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ABSTRACT

Data drawn from videotapes of children aged 20 to 32 months were analyzed for patterns in the use of various self-reference forms at an age when children rarely refer to others compared to their use at an age when children more regularly refer to others as main participants. First, the distribution of the forms "I," "me," "my," other-reference, and personal names was examined. The contrastive use of pronominal self-reference forms based on the transitivity parameters of their use in the subject position was then analyzed. It was found that among the younger, more ego-anchored children, utterances containing two participants and referring to completed actions and intentional behavior were more likely to contain "my" than "I." In contrast, "I" was found most often in utterances expressing the child's experiential states and intentions. The pattern was not found among older, nonego-anchored children, who used "I" when referring to themselves as causal agents as well as in experiential expressions. The ego-anchored children also used "me" in initial utterance position, as a subject affected by action. Nominal self-reference generally occurred in acts of naming, identifying, and describing, and with gestures. Contrast in the use of nominal versus pronominal forms of self-reference is suggested as a subject for further study. (MSE)

I, Me, My and 'Name': Children's Early Systematizations of Forms Meanings and Functions in Talk about the Self

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The present paper focuses on the issue of how speakers situate themselves and others in fields of action in their ongoing discourse: What sort of linguistic devices are employed both crosslinguistically and developmentally by speakers to mark various perspectives on participants' involvements in event schemes?

This research has been inspired by recent discussions in the linguistic literature concerning transitivity, agentivity and prototype semantics (cf. Comrie, 1981; DeLancey, 1984; Givon, 1979, 1984; Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Lakoff, 1977; Slobin, 1981). Such crosslinguistic research has highlighted the extent to which notions such as transitivity and agency are best defined in terms of a prototype. DeLancey (1984) has summarized this position as follows:

> The general claim is that there is a cross-linguistically valid prototype for true transitivity, which involves (among other things) a direct causation schema with proximate and ultimate cause both residing in the same volitionally acting causer. The prototypical definition of agent is part of this schema, i.e. the prototypical agent is just such a volitional causer (p. 185).

With regard to young children, we know from Slobin's crosslinguistic comparisons that children give special treatment to a scene involving prototypical agents. Children acquiring a variety of languages first employ specific markers only in the context of highly transitive events which are caused by agents acting with volition and control.

In addition to the claim that the prototypical agentive schema receives special linguistic marking in a number of languages, has been the claim that deviations from the prototype also are marked by deviations from prototypical agentive morphosyntax. Examples of possible deviations include: a) mediated causation - for instance, where proximate and ultimate cause don't reside in the same person; and b) unintentional behavior - that is, when one acts as a causer but not with volition.

Two related questions concerning children's marking of prototypical agency are addressed in this paper. First, what constitutes young children's definitions of what 'counts' as an agent at the linguistic level at various phases of development? Second, how do children treat deviations from the agency prototype? Do such instances receive different linguistic treatment?

1. DATA: The data drawn upon stem from a larger study investigating the early use of grammatical markers by six children ranging between the ages of 20 and 32 months at the onset of the study. The 6 children were videotaped twice a month - once with a caregiver and once with a familiar peer - for a period of four months. The children partici-

pated in the same activities each month, including: play with blocks, manipulative toys and looking through a photobook containing pictures of the children and their peers. The video-sessions, which lasted approximately 45 minutes, took place in an extra room at the daycare center the children attended.

2. REFERENCE TO MAIN PARTICIPANTS: The first step in the present analysis involved a consideration of the sort of participants the children referred to in their discourse. As is noted on Table 1, the six children could be divided into two groups: First, three of the children (Megan, Grice and Jeffrey) primarily referred to themselves as main participants at the onset of the study (e.g. MY take it home). These children, who will be referred to as Ego-anchored, can be contrasted with the second group of linguistically more advanced children, whose references included not only Self, but also Others as main participants (e.g. NANCY blowing bubbles).

