CHAPTER 8

# Constructing the meanings of personal pronouns

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The meanings of personal pronouns are described using basic notions of Cognitive Linguistics. Among these notions are subjective vs. objective construal, profiling, grounding, intersubjectivity, paths of mental access, and conceptual blending. Pronouns are situated with respect to other strategies of nominal grounding. It is explained how personal pronouns can be used impersonally, and the meaning of impersonal *it* is characterized. Special attention is devoted to *I* and *you*. Their abstracted conceptual meanings invoke very basic cognitive models pertaining to the ground, a speech event, and subject vs. object of conception. With these models as inputs, the pronouns' meanings are constructed through successive levels of blending. The crucial factor is intersubjectivity.

Keywords: blending, definiteness, delimitation, grounding, impersonal, intersubjectivity, nominal structure, pronoun, proper name, reference point, subject/object of conception, vantage point

My goal is to sketch a conceptual characterization of the meanings of personal pronouns, especially *I* and *you*. At one level of analysis, describing their meanings is relatively straightforward: *I* designates the speaker, *you* the hearer, *they* a group which excludes the interlocutors, and so on. Such descriptions may not be wrong, but they are certainly superficial. The role of speaker, for instance, is hardly sufficient to characterize the privileged conceptual position of the person referred to by the pronoun *I*. The person who occupies that position (from my own perspective) will now attempt a slightly less superficial description of personal pronouns in the context of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987, 1990, 1991, 1999a).

Relevant to their description are certain basic features of human conceptualization. We must first acknowledge the asymmetry between the *subject* and the *object* of conception. As suggested by the dashed-line circle in Figure 1, the subject of conception (S) lies at the very margin of awareness. It is thus implicit and non-salient. Lying at the opposite pole, the object of conception (O) is the focus of explicit awareness. It is thereby rendered salient within the general locus of attention, which I refer to metaphorically as the "onstage region" (OS). I describe an entity as being *subjectively construed* to the extent that it approximates the role of S in this

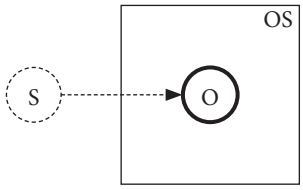



**Figure 1.** Subject and object of conception

configuration, and *objectively construed* to the extent that it approximates the role of O (Langacker 1985, 1997a). Each of us—at every waking moment—occupies the position of S in our ongoing conceptual experience. There is no escaping it. To be sure, the conceptualizer can also be the target of conception, but then it has the on-stage role of O in addition to the offstage role of S. There is likewise no escaping the fact that each of us represents a distinct instantiation of S. We can imagine what it is like to be a different conceptualizer, in position S′, but the experience falls short of actually occupying S′, if only because the simulation occurs at S.

Another basic feature of conceptualization is *dynamicity* (Langacker 1997b, 2001a, 2005). Because it consists in processing activity, conceptualization occurs through time. How it develops through time—the time course of a conception—is an important dimension of its characterization. I presume, for example, that any conception of ordering or directionality at the experiential level is constituted by seriality at some level of cognitive processing (Langacker 1986: 455). Certainly there are many linguistic phenomena where, as shown in Figure 2(a), the conceptualizer (C) follows a mental path by successively invoking a series of entities ($E_1$, $E_2$, $E_3$, etc.), each providing access to the next. One example of sequential access is the navigation of mental spaces in discourse processing (Fauconnier 1985; Cutrer 1994; Sweetser and Fauconnier 1996). A special case of sequenced mental access is a *reference point relationship* (Langacker 1993) involving successive foci of attention: by first invoking a *reference point* (R), the conceptualizer gains access to a range of associated entities—R's *dominion* (D)—one of which is selected as *target* (T). There

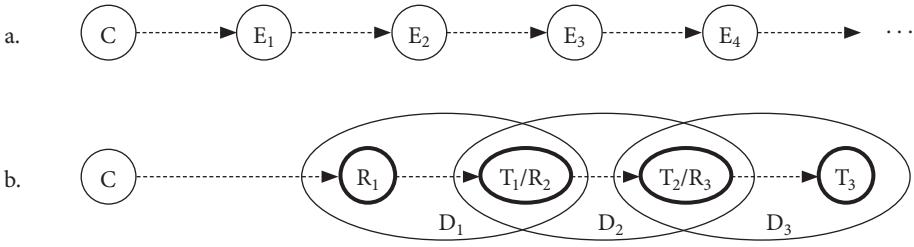



**Figure 2.** Sequential access

is often a chain of reference point relationships, as in Figure 2(b), where the target in one functions as reference point in the next. An example would be a possessive chain like *Jill's mother's cousin's granddaughter*.

