Subjectivity and Grammar:
Where the mind meets the world

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In many studies of the human mind, an absolute point of view is implicitly or explicitly assumed. In semantics, for example, the meaning of *'I'* is often defined as *'the speaker'* and *'now'* is translated by a time and date. We however claim that human cognition is radically grounded in the notion of the subject. The subject defines the zero point of our cognition, the zero point of perspectives from which we relate to the world. The time, space, person and modality we think and talk about is defined *relative* to this zero point.

A second common belief we take issue with relates to the relation between language and thought. It is commonly assumed that we use language to express our thoughts. We argue that the abstract thoughts that are probably unique to the human kind are in fact created linguistically, in the sense that the mental dictionary and mental grammar we use to compute sentences are not only employed to convey meaning to other speakers, but also to compute the meaning in our minds in the first place.

In the linguistic theory of human cognition we are developing, grammar generates the link between what we think about and the world by transforming the perceptual categories time and space into more abstract ones: person, tense and modality. These more abstract categories allow us to speak and think about object and events removed in time and space, and to consider mere possibilities. Yet, these more abstract categories remain no less firmly rooted in the zero point defined by the subject, providing both a unique perspective upon the world and an explicit consciousness of ourselves.