On So-Called Speaker-Oriented Adverbs

— How a speaker appears in a sentence —

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Language expresses not only the objective aspects of things and their relationships but often relations between things and the speaker. That is, in using words for describing an event or a state of affairs we cannot help but express our own feelings. There are, in English, several groups of words that refer not so much to events as to the attitude of the speaker toward the events. One of them is the so-called speaker-oriented adverbs.

It is often found in many of the studies of adverbs that the identification, classification, or labelling of specimens of grammatical functions becomes an end in itself, with the more significant goal of deepening one’s understanding of these words given a second place as ‘semantic features’. The items in this essay do not constitute an exhaustive list of speaker-oriented adverbs. It would not be possible to list all of them, and it would not be my goal to do so. The main aim of this short essay will be not to pigeonhole these adverbs but to get at the semantic realities behind them and, in connection with this issue, to get a deeper insight into the way language and mind work together.

"Why don’t you have a cup of coffee? It sure helps you
keep you awake."

"You don't seem to understand a woman's psychology."

"Perhaps you are right."

"Do you follow?"

"Honestly, I don't quite understand what you mean."

"What would you like, sir?"

"Sandwich and coffee, please."

Given the above pieces of language, most English speakers would feel that the italic parts have something in common. Our linguistic intuition tells that there is something that distinguishes the italicized word from the rest of the sentence. What they have in common is that they all have a flavor of subjectivity: they are, to put it a different way, felt to originate with the speaker's attitude rather than with the objective reality. This makes a sharp contrast with the content the speaker wishes to communicate in 'It ( ) helps keep you awake', '( ) you are right' or 'Sandwich and coffee, ( )'. Whereas the rest of each sentence appears to be uttered through the outer voice of the speaker, the italicized word is felt to be uttered through another voice — as it were, his inner voice. We all know that English interjections such as *alas, ouch, or oops*, etc. are subjective expressions, which are uttered only through the inner voice of the speaker. Naturally, several questions may arise here. Are such words as *sure, perhaps, honestly, fortunately, please*, etc., which have been traditionally classified as sentence adverbs, to be considered semantically identical with interjections in that they all express the subjective in one way or another? If not, what are the differences? What factors make us feel that these sentence adverbs are more subjective than objective, and yet, somewhat different from interjections? How do the sentence
adverbs differ from one another in degree or quality of subjectivity?

These sentential adverbs have been discussed in quite a few papers, among which are Schreiber (1970)(1), and Jackendoff (1972)(2), which first gave an appropriate name 'speaker-oriented adverbs' to these items. However, these studies, implementing the mechanics of transformational grammar, do not satisfactorily take into account the semantic properties of sentence adverbs, nor do they provide us with a precise classification. To my knowledge, Greenbaum (1969)(3) and Quirk, et al. (1972)(4) first presented a proper classification of sentential adverbs. Bellert (1977)(5) has extended Jackendoff's study of adverbs, and has also arrived at a classification similar to that of Greenbaum (1969) and Quirk, et al. (1972). I will therefore take as a starting point Greenbaum (1969) and Quirk, et al. (1972)'s classification of sentential adverbs, which distinguishes three types of disjuncts as represented by perhaps, frankly and fortunately. Let me examine each type from the point of view of the semantic relation to, or effect on, the sentence in which the corresponding adverb occurs. Suppose that the three items are used in the following sentence:

1) Perhaps
2) Frankly,
3) Fortunately,

Bill is better suited for the tough job than you.

An important thing to consider about perhaps is that it exclusively expresses the speaker's inner state instead of the sentence subject's. In other words, perhaps is a direct expression of the speaker, and is never used for the predication of the second-person, third-person, or, strictly speaking, even first-person subject.(6) Irrespective of the person of the sentence subject, what it conveys is the speaker's own judgment as expressed by the assertive is, and it specifies the way the speaker
makes a judgment about what he is communicating.\(^7\) In our linguistic experience we usually do not flatly assert the thought we have in mind. Rather, we often find ourselves hesitating to make an assertion and wishing to express our feeling of hesitation. Such words as perhaps, maybe, and probably are best understood as mirroring these overshadowing elements of judgment. Therefore perhaps in sentence 1 should be understood to form, together with the assertive is in the clause structure, the whole of the speaker’s judgment about the thought ‘Bill (is) better suited for the tough job than you’:\(^8\) According to Quirk, et al. (1972), perhaps belongs to a group of adverbs called attitudinal disjuncts and the following explanation is given:

These disjuncts present a comment on the truth-value of what is said, expressing the extent to which the speaker believes that what he is saying is true.