TABLE 1: CHILD SUMMARY - MONTH I (Sessions 1 & 2)

Reference to Main Participants	Name	Age	MLU with Caregiver/Peer
Ego-Anchored	Megan	20 months	1.98 / 2.15
	Grice	22 months	1.50 / 1.94
	Jeffrey	30 months	2.88 / 2.75
Nonego-Anchored	Eric	28 months	3.84 / 3.12
	Keith	31 months	2.70 / 3.73
	Thomas	32 months	4.08 / 3.74

In the present paper, focus will be placed on an analysis of the children's use of various self reference forms, comparing such usage at a time when the children rarely refer to Others, with the organization of such forms when the children more regularly talk about Others as main participants. To avoid confusion with within child changes over the course of the study, I will deal now with data stemming from the first two video-sessions, saving for a separate presentation a discussion of developmental changes.

3. DISTRIBUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF SELF REFERENCE FORMS: In Table 2 are the results of a distributional analysis of the children's use of various Self reference forms. The main point to pull out of this table is that all 6 children make use of a variety of nominal and pronominal forms, although the relative frequency of use differs between the children. It is also important to note that the three Ego-anchored children freely use all Self reference forms in subject position. Thus they say things like: MY did it, ME jump, I like peas, and MEGAN count.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF SELF REFERENCE FORMS
Month I: All Children

	PRONOMINAL				NOMINAL	(Raw #)
Child	I	ME	MY	OTHER	NAME	TOTAL
Megan	33% (30)	9% (8)	22% (20)	3% (3)	34% (31)	(92)
Grice	29% (21)	28% (20)	32% (23)	1% (1)	10% (7)	(72)
Jeffrey	38% (48)	6% (7)	46% (57)	7% (9)	3% (4)	(125)
Eric	66% (77)	3% (3)	6% (7)	16% (19)	9% (10)	(116)
Keith	56% (90)	1% (1)	7% (12)	27% (43)	9% (15)	(161)
Thomas	62% (118)	4% (8)	9% (18)	21% (40)	4% (8)	(192)

Based on this distributional analysis, the question has been raised: On what basis do the children employ one Self reference form or another? In the remainder of this paper, I will provide evidence for the claim that at a time when the children rarely refer to Others, they use Self reference forms to linguistically mark their involvement as prototypical agents, as well as deviations from this prototype. The discussion will focus first on the children's use of pronominal forms, beginning with Jeffrey's organization of the pronominal forms I and MY. His system will be used then as a point of comparison for the discussion of both of the two younger children, and the three Nonego-anchored children. Finally, I will discuss how all six children use the nominal forms in contrast to pronominal Self reference forms.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Coding: Before turning to the analysis of the organization of self reference forms, a few words should be said about coding. All utterances containing self reference forms have been coded in terms of a multi-level code. For the present purposes it is important to note only the 5 general levels that have been examined. These include: 1) what forms are used (e.g. nominal or pronominal); 2) Semantic parameters of transitivity (based in part on Hopper & Thompson, 1980); 3) Pragmatic function - including whether the utterance acted as a control act to alter the environment or as a non-control act which matched an existing state (drawing upon Ervin-Tripp & Gordon, in press); 4) Non-verbal information - for instance who the partner was, what task, and what gestures occurred; and finally 5) Causality coding - looking at who was responsible and affected by causal actions. In what follows, I'll be discussing the ways the various forms cluster around these categories.

4.2 The Contrastive Use of Pronominal Self Reference Forms: Turning first to a consideration of Jeffrey's use of MY and I, it can be noted that the use of these two forms in subject position was fairly evenly distributed in the early months of the study. On what basis does Jeffrey contrastively use the MY and I forms in subject position? A partial interpretation for this distribution can be made on the basis of a consideration of how such uses cluster around the transitivity parameters that were coded. All self reference forms were coded in terms of 5 transitivity parameters. These parameters and examples of coding categories can be found in Table 3a.

TABLE 3a: CODE DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLES

Parameter	High	Mid	Low
Participant	2 or more	Reflexive	1
Example	My blew the candle out	My want my turn	I guess
Kinesis	Action	Less Transitive action	Non-action
Example	My take it home	I'll hold this	I like peas
Aspect	Telic/Completed	Telic/Future	Atelic
Example	My cracked the eggs	My build a tower	I filling it
Volitionality	Volitional/ Purposeful action	Volitional/ States	Non-volitional
Example	My take it home	My want that one	-
Affirmation	Affirmative	-	Negative
Example	My want those	-	I no want it

TABLE 3b: RELATIVE USE OF I & MY (Subject Position)
Jeffrey: Month I

TRANSITIVITY CONTINUUM (Raw #)

