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The self as other: Self words and pronominal reversals in language acquisition

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The study of reversals may shed some light on the problems children encounter when they try to use the formal, linguistic marks to convey the distinction between the self and the non-self. In two longitudinal case studies of French speaking boys age 1;08 to 3;03, I investigate how they use self-reference. I first focus on a particular use of *pronominal reversal* in Léonard's data: the little boy's use of the third person to designate himself. In a second longitudinal case study, we investigate how Guillaume uses the form *tu* ('you') instead of the first person pronoun. They both speak of themselves with the others' voices in contexts in which they have either done a misdeed (third person) or an exploit (second person). In those two typical developing children, pronominal reversals seem to occur when they begin to assimilate and internalize the representations the parents formulate regarding their child's experiences.

1. Introduction

Very early on in their lives, children can assimilate representations of themselves as verbally proposed to them by adults and eventually use them in their own discourse. It is particularly interesting to study self-reference as a “window to the child's emerging self-concept” (Bates 1990, 165) constructed in and thanks to social interaction. In this chapter, I focus on subject self-words and pronouns with their shifting reference (Jespersen 1921, Jakobson 1963, Benveniste 1966). When we use the term ‘subject’, we can refer to four distinctive notions: (1) the grammatical subject, (2) the semantic subject, (the agent for example), (3) the topic, (4) the speaker. Referring to the self in the first person seems to be very complex at the theoretical level. The idea has founded an entire linguistic tradition ever since Emile Benveniste's famous writings about the ego (1966). We can therefore wonder how young children are able to join the four levels in a single marker, which in French is *je* ('I'). However, this acquisition process is not salient, or catastrophic in Thom's sense (1977). Parents

do not remember the first day their child used *I*, although they will remember the first use of *mummy*, *daddy*, or certain linguistic phenomena which they find striking. However, as we were doing research focused on French children's self-words, we noticed that for a short period some children used *tu* ('you') and of *il* ('he') instead of *je* ('I') (Morgenstern and Brigaudiot 2004). This phenomenon is referred to in the literature as pronominal reversal. It is a rare phenomenon, but it does seem to play a significant role in the mastery of the pronominal system. It can help us understand how children deal with shifting reference and come to understand the problems they encounter when they try to use formal linguistic marks to convey the distinction between the self and the non-self. Pronominal reversal is also frequently observed in language disorders, especially in autism (Bettelheim 1967). The study of reversals as a normal development, albeit infrequent, may therefore also contribute to the understanding of pathological language development.

Previous hypotheses on children's use of self-words will be discussed followed by theories about pronominal reversals. I will then present analyses of the data of two French little boys. Léonard occasionally uses the third person instead of the first person for a short period. Guillaume (around the same age) sometimes uses the second person instead of the first person.

2. Children's self words

Between the ages of 18 and 30 months, various markers are used by French- and English-speaking children to refer to themselves. (Brigaudiot, Nicolas, Morgenstern, 1994, Budwig 1995, Morgenstern 1995, 2006)

- Ø form (zero form), or absence of form. Speaking of oneself is implicit. The speaker relies on a shared situation and background with the interlocutor. In such a context, it would also be interesting to study sign languages because there is no need to mark the grammatical subject when it is the speaker and when there is no contrastive agency. The signer's body is the grammatical subject, thus when the signer and the grammatical subject coincide, there is no need for a grammatical marker.
- The use of the child's name, which is not correct in adult language and has been described as referring to the "social self" (Bain 1936, Cooley 1908).
- The accusative in French (*moi*), but also the genitive in English (*my*) (Budwig 1995, Morgenstern 2003a).
- The second or third person (Morgenstern 2003b).

Between two and a half and three, the use of *je/I* becomes stabilized and the other markers tend to disappear in the subject function. At the same time, children stop

resorting to a strictly deictic use of language and manipulate different tenses, aspects, modalities (Nelson 1989). The following questions could therefore be raised.