Although the involvement of the speaker is appropriately pointed out, the remark neglects to note that perhaps and the expressed or unexpressed assertive constitute the whole judgment accompanying a sentence, ending up with a functional interpretation like ‘a comment on the truth-value of what is said’ without taking up the tie between perhaps and the assertive in the speaker’s cognition. Perhaps is, as the above discussion suggests, to be understood as one of the words that I would call modal disjuncts,\(^10\) which enable the speaker to subjectively appear in a sentence.

Though both perhaps and frankly no doubt express the subjective, the two items differ from each other greatly in the way they semantically contribute to the sentences in which they occur. One might be reminded that while perhaps cannot be employed for the predication of the sentence subject, frankly is very often used for that purpose: perhaps is only about ego, whereas frankly is of two types: one about ego (speaker-orient-
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ed) and the other about the objective world (subject-oriented). Thus there is no *He talked to me perhaps* in the sense that it is 'He' who is 'perhaps', but we have *He talked to me frankly*, which conveys that it is 'He' who is 'frank', as well as the sentence in which *frankly* is preposed and shows ego's attitude. If we look at sentence 2, it is apparent that someone referred to as 'Bill' is taken up for the object for communication in 'Bill (is) better suited for the tough job than you', while what is chosen for topic in 'Frankly' is, very importantly, the speaker himself instead of 'Bill'. In other words, it is not 'Bill' but the speaker who is 'frank'. Equally important is the fact that the adverb of this type co-occurs with the participle *speaking*, which is implicit in the sentence. This means that *frankly* is an expression in which the speaker objectifies his own speech manner. This is in some sense a metacommunication or communication for communication, as was implied in Quirk, et al. (1972):

Style disjuncts convey the speaker's comment on the form of what he is saying, defining in some way under what conditions he is speaking.\(^{(11)}\)

What we are more concerned with is the fact that *frankly* can be used for any grammatical person's predication, suggesting that it is nothing but an objective expression about the speaker of sentence 2; the speaker, grasped from outside by himself, has undergone the process of self-objectification, quite unlike the speaker of sentence 1 uttering *perhaps*. In sharp contrast with the subjective appearance of the speaker in sentence 1, to put it another way, the speaker makes an objective appearance in sentence 2, where the speaker characterizes his attitude toward what he is saying as 'frank'. Therefore such a cognitive link as we find between the disjunct and the assertive in sentence 1 is nonexistent in sentence 2.\(^{(12)}\) The fact that the English language has a rich variety of style disjuncts explains the differ-
ent ways of metacommunication in English, reflecting the intention of speaker who wants to be taken, sometimes as being 'frank', sometimes as being 'honest', or sometimes as being 'truthful' in his way of communication. According to Greenbaum (1969), style disjuncts may be used when the speaker is in fact not being frank. Because the speaker is being objectified by none other than himself, there is some truth in such everyday usage of style disjuncts.

Obviously, in sentence 3 the expression fortunately refers to the speaker's own feeling; that is, it is the speaker who takes the state of affairs as 'fortunate'. In distinction to perhaps and frankly, fortunately expresses the speaker's psychological response to the state of affairs the sentence deals with. Behind the adverb fortunately in sentence 3 is, therefore, the speaker's mental process, through which such an appreciative evaluation is evoked by the semantic content of the sentence in which the adverb occurs. In the expression itself, however, this mental process is simplified into one word, by which the speaker's appreciative evaluation is taken up and presented as 'fortunate' ahead of what he is trying to communicate, as if 'fortunate' were an attribute of the state 'Bill (is) better suited for the tough job than you'. It is not always the case that an item like fortunately initiates a sentence; sometimes we have its final occurrence as follows:

(A) Did you write a graduate thesis?
(B) No, I didn't have to, fortunately.

