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PART III

**Referring to the self and the addressee in  
context of interaction**



## CHAPTER 9

# First and second person pronouns in two mother-child dyads

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First and second person pronouns are complex categories for children to acquire. During a transitional period, when they start referring to themselves as subjects, French-speaking children produce a variety of non-conventional forms. The analysis of these uses provide valuable insights on how they creatively process language and progressively acquire the tools that enable them to refer to themselves and to the interlocutor, as speakers/addressees and subjects. In this paper, we present data from two French-speaking children, recorded monthly between 1;06 and 3;03 during everyday interactions with their mothers. We focus on the transitional use of non-standard forms in the children's speech as a window unto the development of their cognitive, linguistic and social skills, and analyse the global and local impact of the input.

### 1. Introduction

When we use the term “subject”, we can either refer to the grammatical subject, the semantic subject, the topic or the speaker. These four levels are merged in a single marker when a speaker uses the first person pronoun *I*. Reference to self in the first person and the interlocutor in the second person thus involves the mastery of syntax, semantics, discourse and speech roles in dialogue. How do French-speaking children learn to combine these four dimensions in a unique marker, *je (I)* for self and *tu (you)* for their interlocutor?

Children's mastery of first and second person pronouns does seem quite complex due to the intermingling of reference and dialogue as well as the specific

phonological, morpho-syntactic and pragmatic aspects involved. First and second person pronouns ground reference to self and other in dialogue – as speaker and addressee – with reversible roles (Benveniste 1966) and the ability to express their own subjectivity and perspective as opposed to others’ in the ongoing conversation (Morgenstern 2010). The conventional forms in French are *je* or the emphatic or contrastive *moi je* for the speaker, and mainly *tu* or *toi tu* for the addressee. In order to designate themselves in the first person and the interlocutor in the second person, French-speaking children therefore need to learn that:

1. except in some very specific ironical or humorous contexts, French speakers do not use first names (or “mummy” or “daddy”) to refer to self or other. Children need to grasp the distinction between reference to one’s social identity and one’s identity as participant in ongoing dialogues.
2. Because of the syntactic constraints of French, speakers use a grammatical subject even when its reference has already been constructed and could be viewed as implicit in the ongoing dialogue.
3. Reference to the speaker and the grammatical subject are merged in one single form *je* (I); reference to the interlocutor and the grammatical subject are merged in one single form *tu* (you).
4. There is a distinction between emphatic/contrastive uses with *moi je/toi tu* and uses without strong pronouns.

The intricacy of the different morpho-syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, discursive and phonological levels involved is great enough to understand why children follow a meandering path and use a variety of forms before they eventually manipulate the pronominal system in a systematic unified way. We therefore examine their uses of different forms when referring to themselves and their interlocutor, suggesting that each form is linked to specific functions and contexts (Budwig 1995; Morgenstern 2006; Caët 2013).

Previous studies have shown that proto-forms such as bare predicates or filler syllables, and non standard forms such as first or second person pronominal reversals or use of names, are the result of children’s progressive appropriation of the pronominal system and of the construction of their self as participant in dialogue (Rabain-jamin & Sabeau-Jouannet 1989; Bates 1990; Budwig 1995; Kirjavainen et al. 2009; Morgenstern 2012a; Caët 2012, 2013). Several researchers have observed that children use different forms to express specific meanings or pragmatic functions when referring to themselves. For instance, Budwig (1995) who studied children in conversational activities suggested that English-speaking children use different forms according to the degree of agentivity they express: they tend to use *me* when designating themselves as dependent agents, *I* when referring to desires or internal states, *my* to express strong agentivity or control

over actions, and their name for descriptions. Nelson (1989) and Gerhardt (1988) who more specifically analysed situations of monologues and narratives in one child, suggested that she used different forms according to her degree of subjective involvement: *I* tended to be used by the child when she referred to self as agent, describing actions and expressing desires (adopting a subjective perspective on herself) whereas *me* and *my* were used when the child referred to herself as the recipient of actions in narratives (adopting an objective perspective). The common claim between these observations is that children use different forms to express different perspectives on themselves. Differences emerge according to the data that is analysed (monologue or dialogue), the setting in which the children were recorded, the phenomena analysed (transitivity of the verbs used for instance), the language under study and the individual children themselves.

In longitudinal studies that Morgenstern (1995, 2006) conducted with French-speaking children, she also observed that they used different markers to express different values she called the referential value (when children use their name or *moi* in preverbal position and express contrast, opposition or compare referents), the modal expressive value (children then use predicates with no subject or fillers to refer to their desires, wills, projects or positioning) and reference to self in narratives (when children use third person). This categorization intersects with Budwig's and Nelson's in many ways. These studies also show that the children's referential system constantly undergoes reorganisations as they progressively learn new ways to express different perspectives on themselves.