- How could we account for the simultaneity of these forms for a given period of time (in our data from 2;3 to 2;8)?
- Are these forms used randomly or do they have different values according to the context they are used in?

In previous work (Morgenstern 1995, 2006), I assigned two main values to self-words produced in discourse by children between 18 months and 3 years old.

1. The referential value, focusing on who performs the action (there is a contrastive agency). For example, a child says, “moi fait la photo”/[I’m the one who films (takes the picture)], as he is trying to take the camera from my hands. The self-word is used in context with a contrastive value. The child uses the forms *name* and *moi* to express this value (similar to Budwig’s “high transitivity” value 1989).
2. The modal/expressive value. The child under analysis expressed his desires, his will, his projects, his points of view as in “veux zouer à la pâte à modeler” [I want to play with clay]. At first, the child used bare predicates, then preverbal vowels (fillers) and little by little, the filler [ø] became [yø] then [zø] and finally, around three, *je*. These self-words can be seen as subjectivity indicators. The child considers the situation he is in, does not find it satisfactory and uses language to express what he would like to substitute for the reality he has before him (Danon-Boileau 1994). He therefore produces utterances such as: “j’entends pas maman, tu peux mettre plus fort” (I can’t hear Mum, could you make it louder?). But he will also give his opinion “je trouve qu’elle est jolie cette musique” [I find this music melty].

I also found a difference between the way self-words were used in dialogic interaction and in narratives. Léonard used the third person ‘i/il’ for a short period to refer to himself in narratives. In order to tell a narrative, children must verbalize internal representations consisting in images, words and a theatrical development. They mentally view the scenes in which they have played a major role and therefore see themselves as a character among others. That might be a reason for their use of the third person just before two and a half years old.

The language addressed to the two children in our study is particularly relevant since Léonard’s mother uses the third person in contexts in which she makes up stories about him (she happens to be a writer). Guillaume’s mother never uses the third person when she speaks to him. Léonard makes fairly frequent use of third person pronouns during a few months to refer to himself, while Guillaume uses the second person quite frequently in this function. We will examine which

contexts the two children use these forms in; at first they seem quite deviant. I will try to show how by resorting to alterity (second or third person instead of first person), the child represents himself differently and asserts his own identity through other standpoints, other perspectives, other “voices” (Bakhtin 1986) in dialogic contexts.

3. Pronominal reversal

Pronominal reversal is rare in children whose linguistic behaviour is typical, but it is quite frequently mentioned in the literature. Studying the errors children make in the output may be a way to raise “specific questions whose answers may shed light on the mechanism of pronoun acquisition” (Chiat 1989: 383). Besides, pronoun reversals are frequently observed in language disorders, especially in autism, since it is part of Kanner’s original description as well as Asperger’s. “Personal pronouns are repeated just as heard, with no change to suit the altered situation (...). Not only the words but also the intonation is retained” (Kanner 1943: 244).

The initial attempt to explain the phenomenon was made in terms of echolalia and of autistic children’s difficulties in recognizing people as centres of subjectivity and as the occupants of reciprocal roles in discourse given that the use of personal-reference terms varies depending on the speech role one occupies in the conversation. The study of reversals as a normal development (even if infrequent) might therefore contribute to the understanding of pathological language development.

Many hypotheses have been proposed to explain reversals. These include (a–c).

- a. The name hypothesis: the idea that pronouns are used as names (Clark 1978).
- b. The person hypothesis (Charney 1980); a given pronoun is taken to refer to a constant person or set of people, leading to pronoun reversals.
- c. The risk-taking hypothesis: precocious children take the risk of using pronouns and fail to perform a deictic shift (Dale & Crain-Thoreson 1993).

The above hypotheses involve the following factors, which can account for reversals.

- Lack of semantic knowledge. Not knowing which words are pronouns (Bellugi & Klima 1982).
- Simple imitation of the speech heard. “I’ll help you” uttered by a child may contain two pronominal reversals and the child may be asking for help which would be a consequence of reliance on imitative, holistic strategies of language learning.
- Not understanding perspective shifting (Loveland 1984).