In his particular dialogue speaker B completes his statement by additionally presenting his appreciative evaluation on the issue. This word order corresponds more naively to the processive structure that must have been passed through in uttering a sentence in which an item like fortunately occurs, because this disjunct enables the speaker to show his appreciative 'response'
to the situation. Addition of another item is also possible if
the evoked feeling concerning the event is too complex to be
expressed by a single item:

*Fortunately, and somewhat surprisingly,* the furious
fighting of the opening days of the war had scant ef­
flect on traffic through the strait. *(Time Oct. 6, 1980 italics mine)*

I would like to turn to one more item *please*, which is of
interest in that it carries the flavour of a disjunct except when
it functions as a transitive verb; yet none of the scholars men­
tioned above take it into consideration as a disjunct or speaker-
oriented adverb.

Diachronically, *please* used in an imperative sentence is
the shortened form for ‘may it please you’ or ‘if it please you’. However, in modern speech or at least as far as the native
speaker’s intuition is concerned, *please* works as an expression
for the purpose of softening the tone of command or request.
This is one example of a shift from an objective expression
to a subjective expression. Asked “What would you like?”
by a waitress at a restaurant, one may respond “I’ll have two
sandwiches, *please*” or simply “Two sandwiches, *please*”, and
yet the fact remains that there does exist in each replay the
speaker’s will of command, to which *please* is immediately re­
lated; *please* softens the tone of making an order so that the
utterance may sound polite. In other words, *please* qualifies the
way the speaker makes an command. The following piece of
dialogue quoted from the film *Dead Reckoning* might also pro­
vide some insight into the way *please* works for expressing
the subjective. In this particular scene, the woman is very
eager to know something about another man, while Rip is reluct­
tant to announce the man’s death to her and is trying to turn
the topic aside:

——111——
Coral: Where is he now? Won’t you tell me....
    Where did you see him?
Rip: Let’s dance.

Coral: *Please....* I want to know.
Rip: You still wear the same perfume, don’t you?
Coral: Tell me where you saw him?
Rip: She wears jasmine, he said.
Coral: *Please....*          (italics mine)

Apparently in the above case *please* is related to the speaker’s will of request not sequentially expressed, but we can easily understand that what the speaker is asking is something like ‘(Won’t) you tell me where he is now’ or ‘Tell me where you saw him’, and this example shows that the independent occurrence of *please* is of great effect in expressing in a compressed but emphatic way the speaker’s seriousness, eagerness and politeness in asking for information, simply because *please* is a subjective appearance of the speaker. Therefore it will be reasonable to regard *please* in the given examples as a special type of modal disjunct which enables the speaker to show the relationship, unlike *perhaps* and *will* or *is*, etc. in a declarative sentence, to his will of command in an imperative sentence or his will of request (as expressed by *will*) in an interrogative sentence.

3

So far we have dealt with three types of speaker-oriented adverbs in terms of their cognitive background by examining how each of them works to communicate the speaker’s self. In this section attention is given to the two types — the modal disjunct and the evaluative disjunct, which show linguistically interesting phenomena as we further observe them in discourse.
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If the hearer says “Perhaps so” on responding to such a statement as “We’re going to have a tough day tomorrow”, ‘perhaps’ is cognitively related to the hearer's unexpressed judgment concerning the thought he perceives as hearer and grasps back, restating as ‘so’. If the hearer happens to respond simply “Perhaps.”, then neither the grasp-back of the received thought nor its judgment is expressed overtly but all that is mentioned is a single subjective expression, i.e. a modal disjunct. Still we cannot deny the fact that there is behind this single word the speaker's cognitive process, through which he receives and judges his interlocutor's thought. Otherwise, communication would not be possible. A grammatical theory is required to take up such an issue as the existence of unexpressed cognitive process and its relation to what is expressed and move on to transcend formalistic approaches that are only concerned with classifying visible or audible facts of language. In appearance, it is plausible to analyze, as a good many grammarians do, that the above perhaps 'modifies' the previous statement ‘We’re going to have a tough day tomorrow’. What this kind of analysis fails to deal with is not only the process of dynamic interchange of thoughts between speakers but each speaker's making a judgment accompanying the grasp-back of each received thought, all of which characterizes every piece of dialogue: one who has been a hearer, in turn switches into a speaker, applying and expressing his own thoughts, based on what he has just received as hearer from the other. Without proper reception of the thought from the other, one cannot react properly, whether the response is to reaffirm or to negate what is apprehended. In this way a dialogue is a special type of discourse developed by two or more speaking subjects, while a discourse like that of a novel can be managed by one speaking subject, i.e. a narrator. As we have observed above, when perhaps is used as a response in the case of dialogue, it refers to the speaker's judgment, expressing a feeling of doubt or
hesitation, etc. in the speaker’s acceptance of the received thought as valid. In novel discourse there are a good many examples in which perhaps is reiteratively used in order to emphatically express the speaker=narrator’s hesitation behind the affirmative judgment concerning the thoughts he has been developing. The passage from Heart of Darkness will illustrate such usage:

True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible. Perhaps!

(italics mine)

The passage strikes a reader as effective because of a certain stylistic device: parallel structure with the repetition of the item perhaps, which recalls the figure of speech anaphora. When we, in general, acknowledge some thought as valid, it is not always the case that our affirmation can be straightforwardly made. Rather, it is more likely that our judgment is comprised of complex aspects. It is quite natural, therefore, that there is, in the English language, a variety of vocabulary items mirroring such multiplicity of aspects as our judgment contains. We often says, for example, ‘It sure does’, ‘Yes, certainly’ or ‘This is definitely better’ when the thought can be accepted with conviction. On the other hand, we sometimes find ourselves in situations in which we are prompted to say ‘Maybe so’, ‘I’m probably wrong’ or ‘Perhaps he did’ if the thought cannot be acknowledged without some concession. The feeling of doubt is, if repeatedly expressed, more forceful. Back to Conrad’s passage, this negative element lurking in the positive judgment is, together with
the repetition of the modal disjunct, gradually emphasized as one proceeds from the first *perhaps* to the second, and the subtle overshadowing of doubt finally reaches its full concentration in the last one, which is all the more effective because the sentence consists of an independent subjective expression that makes it more like a genuine echoic expression of the speaker's subtle feeling.

Despite the fact that modal disjuncts are *speaker*-oriented, we sometimes come across, especially in novels, the occurrence of the items whose orientations are not felt to be toward the speaker but someone else — toward some character of the story as follows:

Yet he was afraid. Sometimes when he was down at his great house in Nottinghamshire, entertaining the fashionable young men of his own rank who were his chief companions, and astounding the county by the wanton luxury and gorgeous splendour of his mode of life, he would suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it should be stolen? The mere thought made him cold with horror. *Surely* the world would know his secret then. *Perhaps* the world already suspected it.

(Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, italics mine)

In reading the passage we cannot but feel that the above *perhaps* and *surely* reach us not so much through the narrator's voice as through Dorian Gray's. How is this phenomenon to be explained? Why do the modal disjuncts, which are supposed to be speaker-oriented, turn into, as it were, *character*-oriented ones in this particular passage? This question calls for reflec-
tion on the general feature of literary discourse as well as non-literary: a narrator, who is the speaking subject of the story, is not always confined to his real position as observer in the process of storytelling. Rather, it is a common and even necessary practice for him to make a perceptual transition into the position of some character in the story so as to describe the situation or the psychology in a more vivid manner — this is what is called the narrator's switch of viewpoint. Once drawn there, the narrator sees, hears, feels and even thinks, that is, experiences everything, identifying with the character in the story. Because the above perhaps and surely are uttered by the narrator in the psychology of Dorian Gray's it can easily be understood that they are felt to be Dorian-oriented rather than narrator(speaker)-oriented. Such phenomenon can be more easily observed in other genres, particularly in films, which appeal to our visual sense, whereas the very nature of language, which finds expression in the realm of concepts signified by its visual or audible forms, often prevents us from becoming aware of such a perceptual switch by the speaker — the feat our cognitive faculty performs.