If we cannot escape our identity as a specific subject of conception, always at our current location at the present moment, at least our conceptual abilities afford a degree of emancipation from the I-here-now of immediate experience. One device is memory, the partial replay of previous experience. Another is abstraction, based on the reinforcement of what is common to multiple experiences. Through abstraction we can deal with the world at the level of types, exploiting regularities which transcend the immediate apprehension of particular instances. A third device is imagination, where conceptual integration produces structures not actually experienced. Among these are the products of metaphor and blending, and the invocation of fictive entities for myriad purposes (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Langacker 1999b, 2005; Talmy 1996). As a special case, we can imagine experience at some other I-here-now. The extent to which we do so ranges from merely realizing that there is such an experience to vicariously enjoying it by simulation. But that too is an aspect of our experience at the actual I-here-now, from which we can never completely escape.

This leads to a further basic feature of conceptualization, namely its intersubjective nature. Rightly or wrongly, each of us believes that there are other conceptualizing individuals, each of whom also functions as S and apprehends the world at their own I-here-now. In imagining their mental experience, we are adept at assessing what they know, surmising what they are currently attending to, and reading their intentions (Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner 1993; Tomasello 2003). This is both due to and responsible for the fact that our conceptual abilities and knowledge of the world develop interactively in a sociocultural context. And language, of course, is both the product and a primary vehicle of this interaction.

With communicative interaction comes the need for conceptual coordination. Linguistic interaction rests on the supposition that the interlocutors are conceptualizing the "same world" (in a discourse-relevant sense), though they each apprehend it somewhat differently and from their own perspective. For communication to be successful, they must have some means of ensuring that they direct their attention to the same conceived entities. In particular, the successful use of a *nominal* (i.e. a "noun phrase") implies that both interlocutors interpret it as having the same referent. Achieving this coordinated mental reference is the function of nominal *grounding* (Langacker 2004a). Personal pronouns have a special place in the nominal grounding system.

Grounding is the grammaticized means of indicating the epistemic status of the thing profiled by a nominal or the process profiled by a finite clause. The *ground* consists of the speech event, the interlocutors, and their immediate circumstances.

It thus includes the speaker and the addressee, who apprehend the nominal or clausal content, as well as the vantage point from which they do so. As narrowly defined, a grounding element has the special property that the ground and grounding relationship are offstage and subjectively construed—it is only the grounded entity (the profiled thing or process) that is onstage as the focus of attention (Langacker 2002). In other words, grounding elements embody the viewing asymmetry in Figure 1, with both interlocutors functioning as subjects of conception, and the profiled thing or process as the object of conception. I have often represented this in the manner of Figure 3(a), indicating that the profiled entity is apprehended from the ground (G). Here it is useful to show the ground in slightly more detail. In Figure 3(b), dashed arrows indicate that the speaker (S) and the hearer (H) apprehend one another in the context of a speech event, as well as directing their attention to the profiled entity onstage.

Nominal grounding elements of English include the articles, demonstratives, and certain quantifiers (*all*, *most*, *some*, *no*, *every*, *each*, *any*). As evidence that they profile the thing grounded (not the grounding relationship), observe that some of these can stand alone as full nominal expressions: *That is disgusting*; *I like this*; *Most were defective*; etc. More typically, however, they are used in combination with a lexical noun: *a tree*; *this paragraph*; *most elephants*; *every politician*. This canonical pattern reflects a natural division of labor in the overall task of directing attention to the intended nominal referent. By itself, a lexical noun merely specifies a *type* of thing; as such, it represents an established category useful enough in dealing with the world to have conventional means of expression. Due to grounding, on the other hand, a full nominal singles out and profiles an *instance* of that type. Out of all conceivable instances, it identifies just one as the nominal referent for immediate discourse purposes.

Canonically, then, a lexical noun specifies a type without identifying any particular referent, whereas a grounding element does just the opposite. The type spe-

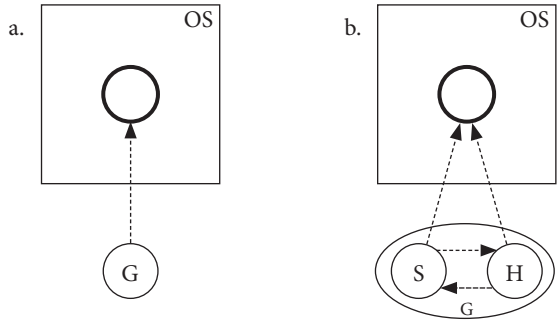



**Figure 3.** Grounding

cifications of grounding elements are highly schematic, being limited to properties like bounding, plurality, animacy, and gender. Their primary import resides instead in the presumption that their appropriate discourse use results in the conceptual coordination shown in Figure 3(b): out of all conceivable candidates, the interlocutors momentarily direct attention to the same nominal referent. Grounding elements differ as to how this result is achieved. A fundamental distinction in this regard is the contrast traditionally known as definite vs. indefinite.