Parameter	Form	High	Mid	Low	Uncoded
Participant	MY	54%	100%	17%	(2)
	I	46%	-	83%	(2)
Kinesis	MY	79%	56%	33%	(1)
	I	21%	44%	67%	(2)
Aspect	MY	100%	79%	23%	(4)
	I	-	21%	77%	(3)
Volitionality	MY	61%	32%	-	(3)
	I	39%	68%	-	(2)
Affirmation	MY	52%	-	-	(1)
	I	48%	-	100%	(1)

To take an example such as the utterance : MY cracked the eggs - we find that it rates high on the participant parameter since there are 2 participants, high in kinesis and aspect because reference is to a completed action, and since the utterance refers to an action carried out with purpose it ranks high in volitionality. Finally, since

it is affirmative it ranks high on the fifth parameter. It should be kept in mind that the utterances were coded while watching the video and if there was insufficient evidence for a particular parameter then it was left 'uncoded' (cf. Table 3b).

To summarize the various numbers given in the Table 3b, the following can be said: The utterances containing MY are more likely than those containing I to contain two participants, highly kinetic verbs and refer to completed actions and intentional behavior controlled by the child. In contrast, the use of I is found most often in utterances expressing the child's experiential states and intentions and most generally, utterances ranking low in agentivity and transitivity. The uses of MY link up with utterances in which the child acts as a prototypical agent bringing about a change, for instance: MY blew the candles out and MY do it, while those containing I, for example: I like peas and I no want those, deviate from the agentive perspective.

While most uses of MY can be accounted for in terms of the semantic distinctions mentioned above, there is a set of uses which deviates from the semantic cluster just outlined. Instances like MY read another book, do not, for example, seem high in transitivity or agentivity though they include the use of MY. The cases which don't rank high in terms of the semantic parameters, contrast though with the use of I at a different level of analysis. Such instances of MY and I cluster around two different functional parameters. The uses of MY that depart from the semantic cluster of agentivity appear in utterances that function as Control Acts: that is as directives, requests, challenges, protests and disputes over control of objects and enactment of activities. Uses of I which rank similarly at the semantic level appear in utterances which function as assertives in which control is never at issue. We find that the utterance MY read another book is said at the completion of the photobook activity in order to bring about the reading of another book. In contrast, utterances ranking low in transitivity involving the use of I involve no such attempt to bring about a change. Utterances like I like peas occur in response to adult questions or other instances in which control is not at issue. This points up the necessity of going beyond the level of the utterance in interpreting the use of these two forms.

The claim I have been making is that the child uses MY in utterances in which he plays a causal role in bringing about a change in the environment. This includes not only his direct physical attempts, but also his attempts at the discursive level to use language to bring about change. Here it is interesting to note that in such cases he often does not directly bring about the causal change, but rather via language persuades others to act in particular ways. Thus for Jeffrey, direct action is not critical to the use of MY. His verbal attempts to persuade Others to act on his behalf are viewed within a similar perspective as direct causation and thus receive the MY marking. At both the semantic and pragmatic level, MY is found in utterances where notions of control and volition are central. The use of I marks a deviation from this prototypical agentive perspective - while volition often is implied, control is not at issue.

The question remains: to what extent can the above distinctions be extended to the other children. Turning first to the other two

Ego-anchored children, one finds that the use of MY also links up with utterances in which control and volition are at issue. Such instances most often appear when the child acts to gain or maintain control of objects. For instance, Megan says: MY play a this as she approaches the table of toys and lifts the toy teapot. Similarly, Grice screams: MY teapot as she trys to grab the teapot her peer has taken away from her. In contrast, the use of I never appears in the context of utterances referring to control. Rather, it occurs in utterances involving the expression of ongoing states. In comparing the younger girl's uses of MY with that of Jeffrey, certain differences can be noted in what 'counts' as prototypical agency. For these two children, MY always involves direct intervention on the part of the child. Instances of mediated causation are not viewed within the agentive perspective. Despite this difference, the contrast for the girls is quite similar to that of Jeffrey.