- The nature of the input. It could be impoverished (Oshima-Takane 1992) and the child needs to observe speech directed to others containing personal pronouns.

All these interpretations stem from the fact that children do not use pronouns the way adults do, corresponding to speech roles. In my data pronominal reversal is not consistent, and always occurs along with adequate usage. So we found the “perspective-shifting hypothesis” proposed by Chiat (1981) highly interesting. It claims that such “errors” would be a deliberate use of reversals to shift mental perspective. In her study of Matthew’s reversals, Chiat argues that this perspective-shifting hypothesis cannot be mistaken for the mere imitation interpretation, since reversals occur in novel constructions. She shows that “many of the reversals in both directions occur in contexts where the addressee’s point of view is being expressed (...) reversed ‘you’ and ‘your’ occur in references to himself that Matthew would hear from other people: in utterances of threat, warning, accusation, prediction, or permission” (Clark 1974: 377). This hypothesis is in contradiction with authors who say that children cannot take the other’s perspective and therefore do not comprehend the reversible nature of pronouns. According to Pettito (1987), up to a certain age, children can only refer to themselves since their language is egocentric. But Piaget (1962) did answer Vygotsky’s criticism (1934) of the notion of *egocentric language* and proposed the word ‘centrism’, meaning that the child cannot differentiate his perspective and the perspective of others. Oshima-Takane (1992) explains that children understand the relation between pronouns and speech roles when they *see* two speakers talking to each other and become aware that the second person pronoun refers to the addressee. She therefore emphasizes the importance of *vision* (also see Oshima-Takane, Cole and Yaremko 1993). A few studies on the acquisition of pronouns by blind children conclude that there is some delay in the use of the first person pronoun and a lot of reversals (Fraiberg and Adelson 1973, Sampaio 1989). Loveland (1984) also insists on the spatial aspects of pronoun acquisition and the importance of seeing different speakers in the activity of dialogue in order to understand perspective shifting. However, Perez-Pereira’s thorough study does not support the claim that blind children by and large use personal-reference terms comparatively late and with a great deal of reversal errors. Pérez-Péreira does agree with Oshima-Takane on the implication of the “failure to observe pronouns in speech addressed to another person” and also mentions the impact of the “large proportion of directives and requests used by mothers” (1999: 677), which may prevent some blind children from using pronouns correctly. We can conclude from those controversial studies that blind children are probably able to compensate their lack of vision by the fact that they can hear and distinguish speech which is not addressed at

them. They must develop the quality of internally locating speech partners in space from what they hear. But that capacity depends on a child's environment and development; some blind children are hindered in their pronoun acquisition while others are not.

For Chiat (1982) pronouns are *plurifunctional*, and this has to do with the possibility of adopting another's point of view. Adults occasionally do this explicitly by saying, "I wouldn't do that if I were you". She illustrates her perspective-shifting hypothesis with examples such as: *C - When you're (speaker) a big boy you (speaker) can go to play tennis* (p. 372). Not only is the child using 'you' to refer to himself, expressing the addressee's point of view and shifting perspectives, but he is speaking *for* the adult. The child might be uttering this mixture of *prediction* and *permission* with an evaluation of her/his future capacities just because that is the kind of utterance s/he usually hears in the same type of situation. The child says what he expects to hear or what *should* be said in the present situation. If this is the case, we might not consider the use of the pronoun 'you' as a reversal and as being the incorrect form, but think of the whole sentence as being uttered by the wrong speaker. In fact, the utterance could be what the child expects – or would like – to hear in the present situation.

A longitudinal study of Léonard and Guillaume's use of the second and third person pronouns for self-reference, will help to analyze this possibility.