A number of studies have underlined the complexity of deictic shifting for children (Clark 1978; Deutsch & Pechmann 1978) but very few systematic studies have been conducted on reference to the interlocutor. This may be due to the fact that a small variety of forms are produced in subject position when English-speaking children refer to their interlocutor, mainly *you* and bare predicates. These two alternatives do not seem to express different functions, and all references to interlocutors aim at regulating their behaviour by making requests or proposals (Budwig & Wiley 1995; Imbens-Bailey & Pan 1998). Comparing reference to self and reference to the interlocutor, Huttenlocher, Smiley and Charney (1983) observed that children tend to produce bare predicates when referring to their own action but use an explicit form when referring to their interlocutor as agent.

Some children, as mentioned by Evans and Demuth (2012b) for English, and Morgenstern (2012b) for French, reverse first and second person pronouns. Various factors can explain reversals including children's lack of semantic knowledge (Bellugi & Klima 1982), their straightforward imitation of the speech heard (Peters 1983), not understanding perspective shifting (Loveland 1984), or the nature of the input (Oshima-Takane 1988, 1992).

Although we know that parents use non-standard forms to refer to the children when addressing them, and that the input has an impact on children's

acquisition of the pronominal system, the relationship between children's uses and parents' uses has only occasionally been studied. Some authors have proposed a frequency-based relationship between children and parents' productions (Bates 1990). Others have proposed that children's non-standard uses of *me* in preverbal positions may emerge from complex constructions present in the input such as *let me do it* (Kirjavainen et al. 2009). Children are also known to use self-words in contexts comparable to those in which parents themselves use them (Rabain-Jamin & Sabeau-Jouannet 1989; Budwig 1996; Morgenstern 2012b). As children's language development is largely impacted by the adult input, it can be fruitful to compare children's forms of reference to self and interlocutor to their parents' references to self and to the child more closely.

The acquisition of reference to self is anchored in dialogue and we propose to analyse children's productions with a dialogic perspective. We take into account the discursive and situational context, in relation to the input that is provided by the parents, both in terms of forms and functions. We study reference to self in parallel to reference to the interlocutor both in the children's and in the parents' productions. When children learn how to refer to self, they can rely on formal and functional clues derived from the forms parents use to refer to *the child* as interlocutor and grammatical subject but also to refer to *themselves* as speaker and grammatical subject as well.

In this paper, we study first and second person subject references used by two mother-child French speaking dyads in longitudinal data. Our aim is to understand how French-speaking children construct the pronominal system to refer to the speaker and the interlocutor in dialogue. Our analyses are conducted in the framework of a usage-based approach to child language (Tomasello 2003), an approach that suggests children's language ability moves from a phase of piecemeal constructions used in limited contexts to more abstract generalizations. This shift is influenced by the input children receive and the kind of dialogues in which they engage (Clark 2003). We conduct both quantitative and systematic, fine-grained, qualitative analyses.

## 2. Data and Method

### 2.1 The data

In this paper, we will focus on two French little girls from the *Paris corpus* (Morgenstern & Parisse 2012) that were collected within the *ANR ColaJE project*<sup>1</sup> and are accessible online (*CHILDES project*: MacWhinney 2000). Madeleine was

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1. The project was financed by Agence Nationale de la Recherche.

filmed by Martine Sekali and Anaé by Aliyah Morgenstern once a month for one hour at home interacting primarily with their mother. Madeleine had an older sister and then a baby brother was born when she was two years old. Anaé had two older brothers. The children lived in or near Paris and had middle-class college-educated parents. The parents all worked throughout the data collection period; they used various forms of childcare when the children were young, and the children started going to kindergarten when they were around three years of age.

Subsequent to recordings, transcriptions were made in CHAT format, enabling the use of CLAN software tools for analysing and searching the data (alignment of video with transcription; Mean Length of Utterance – MLU; word frequency; number of word types and word tokens; morphological categorization; word and expression search). The analyses in this paper were conducted on the sessions in which the children were aged 1;6 to 3;3. Madeleine's data was analysed extensively in a number of studies (including Morgenstern 2009; Sekali 2012; Morgenstern et al. 2010; Morgenstern et al. 2013; Caët 2013) and various linguistic markers were analysed in detail. Her language development was extremely fast. Her phonological system was almost complete at 2;3, she used nominal and verbal determination. Her lexicon increased and her utterances became complex quite early and rapidly (Morgenstern & Parisse 2012). Her logic and argumentation were quite advanced for her age (Sekali 2012). Her mother treated her as a full-fledged co-speaker from very early on (Morgenstern et al. 2013). Anaé's language development was somewhat different. It was also quite fast, and she often made remarkable nonstandard productions that provide clues about how she processed and analysed the input without replicating it in a steadfast manner the way Madeleine did (Caët 2012; Collombel-Leroy & Morgenstern 2012).

## 2.2 The coding

The coding grid was established by both coders together and tested at first on random examples. Both the children and the mothers' productions referring to self and addressee between 1;6 and 3;3 were then coded by one of the authors and checked by the second author<sup>2</sup> in an excel sheet with the following parameters: speaker, addressee, referent, form, grammatical function, predicate, tense, utterance modality, previous mention of the referent, shared attention, speech act, co-verbal gestures. All cases of disagreement between the two coders were discussed and resolved. All explicit cases of reference to self and interlocutor in the data were therefore taken into account. When utterances containing a filler syllable such as [ə] as in [ə] *veux* ([ə] want) or a predicate without subject could clearly be interpreted as referring to self or the interlocutor, we included them in our coding.

