

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language
Class 28: 'I' II

1. What does 'I' mean? According to me, that is to ask: What is 'I' used to mean? Let's assume that it's used to refer and ask this instead: What is 'I' used to refer to?
2. Here's a plausible answer: 'I' is used by a speaker to refer to herself.
3. But here are some problem cases for this answer – cases in which the speaker is perhaps not using 'I' to refer to herself:
 - a. 'I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I want for my last meal.' (Uttered by prisoner.)

Note: # 'John is traditionally allowed to order whatever he wants for his last meal.' This is evidence that 'I' is used to do more than just refer to the speaker.
 - b. 'I am parked out back.' (Referring to my car.)
 - c. 'I am in the lead.' (Referring to a horse.)
 - d. 'I'm about to fall off the ledge.' (Referring to a child dressed as me.)
 - e. 'I'm having more ice-cream am I?' (Maybe better with 'we'.)
 - f. 'I'm a jack-ass.' (Post-it note on someone's back.)
 - g. 'I wouldn't kiss him if I were you.'
 - h. 'Juliet, I love you.' (Uttered by an actor on stage.)
 - i. 'I am a hunk.' (Uttered by someone who thinks he is Guy Pierce.)
4. [Aside: 'I am not here now' – uttered by a professor who is no longer at Cornell.]
5. Maybe in these cases 'I' is being used with a special meaning? But it seems that the speaker is relying on the audience's understanding of the ordinary meaning of 'I' to work out what she is referring to.
6. Let's consider 'I am parked out back' in more detail. Does the speaker use 'I' to refer to herself or to her car?

Reasons to think herself:

- a. 'I, who am an excellent driver, am parked out back.'
- b. # 'I, which is a Volvo, am parked out back.'

- c. # 'We are parked out back.'
- d. 'John is parked out back.'

Reasons to think her car:

- e. 'By 'I' I mean my car.'
 - f. 'By 'John' I mean John's car.'
 - g. 'I am parked out back, and am brand new.' (But maybe the 'am' needs to be 'is' for this to be evidence.)
7. If the speaker is using 'I' to refer to herself, then perhaps by 'parked out back' she means a property that she has in virtue of having a car that is parked out back. That is, her car has the property of being parked out back, and because of this *she* has the property of being parked out back. Roughly, by 'parked out back' the speaker means 'have a car that is parked out back.'

Compare: by "'grass is green' is true" we mean "'grass is green' expresses a proposition which is true.

Problems for this idea:

- a. # 'By 'parked out back' I mean 'have a car that is parked out back.'
- b. # 'I'm going to cost a lot to have removed.'