PART C

ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND LEXICOLOGY
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PRONOUNS WITH TRANSFERRED REFERENCE

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For almost 30 years, there has been occasional mention in the literature\(^1\) of the first person pronoun having varying reference at different places within a single sentence, but no real attempt has been made to explain such cognitive dissonance. My aim here is to further articulate the problem, exploring which syntactic functions a pronoun can be in for this ‘transfer of reference’, and whether the transfer may also apply to plural first person and also to second person pronouns.

If a bit of discourse describes someone, A, taking on the identity of someone else, B (in a dream, or as a hypothetical state-of-affairs) the reference of a pronoun within this discourse may be transferred from A to B.

In the late 1960s, Jim McCawley (JM) came up with a sentence along the following lines:\(^2\)

\[(1) \text{I dreamt I was Brigitte Bardot} \parallel \text{and I kissed me,} \parallel \text{and then I woke up} \]

\[JM \quad JM \quad \rightarrow \quad BB \quad BB \quad JM \quad JM \]

In the portion of the sentence between the \(\parallel\)'s, the reference of I is changed from the speaker, Jim McCawley, to Brigitte Bardot. Note that, although the clause I kissed me has the first person pronoun as both subject and object, the me cannot be replaced by myself. The reason is that I and me are not coreferential, I referring to Brigitte Bardot

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\(^1\) Among a number of other discussions, Fauconnier (1997: 14–6, 161–4) mentions sentences along the lines of If I were you, I would hire me. However, neither he nor others pursue the grammatical possibilities associated with such constructions.

\(^2\) Lakoff (1970: 27) quotes ‘McCawley’s celebrated example’ as I dreamed that I was Brigitte Bardot and that I kissed me. Lakoff then says that he finds the problems thrown up by this example ‘very mysterious, and I have no idea of how to account for them. But one thing is clear. Referential indices will not do the job.’