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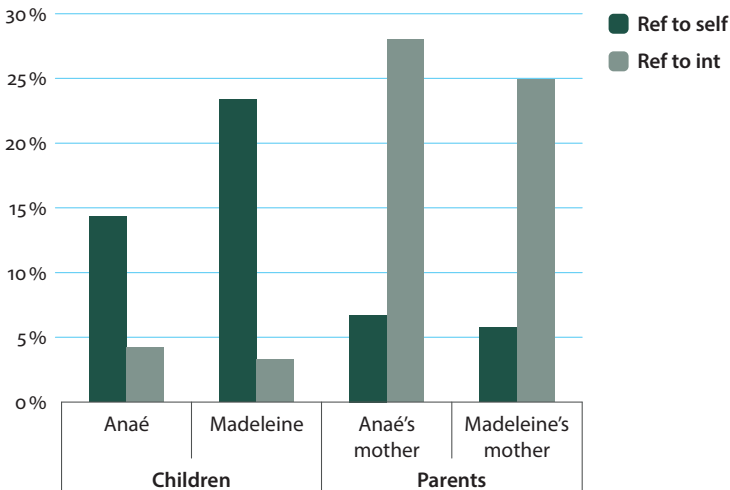
2. Only a few indeterminate cases had to be discussed.



### 3. Quantitative analyses

#### 3.1 Self and other reference in the dyad

Our first results represented in Figure 1 indicate clearly that the two children refer more to themselves and the two mothers more to their children. The children therefore have fewer opportunities when they are with their mother to have a model for the reference to the speaker, which might explain why they acquire the dialogic dimension of the pronominal system more progressively than other features of their language (see also Oshima-Takane et al. 1999).



**Figure 1.** Mean proportion of utterances with reference to self and interlocutor in the children's and the mothers' data between 1;6 and 3;3 out of all utterances (Anaé: N = 6437; Madeleine: N = 7804; Anaé's mother: N = 11386; Madeleine's mother: N = 8725)

#### 3.2 Forms of self reference<sup>3</sup>

As shown in Figure 2, Madeleine starts referring to herself at 1;7, and uses only bare predicates or filler syllables in subject position. At 2;1, there is a transitional period as she produces many different forms in subject position, half of them being non-standard forms (bare predicate, fillers, *moi*) and half standard ones (*je*, *moi je*, *c'est*

3. All the figures include the mothers' average productions (last column) as the fluctuations between sessions are not very important.

*moi qui*). Structures containing the strong pronoun *moi* are over-used compared to the adult system presented in the right-hand column. Surprisingly enough, considering her rapid language development, she continues to produce non-standard forms, and in particular, bare predicates. Though her system progressively becomes closer to her mother's, it is still not similar to it at the end of the period of study.

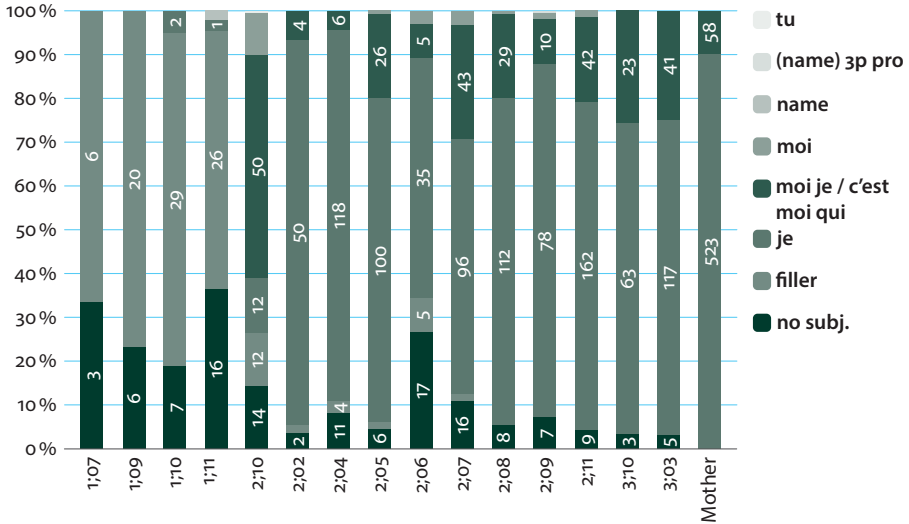


Figure 2. Reference to self in Madeleine's data and her mother

As shown in Figure 3, Anaé only produces two self-referring utterances up to 1;9. She then produces a variety of forms with different functions until 2;5. From 2;5 to 3;3, the majority of her productions contain standard forms of self-reference but with a number of exceptions when she uses non-standard forms. Even though the mother uses mainly standard French forms, there are a few third person markers to refer to self as subject in her data.