Definiteness pertains to the status of the nominal referent at a particular level of discourse processing: the status it has based solely on the content of the grounded nominal, prior to its integration with the content of the clause containing it (cf. Verhagen 1986). In and of itself, an indefinite nominal constitutes an instruction for the hearer to imagine (or "conjure up") an instance of the specified type. From the hearer's standpoint, the referent thereby established is virtual (or fictive) in nature, pending the further information supplied by the clausal content. The clause and the larger discourse context then determine whether the referent remains virtual or is identified as an actual entity. For example, *She has a dog* establishes the dog in question as an actual instance of that type. On the other hand, *She doesn't have a dog* fails to override its virtuality—the dog referred to is a fictive one, conjured up just to characterize a non-actual situation. But in either case the clause introduces and identifies a discourse referent: it can subsequently be described as *the dog she has* or *the dog she doesn't have*.

Here we are more concerned with definites. The basic import of definiteness is that, in the current discourse state, the content of the grounded nominal is itself sufficient to identify the intended referent. Instead of conjuring up an instance, its status to be determined by the clause containing the nominal, the hearer need only direct attention to an instance already available and identifiable independently of the clausal content. Definite grounding elements represent alternate ways of singling out the intended referent from among the candidate instances available in the current scope of discourse. Possessive grounding (e.g. *Linda's computer*) evokes the possessor as a reference point and thereby directs attention to the instance found in its dominion (Langacker 2004b). Very roughly speaking, demonstratives "point to" an instance, whether through a physical pointing gesture (*I want that [→] one*) or simply via the proximal/distal distinction (*this–these* vs. *that–those*). A definite article represents the limiting case, where pointing is superfluous: there being just one salient instance in the relevant scope of discourse, directing attention to it does not involve distinguishing it from other available candidates.

Though greatly oversimplified, the foregoing description of nominal organization provides a baseline for discussing less canonical structures. The pattern I take as canonical is for grounding to be effected by a separate overt element, which co-occurs with a description (comprising a lexical noun and various modifiers) serv-

ing to delimit the range of candidates for reference. Two noteworthy departures from this pattern are proper names and personal pronouns. They represent alternate strategies for singling out a nominal referent directly, i.e. without invoking a separate description that substantially narrows the range of candidates from which a particular instance must then be chosen. In effect, the functions of grounding and description are conflated in a single form.

As the crucial aspect of its meaning, a proper name (e.g. *Klaus-Uwe Panther*) incorporates an idealized cognitive model pertaining to the role of that name in the relevant speech community. The model portrays it as one member of a set of names, each associated with a distinct individual, such that using a particular name is sufficient—for members of the community—to single out the unique intended referent. The very fact of having that name, in accordance with the model, is thus a primary facet of the referent's lexical description, which may of course include other specifications (e.g. human, male, German, prominent cognitive linguist, *und so weiter*). Effectively, this property defines a type conceived as having just a single instance, with the consequence that evoking the type itself amounts to grounding.

Personal pronouns represent the opposite extreme, in the sense that a given pronoun is usable for an open-ended set of possible referents. Their schematic type specifications—limited to the kinds of properties characteristic of grounding elements (e.g. singular animate female for *she*)—do less than most lexical nouns by way of shrinking the pool of candidates for reference. The main factor in singling out a referent is of course their person specifications: roughly, first person for (a group that includes) the speaker; second person for (a group that includes) the hearer; and third person for non-interlocutors. Reference is therefore tied to a particular speech event. And since everyone in a speech community has occasion to function as a speaker, as an addressee, or as a non-interlocutor, a given pronoun is applicable to indefinitely many different referents.

Still, on any single occasion a pronoun is intended as having one particular referent (possibly plural). Important in this respect is the oft-noted distinction between first and second person pronouns on the one hand, and third person forms on the other. Canonically there is just a single speaker and a single addressee, so the referents of *I* and singular *you* are uniquely determined in the context of a given speech event. Even with the plurals *we* and *you* the intended referent is normally quite apparent. But in contrast to the interlocutors, the set of non-interlocutors we might have occasion to talk about is very large, even allowing for contextual delimitation. The potential universe of discourse at any one moment harbors any number of entities that could in principle be referred to by a pronoun like *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*.