Turning to the Nonego-anchored children, it becomes clear that the distinction between the use of MY and I cannot be accounted for in the same way. All three children employ I when referring to themselves as causal agents, as well as when referring to deviations from prototypical agency. In contrast to the Ego-anchored children, we find examples like: I knocked it down, as well as examples like: I want it - that is, references to both prototypical agency and deviations all with the single form I. While the Nonego-anchored children do not contrastively employ the pronominal forms to mark the agency distinction, I don't mean to imply that such distinctions are not made with other linguistic devices. The relevant point here is merely that the contrastive use of first person pronominal forms does not serve this function.

Thus far, we have focused only on the use of two pronominal reference forms. At this point, we can briefly turn to a consideration of a third pronominal form used by the six children - namely ME. This time around, the discussion will begin with a consideration of the use of ME by the three Nonego-anchored children. As might be anticipated, their use of ME, as in utterances like Bring ME the ball, is used much like that of adult speakers to mark Self as patient, recipient, location, etc. of action. The Ego-anchored children make use of ME in this way in the context of highly formulaic utterances such as gimme. But the Ego-anchored children also use the ME form productively in utterance initial position, raising the question: On what basis do these uses differ from the use of MY and I? Briefly, what is similar about the uses of ME becomes apparent if one considers the coding of causality consequences. In the utterances containing ME the child refers to Self as a subject affected by action. In contrast to the use of MY in which the child acts to bring about a change in some object or activity, here the causal change actually involves the child. In one example we find Grice walking towards the door leading back to the daycare center. En route she announces: ME in there, referring at one and the same time to her bringing about and resulting in some change of location. Thus, the productive use of ME occurs in the context of situations which deviate from prototypical agency. The child as subject of reference is - or will be - affected by the action, rather than some other object undergoing a change of state.

Pulling together the various threads of the discussion concerning the children's contrastive use of pronominal self reference forms before regularly referring to Others, I want to suggest that such uses are part of a system of contrasts for differently situating the Self in event schemes. All three of the Ego-anchored children mark their involvement as prototypical agent acting as a volitional causer with the form MY. Furthermore, two contrasts from prototypical agency have been noted to receive contrastive marking. The question remains: to what extent does the child's use of 'own name' fit into the above mentioned paradigm?

4.3 The Use of Nominal Self Reference Forms: All six children's use of nominal forms cluster around similar semantic and pragmatic notions, as well as non-verbal features. In contrast to pronominal usage, the use of 'own name' often appears in single word utterances and existentials. The children refer to themselves by saying things like: That's a MEGAN; GRICE; and That's ERIC. At the pragmatic level, such utterances never function as control acts, rather they occur in acts of naming, identifying and describing. At the non-verbal level, such uses tend to occur with pointing gestures and with reference to the photos of the children.

Considering the child's use of 'own name' from the perspective of marking agentivity and deviations there from, it can be suggested that the view of the Self here deviates from prototypical agency by making no reference to the experiential notions of control and volition. The view of Self is referential and much more objective.

Several important issues are raised by the child's use of the nominal form, in particular whether its use contrasts not only with each of the individual pro-forms previously discussed, but also with the pro-forms as a kind of sub-system. Clearly such issues are worthy of further consideration, though they must remain the topic of a later discussion. At this point though I'd like to make some concluding comments.

5. CONCLUDING COMMENTS: It should be made clear that the findings that children make use of several Self reference forms before they regularly refer to Others is not a novel finding. Several researchers have made similar observations (cf. Loveland, 1984 for review). In this paper, I have been arguing that the use of Self reference forms at a time when children rarely refer to Others represents the children's systematic attempts to linguistically distinguish between their role as prototypical agent - that is an agent acting as a volitional causer, and particular deviations from such a prototype. The claim here has been that the children's use of the Self reference forms is part of the children's attempts to build grammatical systems in which various forms contrast with one another. Thus the relations discussed here are not merely ones of individual forms and their functions, but rather the inter-relationships that exist and actually govern the organization of multiple forms.

There has been a more general point implicitly running throughout this paper. This concerns the way we've treated notions such as agents, experiencers and patients in child language research. There has been a great tendency to deal with such notions as if they were discrete categories for the child. In keeping with recent attempts in

the linguistic literature to relate the notion of prototype to issues of language, it is my belief that we must begin considering such notions as consisting of several related semantic and pragmatic parameters organized in terms of event schemes. As I've tried to point out here, the interesting questions really begin when we consider not only how children talk about prototypical agents, but more so how they linguistically treat deviations from the agentivity prototype.

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