### 3.3 Forms of reference to the interlocutor

The use of second person subject pronouns emerges later than the use of first person and references to the interlocutor are much less varied in Madeleine's data (Figure 4).<sup>4</sup> As soon as she starts producing the standard form, it becomes stabilized and is sometimes associated to the strong pronoun *toi*. Madeleine's mother mostly uses *tu*, sometimes *toi tu*.

4. The analyses do not include imperatives.

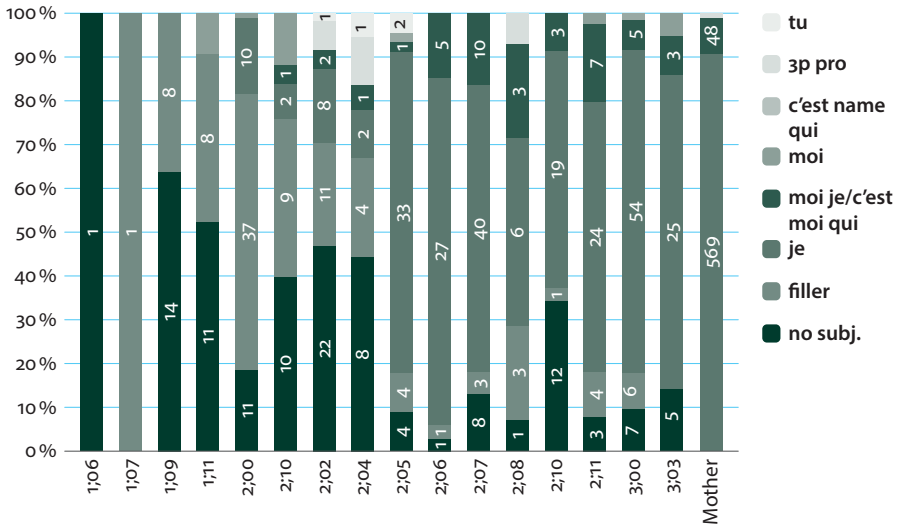


Figure 3. Reference to self as subject in Anaë's data and her mother

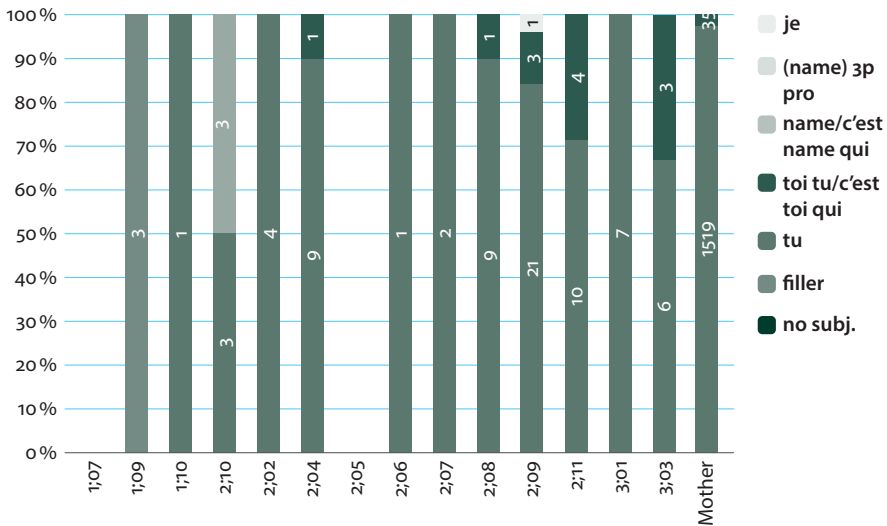


Figure 4. Reference to the interlocutor as subject in Madeleine's data and her mother

Anaë also uses second person references later than first person references and there are a few bare predicates and fillers at first (Figure 5). But at 2;5, her use of *tu* is quite stable, sometimes reinforced by the contrastive structures (*c'est toi qui/toi tu*), just as in her mother's productions.