Third person pronouns have certain similarities (and are often related historically) to demonstratives and definite articles. They are of course definite. Moreover, person distinctions are analogous to—and often correlated with—the distance

parameter for demonstratives. With a two-way contrast, the proximal and distal regions are generally those associated with the speaker vs. everybody else, or alternatively, with the speaker and hearer vs. everybody else. In systems with a three-way contrast, there is a tendency for proximal, medial, and distal to correlate with speaker, hearer, and other. A further affinity is that demonstratives commonly develop anaphoric uses. In such uses they "point" only in the sense of referring back to something mentioned previously in the discourse.

As noted, the definite article can be viewed as a "bleached out" demonstrative employed when pointing is superfluous. There being just one salient instance of the specified type in the relevant scope of discourse, unique reference need not be established by pointing or an indication of distance, but is merely registered. In this respect demonstratives are analogous to first and second person pronouns, and the definite article to third person pronouns. That is, just as demonstratives rely on a distance specification to single out their referent, pronouns like *I* and *you* effect this through their person specification. By contrast, a third person pronoun resembles the definite article in that it merely registers uniqueness of reference. Whereas *I* and *you* uniquely identify the interlocutors as their referents, a specification of third person does nothing more than exclude the interlocutors as candidates. By itself, then, a pronoun like *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they* fails to indicate which potential referent is intended. It implies unique identification but does not itself provide the means to achieve it.

A basic difference is that definite articles occur with lexical nouns as well as more elaborate descriptions, while third person pronouns stand alone. In some cases the description accompanying a definite article ensures uniqueness (e.g. *the current ICLA president*). More commonly, it sufficiently narrows the range of candidates that only one is likely to be present in the relevant scope of discourse (*The cat wants out*). And of course, a nominal grounded by the definite article can also be used anaphorically, referring back to something previously mentioned. With third person pronouns, on the other hand, the absence of descriptions has the consequence that the set of candidates for reference is always open-ended. Only one person can be *the current ICLA president*, but innumerable entities can be referred to as *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*. Nonetheless, these pronouns carry the presumption that their minimal descriptive content is sufficient to single out the intended referent. They rely on the context for this purpose. As an inherent aspect of its meaning, a third person pronoun presupposes that its referent can be identified with a particular entity sufficiently salient in the linguistic or extralinguistic context to offer itself as the only obvious candidate with the appropriate specifications. And because the specifications of *it*, for example, are more schematic than those of *the cat*, a higher degree of contextual salience is required than with the definite article. Pronouns therefore rank higher on a scale of "accessibility" (Ariel 1988) or "givenness" (Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski 1993).

A personal pronoun thus instantiates the general structure sketched in Figure 4 (Langacker 1996). It profiles a thing (bold circle) characterized only schematically by specifications for gender, number, etc. It further incorporates a reference point relationship in which its profile functions as target (T). The reference point (R) is a salient entity within the *current discourse space* (CDS), defined as everything presumed available to both interlocutors as the basis for communication at a given moment in the flow of discourse. A dotted correspondence line indicates that R and T are the same. The import of this arrangement is that the pronoun is presumed to be interpretable in R's dominion (D), specifically in the sense of R being taken as its referent. R is a salient entity in either the linguistic or the extralinguistic context. In the latter case, where the interlocutors are obvious candidates, they (or groups containing them) are invoked as R by the first and second person pronouns. With third person pronouns, R can be identified with an unmentioned entity clearly established as a shared focus of attention in the interactive context (Hankamer and Sag 1976).

When used anaphorically, R is the referent of an antecedent nominal. The problem then arises of finding the proper antecedent among the numerous nominals that occur in the ongoing discourse. A key factor in resolving the issue are conventional grammatical patterns (in the form of constructional schemas) specifying allowable positions of a pronoun and its antecedent relative to one another. The constraints embodied in these patterns have been worked out in great detail by van Hoek (1995, 1997) in the context of Cognitive Grammar. For purposes of pronominal anaphora, the reference point's dominion—D in Figure 4—comprises the stretch of discourse within which a compatible pronoun is interpretable as being coreferential with the antecedent nominal. As discourse unfolds, nominals offer themselves as possible reference points. Their likelihood of being invoked as such correlates with their prominence, largely determined by matters like profiling, trajector/landmark alignment, and viewpoint. The extent of a reference point's dominion—whether a pronoun will or will not invoke a potential antecedent for its

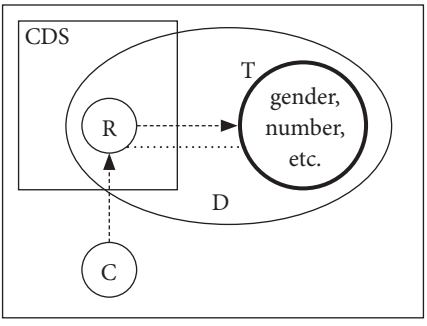



**Figure 4.** Semantic structure of a pronoun

interpretation—depends on the closeness of their conceptual connection, as determined by grammatical and discourse factors. For example, an especially close connection is established when R and T both function as complements to the same relational element. Van Hoek shows in exquisite detail how these various considerations interact to accommodate the complex distributional patterns.