3. The third person

The data I used for this study consists of the video recordings and lined transcriptions of Léonard, age 20 months to 39 months, which are part of the *Paris Corpus* on the CHILDES database (Mac Whinney 2000, the data was analyzed in Morgenstern 2006).

Each self-word used in subject position by Léonard during this period of time was counted and analyzed. Three periods could be distinguished in the data: I non adult uses 1;7 to 2;2; II All self-words 2;3 to 2;7; III Adult uses mainly 2;8 to 3;3.

Table 1. Léonard's self-words

Period	Period	Period
1 1;7 to 2;3	2 2;2 to 2;7	3 2;7 to 3;3
No adult form	All forms	Over 80% adult forms
<i>Ø, filler, name, moi, il</i>	<i>Ø, filler, name, moi, il, moi il, je, moi je</i>	<i>je, moi je</i>

Table 2. Percentage of Léonard's self-words

AGE	Ø	filler	moi	il	name	name+ il	je	moi je
Period I								
1;8–2;2	32	46	10	5.2	3.6	2	1.2	0
Period II								
2;3–2;7	26.75	29.25	5.5	21.5	0	0	11.75	5.25
Period III								
2;7–3;3	11.25	2.75	4.5	2	0	0	59.5	18.5

The percentage of the forms used in the three periods is shown in Table 2.

During the second period, Léonard uses all the forms, in particular 'il'. He talks about himself in the third person, marking the discourse object without identifying it to the speaker. That amounts to over 20% of his self-words during this period, so it is quite an important phenomenon. Of course, only a detailed analysis of the data can allow us to understand whether it is used randomly or if it has a specific function.

The analysis of a sample from the data will enable us to understand Léonard's use of self-words and in particular his use of the third person in autobiographical narratives.

Léonard's father asks him a question about what he did in nursery school. This question shows the child that his parents need information that only he knows; they did not witness the events that took place at school. The child is therefore drawn into the narrative mode. See the example below:

- (1) P: Qu'est-ce que t'as fait à la crèche aujourd'hui?
 [What did you do in nursery school today?]
 L: *atata lake/lafelafe/lapatamodle*
 (axx la crèche, l'a fait, l'a fait, la pâte à modeler)
 [In nursery school I did, I did modelling clay]

Fifteen minutes later, as he is getting ready for his bath, Léonard is naked in his mother's arms and is a little aggressive with her: she kisses his arms and he wipes away the kisses with his hand and says "no kiss on my arms". See (2) below:

- (2) L: *ladipā adavib (l'a dit pan à David)/[he said pan to David]*
 M: T'as dit pan à .../[you said pan to...]
 L: *ladip ladipā adavib (l'a dit p... l'a di pan à David)/[he said pan to David]*

P enters the bathroom.

P: T'as dit pan à David?/[you said pan to David?]

L: wi/yes

M: David de la crèche? [David from nursery school]

L: leonaila/leonaadip ladipã adadib (Léonard il a, Léonard a dit p... l'a dit pan a David)/[Leonard, Leonard said pan to David]

M: Pourquoi?/[why?]

L: wi/[yes]

M: Pourquoi t'as dit pan à David? David il t'avait dit pan aussi?/[Why did you say pan to David? Did he say pan to you, too?]

L: pabodadibpaboadadib (pas beau David, pas beau à David)/[not nice David, not nice]

The child is going to combine the narrative mode and his aggressive mood by reinitiating his entry into the narrative from a visual and gestural association. He gives the impression he is re-living the scene and punctuates his speech with violent gestures. He tells the story by embodying the scene, helping his parents to visualize what actually happened.

This distance between the child who is about to take a bath at home and the child in kindergarten is marked by the use of the third person. Besides, since the little boy was filmed, we were able to see that when he produces his utterance, he does not look at his interlocutor. His gaze is vague as if he were concentrating on the scene he is visualizing in his mind. That reminds us of Cuxac's analysis of narrative in French Sign Language (Cuxac 2000): when the signer is engaged in a narrative, he does not look at the interlocutor, he is not embodying his own self, but a character in a story, as opposed to discourse, in Benveniste's terms (1966).