The discussion of viewpoint might also be of some help in solving the problem of determining the orientation of the other type of disjunct fortunately in a non-literary discourse, which seems to trouble both Greenbaum and Quirk, et al. According to Quirk, et al. (1972), the disjunct allows the interpretation that the subject is fortunate, but this is not a necessary implication and so runs the argument:

For example,

Fortunately, John keeps his car in a garage overnight during the winter.

does not necessarily mean that John is fortunate,
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though out of context this sentence conveys that implication strongly. But we can add to the sentence in such a way as to make it clear that the intention is that someone else is fortunate:

Fortunately, John keeps his car in a garage overnight during the winter. Bob was therefore able to start the car very easily when he needed to borrow it in a hurry early this morning.

From this context, it is clear that it is Bob who is fortunate, ... (16) 

The commonest way of giving an account of this question is to state that meaning can be determined in relation to context: it is impossible to fully interpret the meaning of a sentence in isolation: that is why we have to draw on context in understanding any piece of language. Truly, context plays a decisive role in our interpreting the true implication of the given sentence, but what remains unanswered is, why it can be made clear by the added sentence that the intention is that someone other than John is fortunate. More precisely, what factor involved in the context makes us feel that it is definitely not John but Bob who is really fortunate. It is of much use to remember that it is none other than the speaker=narrator who creates the context so far as it is a linguistic one. Therefore the key to the problem is to ask with whom the speaker identifies, or from whose point of view he is talking in the given sentence. (17) Apparently, the 'added context' suggests that the speakeridentifies with Bob, and therefore, inside Bob's psychology in uttering 'Fortunately, John keeps his car in a garage overnight during the winter'. Then one would be able to understand without too much difficulty that the disjunct fortunately, which is ultimately ascribed to the speaker's evaluative feeling about the described state of affairs,
may well be felt to be Bob-oriented instead of John-oriented.

Greenbaum (1969) also discusses a similar problem:

For example, *fortunately* in the sentence

Fortunately, her uncle gave a present to Mary.

might correspond to:

Her uncle was fortunate to give a present to Mary.

On the other hand, it might well mean that Mary was fortunate or that the speaker was fortunate. Only the context of the sentence, linguistic or situational, would determine what the intention was, and whether it included any of the three persons suggested.\(^ {18}\)

It would be more accurate to explain that if we look at the context, we can determine from whose standpoint the speaker is talking. It could be anyone — 'her uncle', 'Mary', or someone else outside of the sentence or the speaker himself who is 'fortunate', according to the speaker's standpoint. An important thing to be considered in this connection is that a certain event, which is evaluated as 'fortunate' by one person, might be quite 'unfortunate' for another person. Take an example of a sentence dealing with the natural phenomenon of rain. The same event might lead to two opposing psychological reactions:

The farmer looked up at the sky. The area had suffered severe drought for weeks. But *fortunately*, it started to rain toward the evening.

The girl was selling flowers on the street. But *unfortunately*, it started to rain toward the evening.

Obviously, the speaker is in empathy with the farmer in the
first example, but with the girl in the second. In this way, even though the evaluative disjunct might sometimes appear non-speaker-oriented, it cannot be totally free from the control of the speaker's evaluation of the described event. Very few readers will interpret that 'Skylab' was fortunate in:

Skylab scattered hundreds of pieces of debris along its 4,000-mile "footprint" on the mostly desolate scrublands of Australia. Fortunately, there were no reports of injury or damage.

*(News Week, July 23, 1979 italics mine)*

The orientation is best interpreted to be toward the reporter (speaker) who takes the standpoint of the possible readers including Australians and Americans, and is trying to appeal to their common sense and interest: it is understood that the speaking subject anticipates his readers' reaction to the reported news as 'fortunate'.

**Conclusion**

The discussion given above shows that the limitations of Greenbaum (1969) and Quirk, et al. (1972) in dealing with disjuncts derive from the following two defects of analysis: (1) a failure to seek the relationship in the speaker's cognition between a disjunct and a clause structure. (2) a failure to make further investigation into the way the disjunct behaves in discourse, in terms of the speaker's viewpoint. Exactly the same difficulty arises in Bellert (1977), one of the latest studies on this issue, despite the fact that the interrelation between a disjunct and a clause structure is taken up for discussion.