In certain uses, a pronoun's referent cannot be identified with that of an antecedent nominal, nor with a uniquely salient entity in the extralinguistic context. These are the uses which are said to be *impersonal*, as the forms do not refer to any specific individual or sets of individuals. While the term seems quite appropriate, it raises a serious question: How can a *personal* pronoun function as an *impersonal* pronoun? Or more fundamentally, what sorts of meanings do impersonal pronouns have? At least in the case of *it* (as exemplified by the following word), it is often claimed that they have no meaning at all, being inserted for purely grammatical purposes. They do of course serve grammatical functions. This does not however entail their meaninglessness—quite the contrary, for in the Cognitive Grammar perspective, grammar itself is meaningful. Indeed, I suggest that the impersonal pronouns of English display essentially the same meanings they have in personal uses (Langacker To appear).

A key notion is *delimitation*, a matter of how a linguistic expression projects to the world. Let us first consider *place*, which—as a count noun—profiles a bounded region in space. It has this meaning irrespective of how large or small this region might be. With respect to the world overall, it can be a highly delimited area (*This would be a good place for the painting*), intermediate in size (*Hamburg is a nice place to live*), or wholly undelimited (*The universe is a very big place*). Observe that deictic anchoring does not prevent a form from exhibiting the full range of options in this regard. Thus *here* has the same basic meaning, designating a region centered on the speaker, in all of the following: *I'm right here*; *Immigrants come here for a better life*; *Everything in the universe has a reason for being here*.

By the same token, plural pronouns have the same basic meaning whatever their degree of delimitation with respect to the set of all people. *We* designates a group that includes the speaker whether it consists of just two individuals, all the inhabitants of a state, or all of mankind: *We just had a one-on-one chat*; *We have a lot of earthquakes in California*; *We are not alone* [i.e. there is other intelligent life in the universe]. Likewise, *you* designates a group of any size that includes the hearer but not the speaker, and *they* a group that excludes them both. With a low degree of delimitation, the plural pronouns are effectively impersonal, referring to people as an undifferentiated mass instead of as identified individuals. In *{We/You/They} have a lot of earthquakes in California*, the pronoun designates all the people in California, but no one in particular—the import is that anyone living there is subject to earthquakes. The choice among *we*, *you*, and *they* serves mainly to indicate whether the

speaker or the hearer is included in the designated populace. Representing the extreme case of non-delimitation are full impersonal uses like the following, supposedly describing the collective knowledge or wisdom of all mankind: *We know the earth is gradually warming*; *They say you can't be too thin or too rich*.

Turning now to impersonal *it*, we cannot much improve on Bolinger's classic characterization: "a 'definite' nominal with almost the greatest possible generality of meaning, limited only in the sense that it is 'neuter' ... it embraces weather, time, circumstance, whatever is obvious by the nature of reality or the implications of context" (1977: 84–5). Also relevant is the observation by Gensler (1977) that *it* is often quite vague in reference, even when it clearly refers to something. Suppose, for example, that a teenage girl is denied permission to go to the movies with her boyfriend. She might very well complain *It's just not fair*. What, precisely, does *it* refer to in this context? The parents' decision? The fact that they made this decision? The fact that she has to stay home on Saturday night? The powerlessness of her situation? The general misery of being a teenager? It could be some, any, or all of the above. The point, though, is that even the speaker may not know. *It* refers to some aspect of the overall situation, or even the situation overall, but just what it designates may simply be indeterminate. Such vagueness is very common and clearly useful.

In its various impersonal uses, *it* has its normal value as a third person singular neuter personal pronoun. It (i.e. *it*) is impersonal simply by being construed with maximal vagueness and non-delimitation (Langacker To appear). We can reasonably think of it as designating the relevant *scope of awareness* for whatever is at issue. With meteorological predicates (e.g. *It's raining* or *It's hot*), it tends to be interpreted as the surrounding atmospheric environment. With predicates of propositional attitude (e.g. *It's obvious the president is conscientious*), the relevant scope is construed more abstractly, subsuming everything brought to bear as the basis for judgment (observed actions, background knowledge, inference, and so on). But regardless of the nature of the predicate, the referent of *it* cannot be specified with any precision, precisely because it represents the extreme case of vagueness and non-delimitation. Rather than being a discrete element within the scope of awareness, it encompasses the entire scope apprehended as an undifferentiated whole.