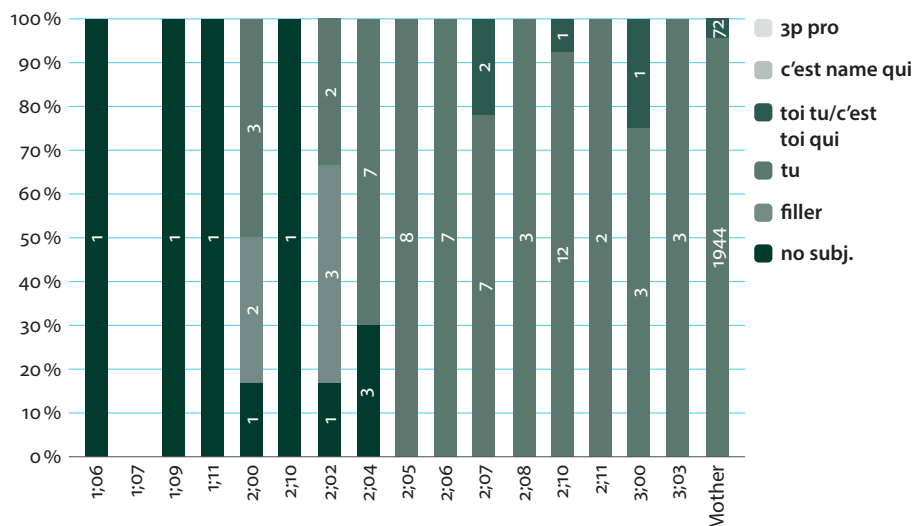


Figure 5. Reference to the interlocutor as subject in Ana's data and her mother

### 3.4 Summary of the quantitative analyses

We can distinguish three periods in the two children's development of first and second person reference. During the first period, the two children produce very few utterances referring to self and to their interlocutor, mostly with bare predicates and filler syllables. During the second period, the number of utterances referring to self increases and the children use a variety of forms, both standard and non-standard. During the third period, they mainly use standard forms. Bare predicates are maintained in rare cases but only in reference to self.

Based on these observations, we will focus on:

- the use of bare predicates, especially those that are still produced in reference to self in the third period (but no longer in reference to the interlocutor). Qualitative analyses will help us understand how the children progressively conform to the French grammatical constraint that consists in producing a grammatical subject with all predicates.
- Children's use of [*moi*+predicate] to mark contrast and emphasis.
- The use of names, both in reference to self and to the interlocutor (also present in the adult speech), which sheds light on how the children refer to self and other without marking their speech role.
- Pronominal reversals, although rare in this dataset, as they give us insights about how the children refer to self and other by taking up the specific forms heard in child directed speech and replicating them in specific situations. They will later be able to shift perspectives according to speech roles.

## 4. Qualitative analyses

### 4.1 Absence of subject

Subject pronouns are mandatory in French and French-speaking parents always use them. But at the beginning of our data, both Anaé and Madeleine produce a number of bare predicates (other than imperatives) in utterances that are interpreted by their addressee and by ourselves as referring to self (occasionally to the interlocutor, but only in Anaé's data).

If we synthesize the children's production by age, during a first period, up to 2;2 for Madeleine and 2;5 for Anaé, predicates with no subject represent 25% and 44% respectively of the predicates that the two girls produce when they refer to themselves. At that time, their utterances tend to be 3 words long as a maximum. Therefore, they only rarely produce both a subject and an object. Morgenstern and Parisse (2012) also observed that in Madeleine's data, only 45% of all predicates have two arguments at that time.

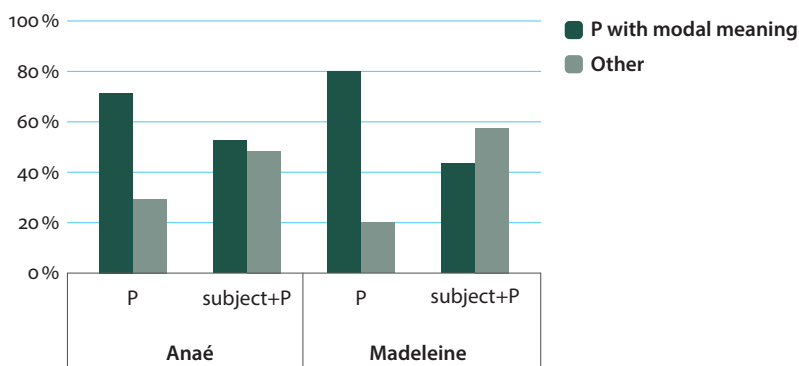
During the second period, in utterances referring to themselves, Anaé and Madeleine produce subjects 90% of the time. Anaé, who during period 1 used some predicates with no subject in reference to her interlocutor, produces all the subjects when she designates her addressee in period 2. To identify the specificity of the contexts in which these predicates appear, we coded a number of features: the length of the utterances with and without subject, the presence of an auxiliary, the meaning of the predicate (modal or actional), whether the referent was previously mentioned or not, or whether it was clearly observable in the situation thanks to gestures in action (cf. Caët & Morgenstern in press). The meaning of the predicate statistically appeared as the most relevant parameter: when the children refer to themselves, most predicates with no subject are composed of a verb or an auxiliary with a modal meaning such as "peux" (can) "veux" (want) or "vais" (going to), expressing the child's desires, capacities or projects.

(1) Madeleine 2;6

Sister: on goûte toutes les deux Madeleine ?  
*shall we both have our snack, Madeleine?*

Mad: maman ! **veux** une tartine au chocolat pour goûter.  
*mummy! want some bread with chocolate for my snack.*

Not only do utterances in reference to self without subject contain mostly modal predicates, but utterances in reference to self with modal predicates are proportionally more frequent in utterances with no subject than in utterances with a subject, as shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Predicates with and without subject in reference to self during period 2 in Anaé and Madeleine's data

With these semantically specific predicates, reference to self may be implicit for the children. This hypothesis also seems to be consistent with the observation that when they refer to their interlocutors with the same type of predicates, children always produce subjects.