Then there is a clarification of the identity of the two protagonists thanks to the mother's question: "David de la crèche?" [David from kindergarten]. Léonard does not answer directly but localizes another actor and uses a name, his own name.

L.: leonaila/leonaadipaadadib. [Léonard, (he) said pan to David]

Léonard uses his name to talk about the agent once he needs to mark the various places and roles of the characters in the scene. As a narrator, he shares his parents' point of view and relates the scene as if he were a mere observer; he names himself with his name as if someone else were narrating the scene. This identity splitting enables him to distinguish between the world of kindergarten and the world of home. As he narrates, he also mimes the scene, which creates a link between Léonard as speaker and Léonard as actor. The body of Léonard *the speaker*

(including his arm hitting in the air) enables him to show his mother *the character Léonard* in his narrative. This is similar to what happens in narratives in Sign language; the signer's body becomes the character of the story, which is called personal transfer.

I systematically studied all of Léonard's uses of the third person to refer to himself and I observed that he only uses *il* when he is producing some kind of narrative which implies the wording of a cinematographic projection of the events which unwind in his head. The images he sees arouse the same feeling of otherness as the image of oneself in a photo or in a mirror. And we know that during the same period, children do not refer to themselves by saying *je* or *moi* when they talk about their image but by their name or the third person (Zazzo 1993).

During this period, Léonard uses the third person instead of the first person to construct a character, an Other, who is elsewhere and is naughty; he says *pan* to David, he tears the book to pieces, he eats up all the cakes.

Guillaume, the second little boy presented in this study, happened to use the second person for a few months to refer to himself. The following part focuses on his productions of pronominal reversals.

4. The second person

Guillaume¹ was recorded every two weeks from his birth to the age of six. The transcription was made by his mother, immediately after each recording so as to have as much information as possible, and was checked by a second researcher. His mother also kept a diary (Brigaudiot & Nicolas 1990).

For this study we selected only part of the data from 1;7² to 2;10, from the time both the forms elided *t'* and *tu* appear in formulaic expressions, as in "t'entends" [you hear?] or "tu vois" [you see] to the stabilization of the use of *tu* to refer to the addressee.

We counted and analyzed each self-word used in subject position by Guillaume during this period of time.

We also distinguished three periods in the data: I non adult uses 1;7 to 2;2; II All self-words 2;3 to 2;7; III Adult uses mainly 2;8 to 2;10.

Table 3 presents the percentages of self-words according to the period.

1. The author thanks Mireille Brigaudiot for her collaboration in this study.

2. The notation for ages is number of years; number of months. Example: 1;7 = 1 year and 7 months.

Table 3. Percentages of Guillaume's self-words

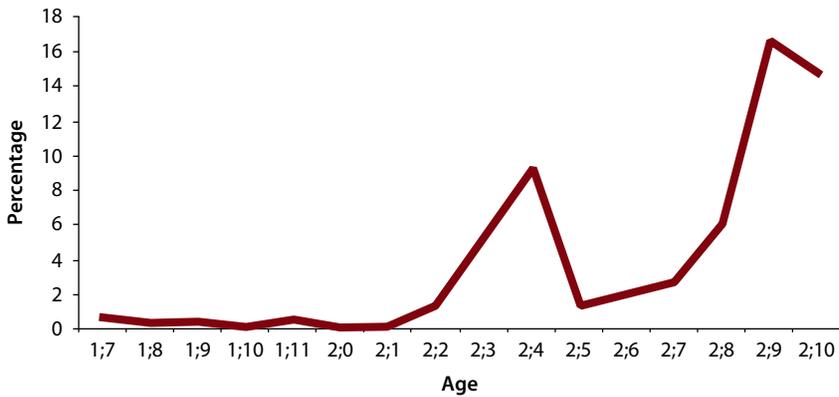
AGE	Ø	filler	moi	il	name	name + il	je	moi je
Period I 1;8–2;2	32	46	10	5.2	3.6	2	1.2	0
Period II 2;3–2;7	26.75	29.25	5.5	21.5	0	0	11.75	5.25
Period III 2;7–3;3	11.25	2.75	4.5	2	0	0	59.5	18.5

The second period is the one I am interested in for that is when the child uses *tu* (you). It accounts for 12% of the uses of self-words in the data for that period. Example 3 is an extract in which various subject self-words are used in the same sequence.