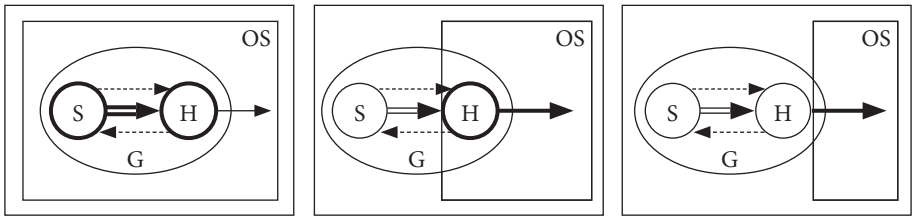
Because they designate individual people, the singular pronouns *I*, *you*, *he*, and *she* do not lend themselves to either sort of impersonal construal. (The impersonal use of singular *you*, as in *You should never underestimate yourself*, involves additional factors not considered here.) One issue that deserves more comment is the special status of *I* and *you*. As the interlocutors in the standard speech scenario, the speaker and hearer are the primary conceptualizers for the meanings of linguistic expressions. And in their conceptualizing capacity, they are offstage and subjectively construed—the subjects (rather than the objects) of conception. In canonic-

al circumstances, they have this implicit role as part of the overall meaning of every expression. To the extent that this is their only role, they occupy the very margins of awareness, for as such the subject of conception is not itself conceived.

Typically, though, the speaker and hearer figure more extensively in an expression's overall meaning. Since people like to talk about themselves and each other, the interlocutors are often part of an expression's objective content, notably as the profiled referents of *I* and *you*. But even when implicit, they generally have more than just a conceptualizing role. Grounding elements evoke them to specify the status of the profiled entity onstage (Figure 3). More broadly, their relationship and interaction are essential to the *conceptual substrate* that shapes and supports an expression's meaning (Langacker 2003). One aspect of this substrate, for example, comprises the actions and understandings that constitute an expression's *speech act* value.

Consider imperatives, as in Figure 5. In addition to their basic conceptualizing role (not indicated) and their apprehension of one another (dashed arrows), the interlocutors participate in an act of ordering, whereby the speaker, through verbal means, exerts social force (double arrow) intended to cause the hearer to do something (single arrow). The speech act may of course be put onstage as the profiled event, resulting in a *performative*. More commonly it is left implicit as part of the supporting conceptual substrate. Being offstage and subjectively construed, it is then an aspect of clausal grounding (mutually exclusive with other grounding elements). Here there are two options for the addressee, who has a dual role: its usual subjective role as interlocutor and subject of conception; and its objective role as trajector of the profiled process. The presence or absence of *you* is a matter of which role is linguistically encoded. When the hearer is put onstage, its presence heightens the distance between the interlocutors, so the order is perceived as being more formal or more forceful. Being left implicit reinforces the hearer's interactive role as interlocutor and co-conceptualizer. But the difference is only one of emphasis—in either case the hearer functions in both capacities.

Because the interlocutors are also the main conceptualizers, *I* and *you* do not construe their referents with maximal objectivity. They retain their conceptualiz-




a. I order you to leave! b. You leave! c. Leave!

**Figure 5.** Imperatives

ing role even when put in profile as the focused object of conception. I suggest that this ambivalence in regard to subject vs. object of conception is basic to the meanings of the first and second person pronouns. Their full semantic characterization involves several related dimensions (or cognitive domains). One is the speech event scenario, representing the canonical circumstances of a two-participant interaction. Another—which could hardly be more fundamental—is the subject–object asymmetry inherent in any "ceptual" experience (Talmy 1996), as sketched in Figure 1. Other dimensions, not explored here, are those pertaining to the sociocultural construction of the self in a given society.

It is commonly observed—often as a criticism of Cognitive Linguistics—that an adequate description of language has to reflect its *intersubjective* nature. I would counter, however, that only a cognitive approach makes it possible to explicate this aspect of linguistic structure in any depth or detail. A central if not a defining feature of intersubjectivity is the apprehension of other minds and what they apprehend, so in describing it one is necessarily describing a cognitive phenomenon. In the case of *I* and *you*, the mutual apprehension of other minds is not just central but pivotal.

One facet of the canonical speech event scenario is that the interlocutors alternate in the roles of speaker and hearer. The realization that this is so involves the conception of two speech events, in each of which S says something to H and H listens to S. This is shown at the top in Figure 6, where the grounds in successive speech events function as input spaces for a blend (Fauconier and Turner 2002). Correspondence lines indicate that the speaker in one event plays the role of hearer in the next, and conversely. Consequently, the blended space—representing the canonical speech event scenario—shows each interlocutor as having a dual role: the current speaker (S) is also a potential hearer (H′), while the current hearer (H) is also a potential speaker (S′).

