From speech with others to speech for self:  
A case study of “externalized drama”  

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Speakers use language to present themselves.  
Eve V. Clark (2003, p. 352)

[Children can and do affect one another’s talk in complex ways, away from adult supervision, models, or intrusion.  
Marjorie Harness Goodwin and Charles Goodwin (1987, p. 227)

Abstract

The chapter is a case study of a particular kind of speech-for-self produced by a preschool-aged girl, characterized as “externalized dramas.” Unlike most such records of vocalized thought, this speech is not involved with guiding ongoing behavior, but rather with acting out problems of interpersonal relations with peers. Using two or more voices in dialog, the speech is full of insults and denials, claims and counter-claims, promises, excuses—all of the continuing struggles to define social roles and one’s own position. Externalized dramas practice and refine pragmatic devices of prosody, lexicon, and speech acts, while dealing with underlying problems of emotional states, violence, fantasy and reality, and other minds. It is suggested that audible inner speech goes inward to become silent speech that continues to be concerned with social dynamics and individual status and roles.

As Eve Clark has often pointed out, “social interaction is essential to the process of acquisition” (Clark, 2004, p. 472). Her studies of early language development have illuminated the role of caregiver–child interaction in the development of grammar and lexicon. The invitation to contribute a chapter in Eve’s honor in a book entitled Language in interaction has led me back to the Berkeley-Stanford work of the 1960s on the development of “communicative competence” (Slobin, 1967) and to some unusual data that I’ve wanted to work on for a very long time. I present these data to Eve, who has been an intellectual and personal friend ever since that era, helping to guide the way toward understanding of how we learn to talk and how language works.

The data I present here reflect another kind of social interaction—discussions and disputes between children. The skills to be acquired here are pragmatic, in addition to grammatical and semantic.
Consider two examples of how young children confront each other through speech. The first is from Brenneis and Lein (1977, p. 59) and is between two first-grade boys. The second is from my own data, in the voices of two 4-year-old girls.

(1) CHILD A: Give that ball, you little. . . .
CHILD B: No.
CHILD A: Give me that ball. [grabs ball]
CHILD B: You give me that ball back.
CHILD A: No.
CHILD B: You give me it. Give me that ball. [grabs ball]
CHILD A: Give it.
CHILD B: No.
CHILD A: Yes, I got it first.
CHILD B: I got the ball.
CHILD A: Give me it.
CHILD B: No, I got it.
CHILD A: Yes.
CHILD B: No.

(2) CHILD A: I just dropped something.
CHILD B: What did you drop? Gimme it. It’s mine.
CHILD A: No it’s not.
CHILD B: Yes it is. It’s mine, mine.
CHILD A: Remember I had it? Remember that time? I had it? I loved it so much. Remember?
CHILD B: [sarcastic laugh]
CHILD A: Remember that time? I loved it so much. Remember? That time?
CHILD B: Mm-mm [negative intonation], I don’t.
CHILD A: Well, do!

I said that the second example is “in the voices” of two girls. That is because there was only one child in the room, my 4-year-old daughter. Yet the structure of the two dialogs is strikingly similar. My study was next to her room, and one afternoon, when she was age 4;3, I heard two voices coming from her room. She frequently played there with a girl friend who lived across the street, but I hadn’t heard anyone come into the house. So I went quietly to her door and looked in, and there was only one child there, sitting at her table, engrossed in drawing, and talking out loud in two different voices. I asked her if there was someone there and she was startled. She had been completely lost in drawing and had no idea that she had been speaking out loud. The speaking and the drawing were unrelated in content. Being a psycholinguist parent of that era, it was 1971, I placed a microphone in her room and recorded a number of such episodes, as well as interactions with her actual girl friend and with her mother and me. In addition, I had been keeping a daily diary since before she was 2. The diary indicates the beginning of “a flowering of imaginary play” about a year earlier, first noted at 3;3. And by 3;5 I noted: “Beginning of explicit role-playing games. These games consist of talking to herself, often for 5-10 minutes.” At 3;6: “Much dialog play—taking two parts—especially in moral discussions with self. Concerned with ‘good’

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1 The data are from my daughter, Heida Shoemaker, recorded at age 4;3 in 1971. She and Eve knew each other at that time, actually meeting in Prague in 1969; Heida has generously allowed me to use these data, in 2012, as a presentation to Eve and our colleagues. Heida has approved this paper, which presents personal information about her early childhood. (Her emerging metalinguistic awareness is discussed in Slobin (1978).)
and ‘bad’.” Thus it was clear that by the time I started to make recordings, these sorts of audible inner dialogues—I’ll call them “externalized dramas”—had been well established. They had apparently begun a few months after she started attending preschool, where she was thrust into daily interactions with other children.