#### 4.2 [*Moi*+predicate] constructions

In French, one can use a strong pronoun *moi* or *toi* together with the subject clitics *je* and *tu* to add emphasis or contrastive value on the reference to self. Thus, children hear [*moi je*+predicate] constructions in the input, and use these constructions themselves. Yet, they also produce [*moi*+predicate] constructions, without the clitic pronoun. Interestingly enough, the contexts in which [*moi*+predicate] constructions occur during the second period are very similar to the contexts identified earlier for predicates with no subject: they are predicates with a modal meaning such as “veux” (want), or “vais” (going to). The syntactic subject *je* may not be expressed because the meaning of the predicate is linked to self-reference and is implicit. Once again, this hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the absence of [*toi*+predicate] constructions in reference to the interlocutor.

In these contexts, *moi* adds a contrastive value to the utterance, as in the example below.

(2) Madeleine 2;7

Mad: maman, moi j'a qu'à prendre mon appareil photo. tu peux aller chercher mon appareil photo ?

*Mummy, I can just get my camera. Can you get my camera?*

Mother: j' crois qu' il est dans la cuisine.

*I think it is in the kitchen.*

- Mad: [ə] vais aller le chercher.  
[a] gonna get it.
- Observer: allez on va le chercher.  
Come on let's go get it.
- Mad: tu restes ici parce que **moi** vais aller chercher toute seule mon appareil.  
*you stay here because I'm going to get my camera by myself.*

The contrast usually involves two marked agents. This contrastive function is probably taken up from prototypical uses observed in the input, yet over-used by the children as shown in Figures 2 and 3 above (moreover, at 2 years old, “moi” is the most frequent word produced by Madeleine and Anaé). In fact, these uses are not very frequent in the mothers’ speech, but may be quite salient for the children since the opposition that is expressed involves the child and her mother.

- (3) Madeleine 1;2. Madeleine and her mother are playing with cubes and boxes.
- Mother: ah tu le vides maint(e)nant ?  
*Oh you're emptying it now?*
- Mother: regarde **moi** je le remplis.  
*Look I'm filling it.*

The use of a strong pronoun in preverbal position may look similar in English and in French, but different morphosyntactic phenomena are at work: “me” produced by English-speaking children may alternate with “I” and “my” in preverbal position within the same paradigm, while *moi* in French-speaking children probably alternates with *moi je* according to the semantics of the predicate, adding the same contrastive value in both cases.

### 4.3 The use of names and third person pronouns

As they acquire language, children need to learn that reference to self and the addressee in dialogue in French requires first and second person pronouns. The analysis of children’s uses of names or third person pronouns when they refer to themselves or their interlocutor, may enable us to grasp the progressive construction of this fundamental aspect of language (Benveniste 1966). Madeleine and Anaé produce their names and third person pronouns to refer to self and their interlocutor, but extremely rarely compared to some other children (see Léonard’s uses in Morgenstern 2006).

#### 4.3.1 Uses of the child’s name

Early uses of her name emerge in Madeleine’s data when she refers to images of herself. In the example below, she mentions the “picture” of herself that the observer is taking as she is video-recording her, pointing to the camera.

## (4) Madeleine 1;11

Mad: Madeleine est dans le photo ?

[points to the camera].

*is Madeleine in the picture?*



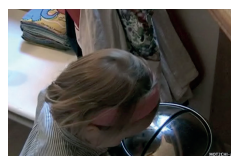
Such uses have long been described in the literature on child development (cf. Zazzo 1948). These uses may reflect the distinction that the child makes between her actual self and depictions in photos and reflections in mirrors. The subsequent disappearance of these uses reflect the child's understanding that in occidental cultures, there is an identification between the actual self and images of self and that in both cases, we refer systematically to ourselves according to our speech role.

Such uses are also observed in her mother's speech, as in the following example, when the mother introduces reference to the child's reflection with "Madeleine".

## (5) Madeleine 2;1

Mad looks at her reflection on the dustbin and laughs.

Observer laughs.



Mother laughs.

Mother: elle fait un sourire Madeleine ?

*Is Madeleine smiling?*



Mad smiles at her reflection and laughs.



Mad: elle a des dents. [points at her own teeth]

*She has teeth.*

Mother: t(u) as des dents oui.

*You do have teeth, that's right.*



This example shows that parents may also use names to specify the referent and make a distinction between the child as addressee and the image of the child. They may do so to facilitate the child's understanding of this linguistic phenomenon during that period.

Anaé refers to herself as subject with her name when she is hiding, as in the following example.



(6) Anaé 2;2

Ana: il est où Anaé ?  
*Where is Anaé ?*

Observer: ah ben je sais pas j(e) vois une bouche.  
*Well I don't know, I can only see a mouth.*



However, the child's lack of mastery of the pronominal system is also marked by her use of the masculine pronoun "il" (he), which might be an overgeneralization or the unmarked pronoun in the child's system (cf. Greenberg 2005), especially since she has two brothers. In these playful situations, the child borrows the perspective, the voice and the conversational role of others. She uses forms adults usually produce in similar situations. To a certain extent, these uses anticipate her reference to herself as subject two months later when she recalls salient past experiences. In the example below, she reformulates her mother's utterance, as they narrate an excursion by train to the zoo.

