

snippets

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He himself and I

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John sees himself in a mirror, but fails to recognize that it's him. He thinks, 'that guy is an idiot', but not 'I am an idiot'. (1) has a reading on which it is true in this situation (the 'de re' reading), and a reading on which it is false ('de se').

(1) John thinks that he is an idiot.

This snippet concerns the use of *he himself* in sentences of this kind. The readings of *he himself* in (2) are notoriously more limited than those of *he* in (1), and pose a puzzle.

(2) John thinks that he himself is an idiot.

According to a received view, *he himself* is obligatorily de se. If true, this means that (2) can only describe a situation in which John thinks 'I am an idiot.' This view stems from a philosophical tradition beginning with (Geach 1957; Castañeda 1968), and has subsequently been endorsed by linguists (Chierchia 1990; Higginbotham 2003). Castañeda called *he himself* a 'quasi-indicator'. The hallmarks of quasi-indicators are (i) the inability to refer to an individual other than an attitude holder and (ii) unambiguous de se construal. *He himself* seems to have the property in (i), and differs in that respect from *he*, as (3) shows. In the years following Castañeda's influential paper, it was assumed that any anaphor displaying (i) is a quasi-indicator, and hence also displays (ii). This assumption underpins a wealth of work on the semantics of attitude reports including Heim 2001, 2002; Schlenker 2000; von Stechow 2002, 2003.

(3) a. Speaking of Bill_i, John thinks that he_i is an idiot.

b. *Speaking of Bill_i, John thinks that [he himself]_i is an idiot.

But it turns out that *he himself* allows a de re reading as well under certain circumstances. Consider again the story above: John, unaware that he is looking in a mirror, thinks 'that guy is an idiot'. In response to the question in (4), it would make sense to answer (2), with focal stress on *himself*.

(4) I don't understand the story. Who does John think is an idiot?

So *he himself* has two alternative uses in sentences like (2), as a de se pronoun and as a focused de re pronoun. The puzzle this poses is: why precisely these two uses? Or, to put it another way, how does focus come to permit de re construal?

The test in (4) builds on an insight from Schlenker (2000: 59), who noted that the facts about the interpretation of *he himself* are unclear, and suggested that '*himself* might be used as a device of focalization'. A congruent answer to the question in (4) assigns focus to the subject of *think*'s complement; on this view, the reflexive can serve as a device for marking this. Maybe one can maintain that, without this motivation for use of the emphatic reflexive, what is emphasized is that the reported belief is *de se*.

These facts show that *he himself* is not in fact a quasi-indicator. Until recently, the other prime candidates as exemplars of quasi-indicators were logophoric pronouns: the distribution of these elements is limited to the scope of attitude verbs, and they unambiguously pick out the attitude holder. But they too allow *de re* readings, at least in the Niger-Congo language Ewe (Pearson 2013, 2015). Perhaps there are no quasi-indicators?

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