These externalized dramas provide a rare window into outer voices that may well become inner voices. Eventually the audible “speech for self” becomes silent inner speech. The goal of this little case study is to explore functions of inner speech that have not received much attention in the literature.

Functions of Inner Speech

Speech for self has been examined at two periods of language development: early crib speech (Kuczaj, 1983; Nelson, 1989; Weir, 1962) and later private speech (Piaget, 1923, 1962; Vygotsky, 1934; Winsler et al., 2009). Crib speech, as the designation indicates, reflects early attempts to control the phonology and morphosyntax of the language heard during the day, along with attempts to make sense of behavioral and moral contexts structured by adult caregivers. Private (“egocentric”) speech has been studied in preschool and kindergarten settings, where children speak out loud in the presence of others to regulate their own activities. Both research traditions are concerned with the internalization of speech that the child hears—primarily the speech of caregivers and teachers. In our adult heads we talk to ourselves using distillations of the messages we received from adult guides and critics.

Externalized dramas, as I will attempt to show, reflect other voices—the voices that come from the child’s peers. This is the world of social interaction that is central in the development of identity. Social dramas continue to be played out on the silent stage of the mind. This theme appears again and again in George Herbert Mead’s seminal work, Mind, self and society” (1934): “He [the child] becomes a self in so far as he can take the attitude of another and act toward himself as others act” (p. 171). The two epigraphs to this chapter, from Eve Clark and from the Goodwins, underline this social and socializing role of language. Peer speech deals with themes of acceptance and rejection, hierarchy, praise and criticism, social control. It is full of insults and denials, claims and counter-claims, promises, excuses—all of the continuing struggles to define social roles and one’s own position. In this workshop the child learns the speech pragmatics of the culture, using the basic tools of phonology, morphosyntax, and prosody developed earlier. Interactive discourse gives the child the tools to construct both a social language and a self.

Katherine Nelson (2012), in a recent paper that looks back on her detailed study of the crib speech of a much younger girl, Emily, provides a characterization that can also be applied to Heida’s verbal enactments: “I am proposing here that the main purpose served in Emily’s use of private speech for self was making sense of the new views of reality that language use offered through exchange of speech with others, especially realities of the social world” (p. 1). This is what Heida was concerned about in this period: making sense of the social world, but in her case it was the new social world of peers rather than family. Nelson notes that this kind of private speech is “private in a double sense, (1) being addressed to the self (2) in a private situation with no one else present. It is not unusual for such speech to also occur when children are playing alone, a situation that has rarely been studied as such, although it is known to occur frequently” (p. 2).

The data from Heida allow us to examine both the forms of imaginary dialog and their content. Both form and content co-constitute emerging pragmatic competence—its tools and dominant themes. And, as we will see, the patterns of solitary dialogs mirror what is reported in the literature of child discourse, going back to the classic volumes of Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan (1977) and Ochs and Schieffelin (1979). The forms are conversational acts and narrative forms: assertion and denial, threats
and insults, reconciliations and reciprocity. There are also speech acts directed at the self as “the other.” The dominant contents for Heida were explorations of causes of emotional states and dealing with “the dark side”: violence, killing and death. Let us first examine form, and then content.

**Forms of Conversational Acts in the Externalized Dramas**

A convenient unit of analysis is John Dore’s “Conversational Act Unit,” defined as “an utterance in a person’s turn at speaking in conversation which conveys information and expresses an attitude (intention, expectation, belief, etc.) relative to that information” (Dore, 1979, p. 342). The conversational acts of the externalized dramas tend to be moves in arguments. The turn-taking is rapid, marked by alternations of voice quality. Changes in pitch and timbre give the illusion of hearing two, and sometimes three different speakers. There is rarely any uncertainty, in transcription, in assigning conversational acts to separate speakers. And unlike the difficulty of transcribing child interaction, there can, of course, be no overlap, since there is only one person speaking the different parts. Arguments escalate, with chains of assertions and denials, peppered with insults and threats, as described for children’s disputes by Brenneis and Lein (1977; Lein & Brenneis, 1978) and many others. Moral judgments are frequent. Narratives are rare, making this speech different from the crib narratives reported by Weir (1962) and Nelson (1989). These are not reminiscences of the day’s events, but rather generalized “scripts” of preschool interaction, augmented by fantasy drama that exceeds everyday events.

