My dissertation explores the nature of perspectival thoughts and the context-sensitivity of the language used to express them. Perspectival thoughts are thoughts that depend in a special way on the perspective of the thinker. I focus on two kinds of perspectival thoughts: ‘subjective’ evaluative thoughts about matters of personal taste, such as Beetroot is delicious or Skydiving is fun, and first-personal or de se thoughts about oneself, such as I am hungry or I have been fooled. I develop a novel form of relativism about truth, on which the truth of some (but not all) perspectival thought and talk is relative to the perspective of an evaluating group.

Before developing my positive view, I argue in Part I of the dissertation that the realm of ‘subjective’ evaluative thought and talk whose truth is perspective-relative includes attributions of knowledge of the form ‘S knows that p.’ After a brief introduction in chapter 1, I start in chapter 2 with a new, error-theoretic challenge for relativism about knowledge attributions. I argue that relativism can only account for all of the empirical data from speakers’ use of the word ‘know’ – in particular, in sceptical paradoxes and ordinary epistemic closure puzzles – if a problematic form of semantic blindness is attributed to speakers. However, in chapter 3 I show that all major competitor theories – forms of invariantism and contextualism – are subject to serious error-theoretic objections, too. This dialectical situation raises fundamental questions for all empirical theorising about the meaning of natural language expressions: What makes for a plausible error attribution? What is a good error-theoretic explanation? In answer to these general questions, I provide a number of criteria for the evaluation and comparison of different kinds of error attributions, and I argue that they give us reason to think that relativism’s error attributions are more plausible than those of its competitors.

In Part II, I then develop a novel unified account of the content and communication of perspectival thoughts. The popular Lewisian view of perspectival thought understands belief and other other attitudes as self-location. In chapter 4, I show that the self-location view of belief is in conflict with the received picture of linguistic communication, on which a single content is transmitted from speaker to hearer: the speaker believes it, expresses it in speech, and the hearer comes to believe it if she understands and trusts the speaker. I argue that these two views can be reconciled and the conflict solved if mental content and speech act content is understood in terms of sequenced worlds. On the view I advocate, content is understood as a set of sequenced worlds – possible worlds ‘centered’ on a group of individuals inhabiting the world at some time. Intuitively, a sequenced world is a way a group of people may be. So to believe a sequenced worlds content in conversation is to group-locate: to locate oneself and the other conversational participants. I develop a Stalnakerian model of communication based on sequenced worlds content, and I provide a suitable semantics for personal pronouns and predicates of personal taste. In chapter 5, I show that one of the advantages of this model is its compatibility with both nonindexical contextualism and truth relativism about taste. I argue in chapters 5 and 6 that the empirical data from eavesdropping, retraction, and disagreement cases support a relativist version of the model. I show in detail how to account for these phenomena on the sequenced worlds view.

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1A version of chapter two is published as “Relativism, Sceptical Paradox, and Semantic Blindness” in Philosophical Studies (OnlineFirst, 2011).