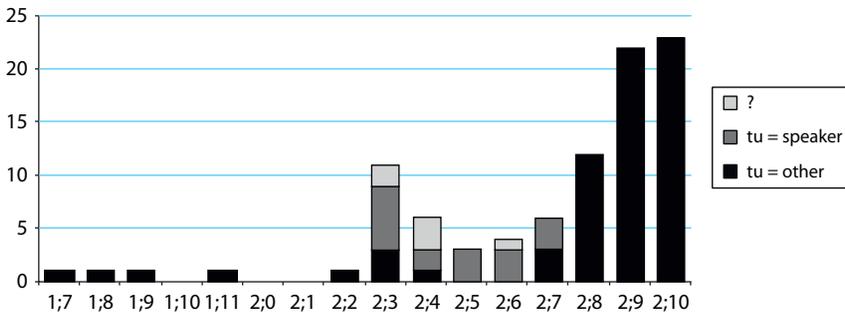
- (3) Guillaume 1: *Ze* vais tourner la farine. Ça y est, *mis* partout. *T*as tourné! *T*as tourné l'œuf!!
 Mother 1: Bien!
 Guillaume 2: Ah ça colle. *Ze* veux encore tourner un œuf. Encore un.
 Mother 2: Tourne amour, tourne.
G. looks at his mother.
 Guillaume 3: *Ai* tourné.
 Mother 3: Maintenant il faut encore un œuf.
His mother is about to break the egg. Guillaume holds out his hand.
 Guillaume 4: *Guillaume i* fait casser un œuf!!!
 I'm gonna mix the flour. Done, put everywhere. You mixed, you mixed the flour!
Good!
 Oh it's sticky. I wanna mix some more egg. Another one.
 Mix honey, mix.

All occurrences of *tu* (you) in the data were coded and analyzed whomever they referred to. As shown in Graph 1 there are two peaks, one at 2;4 and then after a decline, the use of *tu* rises again and becomes more or less stable.

We categorized those occurrences according to whether they were *adult* uses (*tu* meaning the addressee) versus *non adult* uses (*tu* meaning the child) as shown in Graph 2.



Graph 1. Percentage of *tu* (over number of utterances) in Guillaume’s data



Graph 2. Guillaume’s uses of *tu*

At this point we can make two important claims.

1. Reversals only occur once the second person form is already part of the child’s productions and used adequately but in formulaic expressions.
2. Reversals might be a necessary stage for that particular child before the use of adult like *tu* (referring to the second person) in non-formulaic utterances.

In the following we will examine a few extracts in detail:

(4) Guillaume 2;3

G. *is making the inventory of all the shoes in the house and he makes comments.*

G: C’est à papa/[It’s Daddy’s]

M: C’est les souliers de papa/[It’s Daddy’s shoes]

G: *Peux, veux à mettre, veux.*/[Can, want put, want]

M: Tu veux les mettre?/[You want to put them on?]

G: *Oui he puts on his father's shoes comme ça marche*/[Yes. Like that walk]

M: *Hein?*/[What?]

G: *he stands up with the shoes on Marcher comme ça*/[Walk like this]

M: *Tu veux marcher comme ça?*/[You want to walk like this?]