**Assertion and Denial**

Examples (1) and (2) include alternations of assertions and denials. Brenneis and Lein (1977, p. 56) call such sequences “inversion”: “Successive statements may be drawn in turn from a category and its inverse, or … from a category and one other category which represents a denial or negation.” They give the following as an example:

(3) (a) 
DAVE: I am, you dumb-dumb.
LARRY: I’m not no dumb-dumb, dodo.
DAVE: Yes, you are
LARRY: No, I’m not.
DAVE: Yes, you are.
LARRY: No, I’m not.

The following example, in two of Heida’s voices at 4;3, shows the same structure. Second-person charges are answered by first-person denials, with predicate ellipsis and appropriate matching of affirmative and negative auxiliary forms—what Goodwin and Goodwin call “format tying”: “ways in which return moves tie to the detailed structure of the talk that they are opposing” (1987, p. 205). And as is typical of both enacted and real disputes, the interchanges escalate, with contrasting stress on the appropriate lexical items and eventual reduction to a repeated series of negative interjections.

(3) (b) 
VOICE A: You’re my friend? Are you?
VOICE B: Nope.
VOICE A: You were.
VOICE B: No I wasn’t.
VOICE A: Yes you were.
VOICE B: No I wasn’t.
VOICE A: Were.
VOICE B: No I wasn’t.
VOICE A: Yes you were.
VOICE B: No I wasn’t. I said, no I wasn’t.
VOICE A: You were.
VOICE B: Nuh-uh.
VOICE A: Uh-huh.
VOICE B: Mm-mm.
VOICE A: Uh-huh.
VOICE B: Uh-uh.

**Threats**

Voice A terminates this fruitless interchange with a threat: “You do then you’ll be dead! Dead!” Lein and Brenneis (1978) make use of the same category in their study of children’s disputes in three cultures, giving the example: “I’ll kill you.” Threats are frequent as a conversational act of last resort in Heida’s externalized dramas. In the following example, the threat follows a prolonged bout of liking and hating. As soon as mutual liking is established, Voice B turns on Voice A with threats of violence.

(4)  (a) VOICE A: Do you like me?
VOICE B: Yes.
VOICE A: OK, then I like you.
VOICE B: Heh-heh. OK. Um, you know what I will do to you? Kill you.
VOICE A: Well then, I don’t like you.
VOICE B: Then I don’t like you. I will kill you.
VOICE A: Ohhh. I like you.
VOICE B: Then I like you. I won’t kill you.

Having achieved the desired goal of mutual liking, Voice B goes on to a different play bout, saying: “Good. C’mere, tuck in my little girl.”

Threats are also noted in the diary, though they don’t continue as an escalation between parent and child, as they do between peers. At 3;5 she said to her father:

(4)  (b) You be nice to me or I won’t be nice to you. If you don’t be nice to me very time I will hit you every time.

**Insults**

Example (3a), from Brenneis & Lein, is built on insults: “dumb-dumb,” “dodo.” Heida’s externalized dramas also contain insults of various sorts: “dumb-dumb,” “punkin’ head,” “crybaby.” When she was first in preschool, at an earlier age (3;4), the diary notes her concern with insults between children: “Why Nicky says it to Jess: ‘you idiot’?” And she reports her own use of insults, along with threats: “I call Nicky ‘idiot’ sometimes when I make him dead.” And she gives her parents this succinct summary of preschool interactions: “Then what happened was somebody came and pinched me. This whole thing goes again and again. The boys hit the girls then the girls hit the boys then the boys hit the girls.” Clearly, the insults and threats in the externalized dramas are modeled on preschool interchanges rather than interactions with adult caregivers.

**Agreement, reconciliation, reciprocity**

Unlike reports in the literature of children’s disputes, Heida’s imaginary characters are not always irreconcilable antagonists and rivals. Conflicts are sometimes resolved in various ways, as in the following examples.
(5)  (a) VOICE A: I don’t want you to.
    VOICE B: OK, I won’t.

(5)  (b) VOICE A: I can’t do this one. I’m gonna do this one later. OK?
    VOICE B: OK, do it later.

There is an underlying normative sense of reciprocity and its violation. The following two voices each rely on an unstated assumption that affective states between two individuals should be in balance: you feel something towards me and I feel the same towards you (note the appropriate contrastive stress on pronouns in this example).