Since it was not my main concern to present a complete classification of all disjuncts, detailed analyses were confined to a few specific examples, with particular attention to the proces-
sive structures behind them, and some problems of classification
open to question were only suggested in notes. Therefore if
one follows the line of thought taken in this paper, reconsidera-
tions will be necessary in the treatment of sentence adverbs in
general. Further, as has been show, if one seriously takes into
consideration the relation between language and mind in study-
ing speaker-oriented elements as an appearance of the subjective
in language, he will be inevitably required to face up to the
problem of interaction between the subjective and the objective
in our cognition, and to elaborate on how this matter should be
included in a linguistic theory.

Notes
* I should like to express my gratitude to Associate Professor Kasai and
Instructor Wetzel for their comments and advice.
(2) Jackendoff, R. S. (1972), Semantic Interpretation in Generative Grammar
(Cambridge, Mass.: M. I. T. Press)
(4) Quirk, R. S., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik. (1972), A Gram-
mar of Contemporary English (London: Longman)
(6) It might seem odd at first glance to treat a speaker and a first-person
subject separately, but in a case like this the two must be distinguished
from each other on an epistemological basis. One can refer to himself
as ‘I’ or ‘me’ only when he grasps himself objectively. It is not until
then that the speaker is ready to describe himself in the first-person.
(7) T. Miura points out that a sentence is necessarily accompanied by the
speaker’s judgment, irrespective of its structure, whether it has a
typical subject+predicate structure or an amorphous one as in “Yes, of
course” or “Next!”. In both cases the assertive that indicates the
speaker’s judgment may or may not be expressed: consider, for ex-
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...ample, the difference between “I do smoke” and “I smoke”. Concerning the sentence judgment, see T. Miura (1967), *Nshikito gengono riron* (A theory on cognition and language II) (Tokyo: keisoshobo), p. 169. or S. Miyashita (1980), *Eigowa dokenkyusaretetaka* (How has English been studied?) (Tokyo: kisetsusha), p. 29.


(9) Quirk, et al., op. cit., p. 511.

(10) *Maybe* as well as *perhaps* belongs to this category, and a ‘modal disjunct’ will have to be established as an independent part of speech distinguished from adverb rather than as an ‘adverb as disjunct’; *perhaps* and *maybe* are not used for expressing the objective, whereas an adverb is an expression of the objective. As for *probably, sure(ly), certainly, possibly, absolutely, definitely*, etc., one can understand that, despite the fact that the corresponding adjective expresses the objective, each item is extended to the expression of the subjective and linked indissolubly with the assertion in the speaker’s cognition.


(12) Quirk, et al., discuss the ambiguity of the style disjunct in an interrogative sentence: *Frankly* in “Frankly, is he tired?” may correspond to *I ask you frankly* or to the more probable *Tell me frankly* (p. 509). The ambiguity derives from the fact that the sentence produces two interpretations on the orientation of the disjunct: whether *frankly* is an objective expression about the speaker himself or about the hearer(s). In the latter case, the speaker is describing a speech manner he desires on the part of his hearer(s).

(13) Greenbaum, S., op. cit., p. 93.

(14) Besides *unfortunately* and *surprisingly, luckily, ironically, interestingly, understandably, happily*, etc. belong to this class. It should be noted that each of these adverbs has a concrete content in comparison with any of the adverbs that can be used as modal disjuncts. This factor seems to make these adverbs work as evaluative disjuncts instead of modal disjuncts. As can be easily inferred, the evaluative disjunct does not make a cognitive relationship to the assertive in the clause structure in such a way as the modal disjunct does.

(15) I am in a position to assume that the assertion as sentence judgment...
is not expressed if there is no copula or do (es) in a sentence. Therefore I prefer to consider that in sentences like “Perhaps,” or “Perhaps so,” the sentence judgment is unexpressed, although it does exist in the speaker’s cognition. See note (7).


17 It would be futile to attempt to determine ‘who’ is fortunate by looking at this sentence alone; even talking about the implication of the sentence in isolation would be of little significance. That will lead to an irrelevant discussion because this single sentence itself is nothing more than a sample sequence consisting of a chain of words and in no sense functions as an expression, which necessarily belongs to a certain speaker in a certain situation. A single sentence denuded of its speaker, that is, of its context is equal to an abstract concept.

18 Greenbaum, S., op. cit., p. 96.