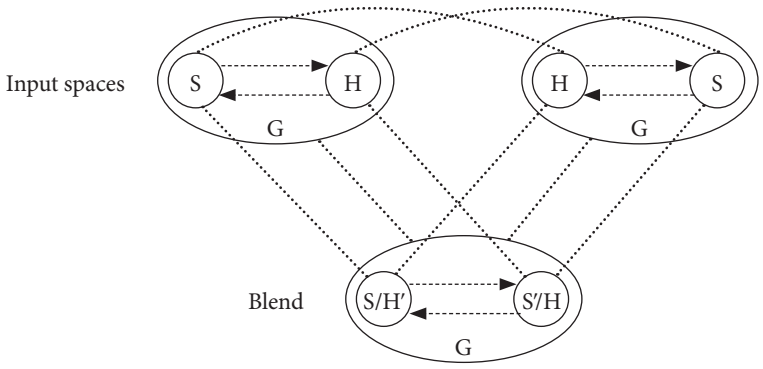



**Figure 6.** Dual role as speaker and hearer

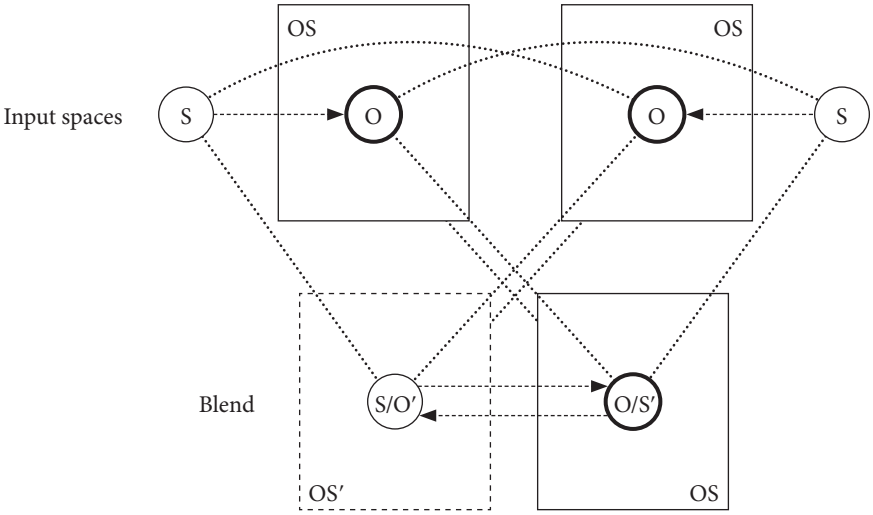



**Figure 7.** Dual role as subject and object of conception

The roles of subject and object of conception are likewise reversible. When one person (S) conceives of another (O), the former usually recognizes the possibility of being conceptualized by the latter as well. This too is describable in terms of blending, as shown in Figure 7, where the input spaces represent two instances of conceptualization. By virtue of apprehending other minds, a subject of conception is cognizant of being a potential object (O′), while the object is also a potential subject (S′). As a special case—the one most relevant for *I* and *you*—the two individuals have these inverse roles with respect to one another. This is indicated by the correspondence lines between the two input spaces. In the blend that results, each individual has a dual role, one actual (S or O) and the other potential (O′ or S′). An actual instance of one individual conceptualizing another carries with it the realization that the inverse relationship may also obtain.

As noted, the first and second person pronouns incorporate both the speech event scenario and the general viewing scenario. They can be analyzed as products of higher-order blending, where the blends in Figures 6 and 7 function as input spaces. More specifically, they result from imposing the subject–object asymmetry inherent in profiling on the schematic conceptual content of the speech event scenario. The pronoun *you* is sketched in Figure 8. It is simply a matter of identifying the speaker with the subject of conception, and the hearer with the object of conception. The latter is therefore profiled in the higher-order blend, but is further apprehended as a potential speaker and subject of conception (i.e. as an interlocutor).