(7) Anaé 2;4

Mother: oui tu t(e) rappelles quand on était allé au zoo ?  
*Do you remember when we went to the zoo?*

Ana: ouais.  
*Yes.*

Mother: on avait pris le train.  
*We took the train.*

Ana: **Anaé [e] a pris [o] train.**  
*Anaé took the train.*

Mother: Anaé elle a pris le train et on est allé où ?  
*Anaé took the train and where did we go?*

If this use of her name occurs in a context where a special, salient event is related, another type of use can be observed when Anaé identifies herself as the author of a mischief, as in the following example.

(8) Anaé 2;5

Anaé: Babouche il est cassé.  
*Babouche is broken.*

%xpnt: points at the book.

Mother: ouais il est un+p(e)tit+peu cassé.  
*Yes it is a little bit broken.*

Anaé: **c'est Anaé qu(i) [e] cassé.**  
*Anaé is the one who broke it*

Anaé therefore uses her name in narrative contexts, describing herself as if she were the character of a story, retelling how this character took the train or tore the book with an external perspective. She does not identify herself with the agent of the actions she refers to, as if she were taking her mother's voice and perspective to refer to herself (see Morgenstern 2006, 2012a for similar analyses of Léonard's data).

Comparable uses can be observed in the speech of Anaé's mother. The following example illustrates the use of the child's name and the third person in a context of great achievement, as Anaé manages to reach the top of the slide by herself.

(9) Anaé 1;11

Father: tu viens ? [Anaé walks to the stairs]  
*Are you coming?*

Father: tu montes ? [Anaé starts climbing the stairs of the slide]  
*Are you climbing up?*

Mother: oh la la qu'est+c(e)+qu' elle est grande Anaé !  
*Oh my, Anaé is such a big girl!*

The mother sometimes uses the third person combined with a nominal phrase when she pretends to be telling the child off as in the following example.

(10) Anaé 2;2

Mother: hop on essuie la bouche.  
*Come on, let's clean up your mouth.*

Mother: oh lala, oh lala elle est sale cette petite fille. wah qu'elle est sale.  
*Oh my oh my, this little girl is dirty, wow, she is so dirty!*  
Anaé protests.

The mother seems to be addressing a witness and reinforces the negative evaluation also marked by the adjectives (*sale/dirty* and the demonstrative *cette*/that in *cette petite fille*) and the interjection *wah/wow*. The use of the third person enables the mother to situate herself outside the interactional sphere and address a judgement on the child's doings that is not explicitly directed to her. She therefore seems more objective and is placing herself in her status as an adult as opposed to her daughter as a "little girl".

#### 4.3.2 Uses of "mummy"

Reference to the mother with "mummy" (when addressing the mother) emerges in a wider variety of contexts. In the following example, although Madeleine is fully able to use second person pronouns at 2;1, she uses [*maman*+predicate] as she is playing, pretending to be ironing.

## (11) Madeleine 2;1

Mad: je v(eux), je veux pas le chandail. [Madeleine removes the sweater from the ironing board]

*I don't, I don't want the sweater.*

Mad: maman prend le chandail. [gives the sweater to the mother]

*Mummy takes the sweater.*

Mother: bah oui ben j(e) vais le mettre à la poupée.

*Well yes I'll put it on the doll.*

Although the mother does answer the child, “mummy” (with the use of a prosodic contour that is different from vocatives) emerges in a context where the adult is not actively participating. Madeleine is the one who makes decisions concerning the game as if she were playing on her own. The use of “mummy” in subject position, together with the absence of gaze towards her suggests that Madeleine is placing the mother outside the interactional sphere, as a character who cannot answer. A similar situation can be observed in the following example.

## (12) Madeleine 2;1

Mother: tu sais moi j'aime pas trop qu(e) la poussette descende.

*You know I don't like it when the stroller goes downstairs.*

Mad: c'est maman qui descend la poussette de moi. [slightly touches the stroller with her hand and takes a step backwards]

*Mummy takes the stroller of me downstairs.*

Here, Madeleine is negotiating the right to go downstairs and in the garden with the stroller. In this context, the child depends on the mother for her desires to be fulfilled. In addition to her careful gestures on the stroller, her use of “mummy” seems to underline the adult's role in the family, as this would be the case in Thai for instance, where kinship terms can be used to express obedience (Howard 2007). Uses of “mummy” therefore seem to allow the child to address indirect directives to the mother, placing her outside the speaking sphere at a time when she is not yet able to produce requests such as “can you...?” or complex utterances such as “I would like you to...”. She will be able to use these structures around one month later.