G: *Ouais he takes a few steps bravo tu marches!!*/[Yea. Congratulations! You're walking]

G. is making the inventory of all the shoes in the house. He tries on his father's shoes, takes a few steps and says, "bravo tu marches" [congratulations you're walking!]. Once he has started to accomplish this, we find *tu* as the marked form. Does this *tu* mean 'I'? Is the child really the one who is supposed to congratulate himself? Is he the right speaker for that utterance? Shouldn't his mother be saying it? We can consider the situation as being an accomplishment (from the child's perspective at least). This utterance is very similar to previous utterances that have been addressed at him in comparable situations. The child could be expressing his own pride by using an utterance usually produced by his mother in similar situations, showing he has internalized previous dialogic situations and adopting a form of discourse in which he expresses another's perspective on himself (Fernyhough 2008). That enables him to speak about himself as if another person were addressing the utterance to him. We can therefore consider this *tu* as a device to mark identity and otherness. It is very interesting to notice that the mother continues the dialogue without asking anything about this use of *tu*. She understands the *tu* as referring to the child.

(5) Guillaume (2;05) has eaten a peanut

G: *t'as avalé encore!*/[You swallowed again!]

M: *non, une seule cacahuète, pas tout*/[No, only one peanut, not all of them]

Here the child is misbehaving, and what he is doing could actually be considered dangerous. The *tu* is the same one the child uses when he is running on the pavement and stops just before crossing the road, and says "tu traverses pas" [don't cross]. It can also remind us of when the little child says 'no' or shakes his head as he is about to touch a dangerous object. We can see that the child is producing an utterance out of a fixed scenario. He uses his auditory memory with a situation associated to a sort of quotation. He therefore applies the formula '*tu* + predicate' to a situation. It is as if he were snatching the mother's utterance out of her mouth, as if he were borrowing her role, her place in the dialogue, as if the most important was not who the speaker is but that the utterance should be spoken. The script exists. He does not create an utterance, but uses it because it applies to the present situation.

Here again, his mother has continued the dialogue without asking who this *tu* was. But there comes a day when the clarification of the reference becomes an issue. And this moment coincides with metalinguistic play.

Let us consider the next example:

- (6) Guillaume 2;7 (last ‘tu for je’ in the data)
G and M talk about absent toys.
 M: y'en a beaucoup! i sont de quelle couleur?/ [There are many of them!
 What color are they?]
 G: bleu/[blue]
 M: oh c'est pas vrai/[ah that's not true]
 G rit: t'es menteur!/[you're a liar!]
 M: t'es un menteur, ah ah ah, t'es un menteur! i sont pas bleus i sont rouges!/[you're a liar, ah ah ah, you're a liar! They're not blue, they're red!]
 G: i sont rouges, menteur!/[they are red, liar!]
 M: petit menteur, tu joues hein ma puce/[little liar, you're playing, aren't you darling]
 G: t'es un petit menteur/[you're a little liar]
 M: t'es un petit menteur/[you're a little liar]
 G: maman t'es un menteur/[Mummy you're a liar]
 M: ah moi j'suis pas menteuse non. (...)/[oh, I'm not a liar, I'm not]
 G: non, papa i dit p'tit menteur papa, après idit p'tit con/[no, Daddy says little liar and after he says little asshole]

The quotation “*t'es un petit menteur*” [you're a little liar] is playful. The mother has just told the child he is not telling the truth. The expression “*t'es un petit menteur*” is teasingly manipulated as the mother points out “*tu joues*” [you're playing]. The child even compares the mother's speech with the father's. He now has enough distance with reported speech to play with roles and perspectives.

Our analysis points to two levels of pronominal reversal in Guillaume's data:

- a. During the first period, this special *tu* is used in an utterance that is a sort of echo of speech previously addressed to him. The situation the child is in reminds him of a previous experience (or of several previous experiences) during which a similar utterance was produced. Therefore, he makes a comment using the second person pronoun and expressing his own pride or shame as if he were his mother congratulating or scolding him. We can call this an assimilation process; the echo is applied to the current event with no distance at first. But that process is fundamental in the construction of a theory of mind, it is a first step. It reminds us of what autistic children do when they reverse pronouns.

