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Indexical representation in mindreading: how is the content fixed?

Keywords: indexicals, mindreading, metacognition, externalism

When are indexical representations *required* for mindreading (for the attribution of mental states to others)? It is uncontroversial that indexicals facilitate communication. Here I am concerned to characterize the default conditions under which indexicals have an integral functional and psychological role in mindreading. In light of that characterization I draw a conclusion about context dependent content in that category of mindreadings.

Working in philosophy of language and logic, and following Kaplan (1989), Perry (2001) designates pure or essential indexicals ('I', 'here', 'now') as those that vary their reference *purely* as a function of point of view, and also do not *need* to be accompanied by any sort of gesture (although they may well be accompanied by a gesture, such as pointing). The widely accepted view is that the content of an indexical is fixed *pragmatically and externally*, by the context of the utterance or thought. As mental representations, indexical concepts represent in perspective and also they represent minimally; the content is 'semantically impoverished' or underdetermined. Completing the content requires a rule (for example, that 'now' always refers to the moment of an utterance).

I propose that indexical concepts are necessary by default when the target agent's mental state is difficult to represent, and typically when the intentional object of the target state is entirely missing, occluded, or fictional. In those cognitively demanding situations it is reasonable to suppose that mindreading involves metacognitive processes. At the same time, these metacognitive attributions are most plausibly more prone to error (Frith, 2012). Indexicals are now playing a quasi-executive grounding role (Corazza, 2004). In my analysis of context dependent content, I don't commit to content externalism or content internalism. Rather, the context (the agent, location and/or time of the utterance or thought) fixes content both widely and narrowly. The content is in part supplied *reflexively* by the "inner awareness" or phenomenology (Woodruff-Smith, 2005) of the mindreader. My account is in some respects consistent with Stawarska (2008) who objects to "egocentric" accounts; however, I hold that indexical concepts are often the products of first-person introspection.

References

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4. Stawarska, B. (2008). 'You' and 'I', 'Here' and 'Now': Spatial and social situatedness in deixis. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*. 16:3, 399-418.
5. Woodruff-Smith, D. (2005). Consciousness with reflexive content. In *Phenomenology and Philosophy of Mind*. Woodruff-Smith, D. & Thomasson A.L. (Eds.) Oxford