Naturally, the pronoun *I* results from identifying the speaker with the object of conception, and the hearer with the subject. This produces the seemingly incon-

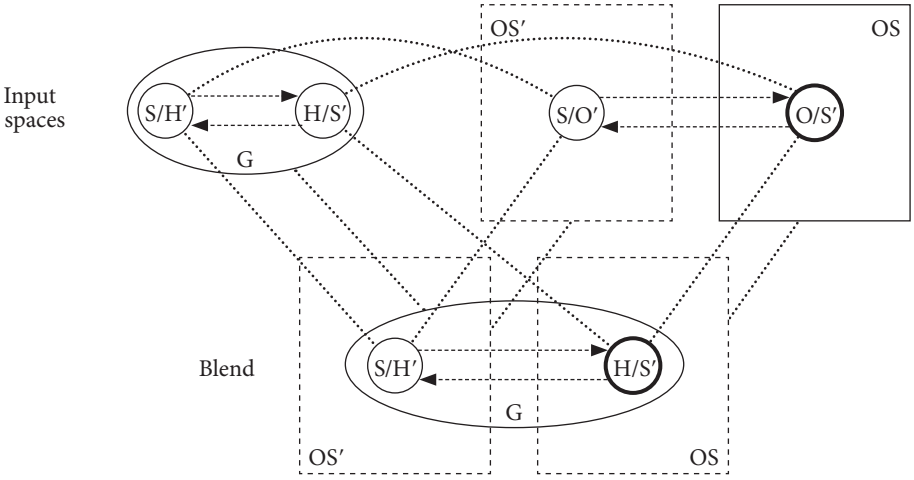



**Figure 8.** *You*

sistent situation in Figure 9, where the speaker—in spite of being the primary subject of conception—is put onstage as its focused object. Is this problematic? Can we coherently maintain that the speaker functions simultaneously as both the subject and the focused object of conception? The inconsistency should not bother us, if only because blends—by their very nature—incorporate incompatible specifications. Despite their inconsistent properties, for example, a theory is metaphorically conceptualized as a building.

From another perspective, however, there is no inconsistency at all. In the blend of Figure 9, the speaker does still function as a subject of conception, as indicated by the dashed arrow leading from it to the hearer. This is quite consistent with the speaker also being an object of conception vis-à-vis the hearer, as indicated by the arrow going in the opposite direction. But we can push things even further by noting that the speaker also functions as object of conception in relation to itself. This is a consequence of the apprehension of other minds and the mental simulation of how they appear from their vantage points. In particular, the speaker apprehends the hearer and how things appear from the hearer's vantage point, and from the hearer's standpoint the speaker is indeed an onstage object of conception (Langacker 2001b). Through this simulation of the hearer's experience, the speaker lies at the end of a path of mental access (Figure 2a) that originates with the speaker itself. The path is represented diagrammatically by the dashed arrows in the blend leading from S/H′ to H/S′ and back again.

It is of course a truism that pronouns like *I* and *you* derive their specific reference from the context of the utterance. From this it is sometimes concluded that they lack conceptual meaning, being pragmatic rather than semantic. I have instead proposed that they do have abstracted conceptual meanings. Moreover, their

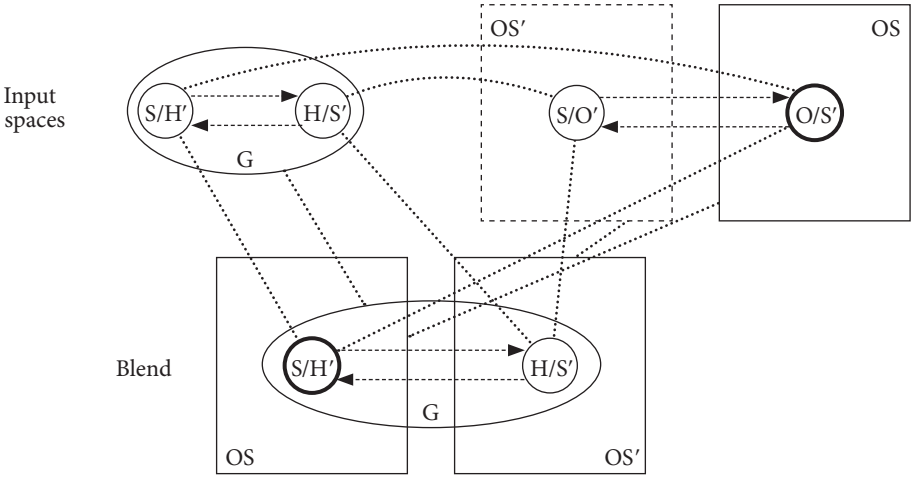



**Figure 9.** *I*

description requires the same theoretical apparatus employed in cognitive semantics for the meanings of other expressions: cognitive domains (e.g. the conception of a speaker-hearer interaction), profiling, vantage point, subjective vs. objective construal, and elaborate mental constructions based on blending. Although the descriptions proposed are neither complete nor definitive, they do at least make it clear that the pronoun *I* does not simply designate the speaker. This attempt to explicate its import from a cognitive linguistic perspective has led to a surprising but welcome conclusion: instead of egocentricity, the crucial factor in its meaning is intersubjectivity.

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