

Illocutionary Form as the Source of First-Person Immunity to Error Through Misidentification

In *The Blue Book* Wittgenstein distinguishes between two significant uses of the first-person singular pronoun ‘I’—that is, its use as subject and its use as object. Uses of ‘I’ as subject are exemplified by claims such as “I see so and so,” “I think it will rain,” and “I intend to make coffee.” Uses of ‘I’ as object are exemplified by claims such as “I have grown six inches,” “I have chocolate on my nose,” and “I have red spots on my arms.” Following Wittgenstein, only in the latter, object use is there room for a certain kind of error; the error in question is an error in identifying *which person* the predicate is true of, if it is true of anyone at all. This is not so when ‘I’ is used as subject. In making a statement such as “I think that Los Angeles is south of San Francisco,” certain forms of evidential challenge are *de jure* inappropriate. To the question, “are you sure that it is *you* who think that?”, no substantive answer is possible. While statements of this kind can be false, statements making use of ‘I’ as subject are—as Shoemaker puts the point—immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person pronoun (1968: 556).

When my use of a first-person singular pronoun is immune to error through misidentification (hereafter, IEM), I know *myself* to be in some way or another. If I assert that “I am thinking of LC”, my assertion is about myself, as myself, at least in part: it expresses something about what’s going on with me as the thinking, asserting subject. In other words, such uses of ‘I’ articulate a form of agential self-knowledge. But there are several ways in which I can know myself to be in some way or another. I can, for instance, know that *I am wearing a tie* through sense perception, but I can also know that I, myself, think/judge that *Ella is beautiful* by thinking that thought. Moreover, there seem to be distinct forms of agency corresponding to different sorts of rational activities. Intuitively, the kind of agency involved in acting intentionally (i.e., practical agency) is different from the kind of agency involved in acts of inferring, judging, and asserting, i.e., theoretical agency.

My aim in this paper is to begin to clarify the phenomenon of first-person immunity to error through misidentification (IEM) by determining in what the source of first-person IEM consists. I will argue that the source of first-person IEM is to be located at the level of illocutionary form, and I will attempt to show that all claims that are IEM are, when made conceptually explicit, of the same general illocutionary form—namely, they are syncategorematic first-person assertions. My principal lines of thought follow from an investigation into the relation between assertion or claim-making and self-consciousness. My account stands in contrast to the dominate contemporary position that attempts to locate the source of IEM at the level of sub-sentential sense—either, for instance, in the sense of the first-person pronoun (e.g., Evans 1982; Peacocke 2012) or in the sense of a certain class of predicates (e.g., Bermúdez 2016; Shoemaker 1968). On my view, the very possibility of claims having objective purport rest on a certain kind of subject-centered or self-conscious agency.