It is important to note that there is one case in the data where the mother designates herself with “mummy” with a comparable function, when Madeleine is 1;0. Madeleine wants to grasp the cable of her mother's computer, which is clearly not an object a 1 year-old child is supposed to play with. As she forbids her to touch it, the mother designates herself with “mummy”.

(13) Madeleine 1;0

Mad grasps the computer cable and puts it in her mouth.

Mother: non, non ça c'est à maman.

*No no, this is mummy's.*

In doing so, she clarifies the referent and also refers to herself outside dialogue, marking her status in the family as a mother (and therefore an adult) and her “membership category” (cf. Forrester & Reason 2006). She extracts herself from the interactive sphere and prevents the child from giving any kind of response.

#### 4.3.3 Use of names

Looking at some of the children's uses of their name and « mummy », in relation with their mothers uses of the same forms, we note that self and other are not always identified with the roles of speaker and addressee by the two children during the language acquisition process. If we compare these uses to Léonard's uses of his name (Morgenstern 2006) in narratives, descriptions or when designating himself as the recipient of actions, it seems that uses of names refer to objective representations of self and interlocutor. And if we compare these non-standard uses of names in reference to self and interlocutor, to uses of names in reference to other persons, we can see support for the hypothesis that using a name in reference to self or interlocutor (and therefore not using speech roles) is a way to objectify the reference (cf. Cooley 1908; Bain 1936; Budwig 1995).

#### 4.4 The use of 2nd person pronouns in reference to self

As children learn how to speak about themselves, they also have to learn that they should not use forms that others use to designate them when they speak to them (second person pronouns) but that they have to consistently reverse the perspective and talk about themselves as speakers (first person pronouns). Some children do not systematically refer to themselves with the first person and they sometimes use second person pronouns. This phenomenon is called “pronominal reversals”. Madeleine and Anaé rarely designate themselves with second person pronouns and mostly in contexts of repetitions as in (14), where Anaé is doing a somersault.

(14) Anaé 2;2

Mother: attention attention. Tu rentres bien ta tête. Rentre bien ta tête.

*Be careful, be careful. You tuck in your head. Tuck your head well in.*

- Mother: tu montes tes fesses.  
*You're pushing up your tush.*
- Mother: vas+y rentre ta tête, rentre ta tête.  
*Go on tuck in your head.*
- Mother: monte tes fesses.  
*Push up your tush.*
- Mother: bravo [applause].  
*Great job*
- Ana (laughing): tu remontes tes fesses.  
*You're pushing up your tush*
- Mother (laughing): tu remontes tes fesses ?  
*You're pushing up your tush?*

Here, Anaé is taking up an utterance previously said by her mother which seems to make her laugh, probably because of the whole situation and because the mother was using the word “fesses” (tush). Therefore, Anaé is not the actual author of this second person designation. She is simply replaying an utterance that the mother has just said when talking about her. This example emerges in a clear case of repetition, but some children actually make a much more frequent and less local use of “you” for “I” such as Guillaume described by Morgenstern (2003). The child designates himself in utterances that the adult usually says or could say in similar situations, as if these utterances had been internalized as part of a script triggered in specific situations and produced by the “wrong” speaker: the child instead of the adult. In these contexts, the children use a second person pronoun and speak about themselves with the others’ voice, taking their interactional role as if they were the addressee (Chiat 1986). Children who do this often will then progressively learn that when they are the speaker, even when they are replicating someone else’s words, they must use *je* (*I*) to designate themselves with their actual speech role.

## 5. Conclusion

Referring to self as subject with *je* or *moi je* and to the interlocutor with *tu* or *toi tu* is theoretically complex. As they acquire these tools, children make non-standard uses that provide some insights into how they build the pronominal system. We focused on these non standard uses (including the absence of form) for self-reference and reference to the interlocutor in subject position, and observed that children first take up the semantic and pragmatic functions of the forms provided in the parents’ speech. The third person (also used by the mothers) as

well as structures with *moi* ([*moi/moi je*+predicate]) are produced in adult-like contexts, despite their rarity in the input. Further analyses of the non adult-like [*moi*+predicate] structures and bare predicates in our data suggest however that the children tend to produce them with predicates that have a modal meaning, although these structures always occur with the clitic *je* in adult speech. Between 2;0 and 2;6, children spontaneously treat modal auxiliaries and verbs differently and use them in specific constructions, but only when referring to themselves.

On their path towards conventional language, children grasp and manipulate existing forms in the input as they actively reconstruct their semantic and pragmatic functions in dialogue. Children's productions here reflect both the specific features of child directed speech and of their own processing of their input. The treatment of the input evolves as the children's cognitive, linguistic and interactional skills develop. Their productions are part of a succession of transitory systems that lead them to adult usage. Parents' input plays a fundamental role in the acquisition process (Clark 2003) because their productions model those of the child and accompany them throughout the transition into the adult system. However, a great part of the linguistic processing is done by the children themselves as they reconstruct and manipulate the conventional system. At the end of the acquisition process, children master the pronominal system with its constraints, its phonological difficulty and its cognitive and pragmatic complexity.

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