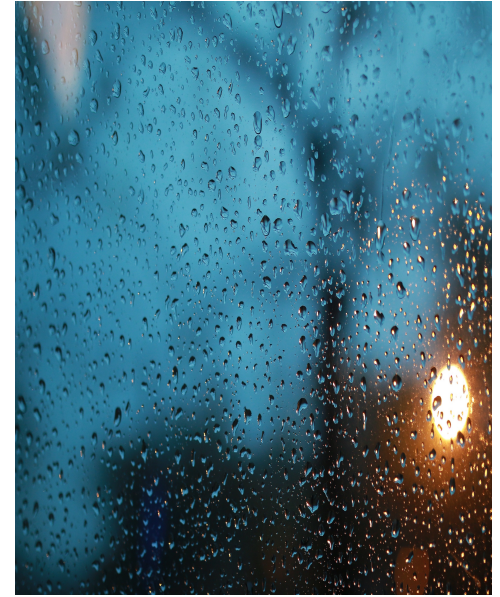
Against the pragmatic solution

- (Shoemaker 1994:213): “What seems to me too little noticed is that there is something paradoxical or logically peculiar about the idea of someone's believing the propositional content of a Moore-paradoxical sentence, whether or not the person gives linguistic expression to this belief. What really needs to be explained is why someone cannot believe that it is raining and that she doesn't believe that it is, despite the fact that the conjuncts of this belief can both be true. If we can show that such beliefs are impossible, or at least logically defective, and if we come up with an explanation of this, then an explanation of why one cannot assert a Moore-paradoxical sentence will come along for free, via the principle that what one can believe constrains what one can assert.” [our italics]



The speaker's coordinates in Syntax

Bianchi 2003, 2006; Sigurdsson 2004; Schlenker 2003, 2004, 2005
Giorgi 2010, Speas & Tenny 2003, Tenny 2006,
Puglielli & Frascarelli 2008



Experiencing a propositional content (1)

What is represented in the leftmost layer of the C-periphery is the experiencing event, in the form of an *Exp-head* (a λ -abstractor on experiences) that selects the propositional content p

The application of the Exp-head to the propositional content produces the following interpretation:

The property of being an experience of entertaining the thought that p is the case

Experiencing a propositional content (2)

The abstract SELF-argument in spec-ExpP saturates the property of experiences, producing the following reading:

*The property of experiencing that p is the case ($\lambda_{exp}: exp(p)$) is self-ascribed, i.e. **there is a singular conscious experience that p is the case***

The Kaplanian context-coordinates **[s,t,p,a]** are activated whenever an experience *Exp* is directly prompted through self-ascription of a propositional content p : crucially, all the participants in an external event of communication can self-ascribe the property of experiencing that p is the case!

Experiencing a propositional content (3)

As a consequence, the event of self-ascription of the experience that p is the case can be contextually located in time and space (when language is externalized, it typically coincides with the *uttering event*), and assigned a **publicly recognizable bearer** (the speaker), to which other bearers are added whenever self-ascription extends to other participants

Kaplan's context coordinates $[s,t,p,a]$ are contextually specified parameters of the event of self-ascription of the experience that p is the case

The first-person as the syntactic realization of SELF

1. *I am sad* = the speaker self-ascribes the experience of being sad

[I] is a syntactic expression of the SELF-argument: it differs from the abstract SELF-argument in that it is endowed with the interpretive feature [+speaker]

In 1., [I] moves to spec-Exp and syntactically activates the context-coordinate [speaker]

This translates into the constraint that « $\lambda \text{exp: sad}(\text{exp})$ » can be directly accessed only by the speaker, as the bearer of the experience.

The experience of being sad is self-ascribed, i.e. there is an experience of feeling sad (Lewis, Chierchia)



The first-person as the syntactic realization of SELF

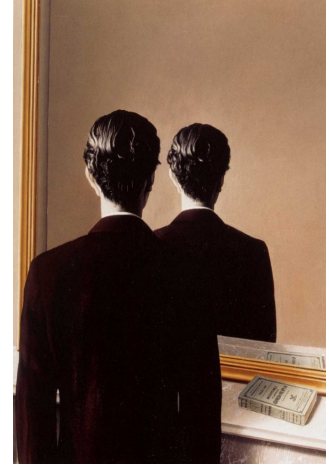
It follows that [I] is not necessarily interpreted *de re*:

There is no sense according to which the experience of being sad is ascribed to a publicly identified entity whenever directly accessed (think about **linguistic thought**, for instance).

Rather, **existential inference is a consequence of externalization**: from the Kaplanian public/contextual perspective, first-personal property-ascriptions involve a physical bearer (the speaker), and sometimes the speaker is perceptually given to the bearer of the experience himself:

2. I am wearing red shoes

First-person and Second-person



1. I am sad

The fact that [I] instantiates SELF is responsible for the self-ascription of the experience of feeling sad and for the consequent immunity to error effects: in the case of 1., **nothing requires the ascription of publicly recognizable perceptual properties to a *res***

The [+speaker] feature of [I], which activates the contextual parameter [speaker], is responsible for the fact that property self-ascription is limited to the contextually-determined speaker of 1.