- b. There is a second level in which the echo is transformed into metalinguistic play. It becomes similar to reported speech. The mother plays this metalinguistic game with him because she intuitively knows he has a theory of mind. There is the necessary distance. We see Guillaume use a kind of false speech; he is joking, he is playing with his mother and deliberately manipulating an utterance she must have addressed to him.

After that stage, all uses of *tu* for 'I' in older children and adults will be metalinguistic and deliberate in one way or another. It may be the case that autistic and psychotic children do not reach that second level, and stay at the level of assimilation in which their speech sounds like an echo of speech addressed to them, in a seemingly similar situation, without their having fully appropriated the content of what they say about themselves. But even if they do not assert themselves as authors of the content, their use of the other's perspective is a first step towards internalization of another's speech.

After that period of pronominal reversal, in our data, Guillaume always uses *je* to refer to himself in dialogue in subject position.

5. Conclusion

Léonard and Guillaume use the second and the third person instead of the first person when they need to separate the agent and the speaker. They give the impression that another person is speaking and it enables them to present themselves with another voice at certain moments, extraordinary moments, when they have been either villains or heroes and to unveil other facets of their selves. This could be glossed by saying, "I'm talking about myself as if it weren't me talking". The self considered as other, seen through the eyes of another. This all happens at a non-conscious level and it is all solidly anchored in reality since the child is talking about feats or naughty behavior he has actually carried out. This hypothesis emphasizes the role of addressed speech (Perez-Pereira 1999) and of the care-giver as "self regulating other" (Stern 1985) throughout language acquisition.

But there is a sequel to this splitting up of their self. A few months later, the children in this study invented an alter ego to which they gave another name in order to be able to speak about another self. Around the age of 2;05, Léonard abandons the third person to refer to himself but he makes up the character of Jean-Patou and refers to him as the author of all his misbehaviour, "Jean-Patou broke the little bed because he jumped on it so much, he tore up the book because he didn't like the story..." Guillaume invents the character Rouda who is his hero and does all the great things he would like to do. So the children talk

about another individual who is their other self, the good or the bad self. They create a fictional character, an alter ego who can be either naughty or extraordinary. This phenomenon has already been mentioned in the literature and is often reported by parents (Astington 1993). The two children kept their imaginary friend for a few months (Léonard), and over a year (Guillaume), and then gave them up.

At a certain time in the genesis of the pronominal system, pronominal reversals vanish from the data of typical developing children. These children merge their role as speaker and as agent, topic, grammatical subject, into one form. They conceive of themselves with a certain permanency, linked to Piaget's object permanency (1923) and can keep their integrity, their identity in time. As Ricoeur writes in *Soi-même comme un autre*:

Il ne s'agit pas de s'assurer qu'on parle de la même chose, mais qu'on peut l'identifier comme étant la même chose dans la multiplicité de ses occurrences. Or cela ne se fait que par repérage spacio-temporel: la chose reste la même en des lieux et des temps différents. (1990: 45)

[The issue is not to make sure you talk about the same thing, but that you can identify it as being the same thing in the multiplicity of its occurrences. That can only be done in the spatio-temporal frame: the thing stays the same in various places and times]

At the end of the acquisition process, at around 3 years old, children join the grammatical subject, the semantic subject, the subject of conversation in a single form, the first person pronoun, but they have gone through a transition period during which they could separate these various levels and produce various markers, breaking away from regular adult forms.

Children then understand that these various facets of themselves marked in the different forms they use (zero form, filler syllables, name, third person, accusative form, genitive form) do not alter the unity of their identity. At the end of the process, they have become speakers, or in enunciative terms, enunciators. They can speak of themselves and judge their own selves through what they have been and have done in the past, what they are and do in the present, what they will do and be in the future or would like to be and do. They therefore succeed in breaking away from the other, from the other's speech and have built their own place in dialogue, on the intersubjective scene.