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Abstract: This investigation traces the ontogeny of the use of “I” and how its symbolic use promotes imaginative thinking. Peirce's triadic system is contrasted with Vygotsky's binary system to highlight the import of Thirdness in characterizing the ontogeny of person deictics within conversational roles. Person deictics, such as “I”, are first indexes. Later when their social function/meaning is apprehended, they serve as symbols as well; still later they are used psychologically in self to self monologues, and acquire distinctive interpretants when used unconventionally. Early indexical uses of “I” are non-symbolic – “I” referring to self only absent recognition of conversational roles. “I” is employed symbolically when its referent shifts and when its invariant meaning (speaker) is apprehended. Person deictics enhance the emergence of imagination when the symbolic use transcends their inter-psychological regulation through human to human conversation to their intra-psychological function in self to self discourse. Extension of functional roles (speaker/listener) to dolls/puppets (in representational play scenarios) constitutes an extended use of the symbolic function because inanimates cannot assume conversational roles; and such use triggers the association of different interpretants to the category of deictic use. The symbolic use of “I” as speaker facilitates apprehension of self as object, which is a major determinant of when in ontogeny children extend the use of person deictics from Dynamic to Final interpretants.

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