This subsumes the proposal in **Wechsler 2010**:

1. can only be interpreted indirectly by non-speakers, via ToM

First-person and Second-person

Similarly, the [+addressee] feature of [you] activates the context-parameter [addressee]: it is thus responsible for the fact that property self-ascription is limited to the contextually-determined addressee of 2.

2. You are sad

This subsumes the proposal in **Wechsler 2010**:

2. can only be interpreted indirectly by non-addressees, via ToM)

Syntactic evidence for the Exp-head

1. #Crede Maria abbia telefonato
2. Crede/immagino/penso Maria abbia telefonato

Interestingly, Giorgi 2010 proposes a uniclausal interpretation of 2., and a semantics in terms of a lower degree of epistemic certainty.

We propose that this interpretation is attained inferentially

[credo] is the lexicalization of the Exp-head:

The speaker self-ascribes the experience that p is the case.

2. is thus a case of first-personal ascription of a proposition



Syntactic evidence for the Exp-head

Since the context-parameter [+speaker] is activated in syntax by the phonetically empty **first-person pronoun**, the propositional content of the utterance does not stay open to self-ascription by other cognitive agents via the utterance itself

This constraint is enough to ensure a lesser degree of epistemic certainty as a pragmatic effect; the resulting epistemic effect is further modulated by the specific lexical choice of the predicate (believe, imagine, think)

Immunity to error in embedded clauses (1)

1. John remembers giving the speech

Is it really John the person of whom he remembers that that person gave the speech? (Wittgenstein)

J. Fodor's evidence:

Only Churchill gave the speech on tears and blood

Churchill remembers giving the speech

Only Churchill remembers giving the speech



Immunity to error in embedded clauses (2)

1. Churchill remembers giving the speech on tears and blood

The gerundive complement expresses a property (Delfitto & Fiorin 2018) and [remembers/imagines] lexicalizes the Exp-head

The reading follows that Churchill self-ascribes the experience of giving the speech, and that experience qualifies as a memory/an act of imagination. Since the experience of giving the speech is unique to Churchill, nobody else can ascribe it to her

1. is thus a case of non-first-personal ascription of a property!

(the other side of Giorgi's cases of first-personal ascription of a proposition)

Immunity to error in embedded clauses (3)

Advantages

Partial Control:

Maria remembers gathering in the school all together

Maria gathered in the school all together

This is a consequence of the property interpretation of the embedded clause

Lexical pronouns:

2. Maria ricorda/immagina di aver fatto LEI (non Teresa) la domanda

3. Maria ricorda/immagina (di) aver fatto TERESA (non lei) la domanda

Moore's paradox explained away

It's raining but I do not believe it's raining

*There is an experience [that p is the case and that there is no confidence that p is the case]

I won the lottery, but I do not believe that I won the lottery

There is an experience [that p is the case and that there is no confidence in having the experience that p is the case]

Addressing the hard problems

$\text{Exp}(p \wedge \neg B(p))$

$\text{Exp}(p) \wedge \text{Exp}\neg B(p)$

$\text{Exp}(p) \rightarrow \text{Exp}B(p)$ (awareness of belief)

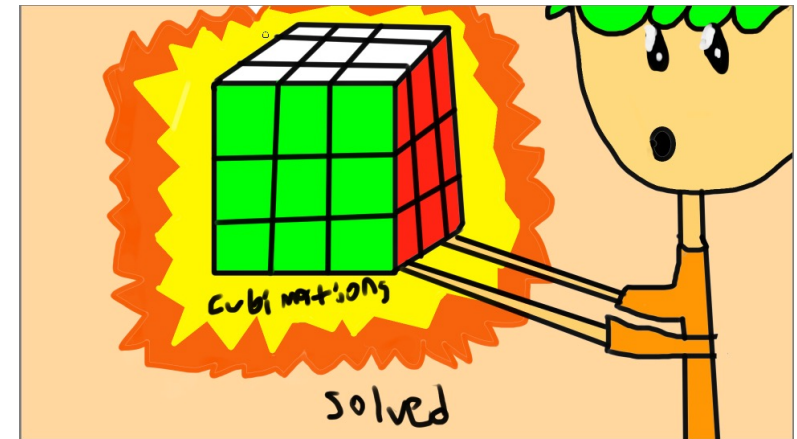
$\text{Exp}B(p) \wedge \text{Exp}\neg B(p)$

 $\text{Exp}(p \wedge \neg B\text{Exp}(p))$

$\text{Exp}(p) \wedge \text{Exp}\neg B\text{Exp}(p)$

$\text{Exp}B(p) \wedge \text{Exp}\neg B\text{Exp}(p)$

* $\neg B\text{Exp}(p) \rightarrow \neg B(p)$



Syntactic evidence

- (1) a. I won the lottery but I don't believe it
b. I won the lottery but I don't believe so

- (2) a. Ho vinto la lotteria ma non ci credo
Have.1ps won the lottery but not in-it believe
- b. Ho vinto la lotteriam non lo credo
Have.1ps won the lottery but not it believe

(thanks to Diego Krivochen, p.c.)



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Conclusions

- The first-person involves an experiential dimension that cannot be captured analytically or pragmatically
- Syntax encodes self-ascription and the notions of experience/SELF in the clausal left-periphery
- The first-person effectively constrains the communication of propositional content, by linking the bearer of an experience (SELF) to ONLY ONE publicly recognizable object (the speaker)



Thank you for listening!

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