(5)  (c) VOICE A: I hate you.
    VOICE B: I don’t hate you. Why d’you hate me if I don’t hate you?
    VOICE A: Because I don’t like you and you don’t like me.
    VOICE B: I like you.
    VOICE A: Do you?
    VOICE B: Yeah.
    VOICE A: Yeah? Then I like you too.

Conversational acts of reciprocity are based on an if…then structure. The diary notes “beginning of reciprocity” at 3;3, with a prototypical conversational act of this type, addressed to her father: “If I give you a bite of mine, you give me a bite of yours.” At 3;4 it was generalized to affective states, at the same time that Heida began to speak of preschool experiences: “If you be nice to me, I will be nice to you.” “If you get mad at me, I will get mad at you.” A month later, at 3;5, she turned the if…then construction into a corresponding X…so Y. She reported a preschool interaction, with an appropriate double negative: “I like him, so he can’t not be nice to me.” And at 4;3, the time of the recordings of externalized dramas, she made the entire structure evident in a conversational act directed to her father: if not X, then not Y; if X then Y — “If you don’t be nice to me, I won’t be nice to you. If you be nice to me, I’ll be nice to you.”

**Self as referent**

Various types of conversational act place Heida in the grammatical role third- person referent. Sometimes this is done by explicit naming, in which both voices refer to “Heida,” one as her antagonist and one as her supporter.

(6)  (a) VOICE A: Don’t ever play with Heida then.
    VOICE B: Uh, sometimes play with Heida.

Another type of sequence introduces a third voice who seems to intervene on Heida’s behalf. This interchange follows directly on the dialog in (5c), repeating the last utterance here. The three voices are audibly distinct in voice quality, with the Voice C speaking at a lower pitch. Both Voice B and Voice C refer to the speaker of Voice A in the third person.

(6)  (b) VOICE A: Yeah? Then I like you too.
    VOICE B: Hey, but I don’t like you.
    VOICE C: Well, that’s my friend. I’m a people and this is my house.
    VOICE B: Oh yeah, but I still don’t like her. Sorry, but I still don’t like her. Anyway, OK?
VOICE C: OK, you never like [unclear].
VOICE B: I sometimes like her. But not right now.

Heida can also be the object of praise. First the voice seems to be guiding an activity—a commonly reported function of speech for self. Finally she has completed a project and is evaluating her work, using a single voice in a sequence without an interlocutor. Note the switch from first-person agent to an oblique self-reference as me.

(6) (c) I did this one already. It’s nice of me. This one is ready. There, I did that one already.

Outside observer as critical voice

Sometimes an apparent outside observer criticizes a participant. In the following bout, the criticism is voiced in the third person, and is responded to with a challenge to the observer, addressed in the second person. And then the dispute can descend into first-person statements. These interchanges may well be modeled on preschool scenes in which children make third-person critical comments about others. The following segment, from 3;4, suggests that the challenger, Voice A, is Heida and the third person being commented on is someone else, or perhaps another part of Heida.

(7) (a) VOICE A: She doesn’t know all those things. She doesn’t know anything.
VOICE B: You’re wrong. She doesn’t know anything and you don’t know anything.
VOICE A: I know lots. I know some things. Mama knows lots of things. Papa doesn’t know any.

In a long sequence at the same age, Heida is making something that breaks and the critic gives guidance and then criticism. Here the externalized drama has similarities to Vygotsky’s (1934) discussions of inner speech, in which the outside voice of a teacher or parent becomes the child’s inner voice, moving, as he put it, from interpersonal to intrapersonal. (However, the externalized speech recorded here does not have the elliptical quality that, according to Vygotsky, characterizes inner speech.) The following gives the highlights (Heida is Voice A and the guide/critic is Voice B).

(7) (b) VOICE A: Breaked
VOICE B: But, if you do it slowly [drawn out] it won’t break, but if you do it that way it will break.
VOICE A: I’ma do it slowly and it won’t break. I’ma try it. [It apparently breaks again and Voice B gives the same critique, with more emphasis. This cycle repeats several times. After a while, Heida apparently does it quickly, and it breaks again—but now the advice seems have shifted to fast rather than slow action.]
[...] Did it fast, then it broke. Pretty fast anyway. Did it pretty fast.
VOICE B: Not at all fast. Not at all fast. Sorry, but not at all fast. Not at all, not at all fast. Sor-ry. Not.
VOICE A: I am really sorry, really, really sorry. But just can’t.
**Fantasy narratives**

There are no narratives that are simply reports of past experience, but there are occasional fantasy narratives, with word play and free association on the sorts of themes that also occur in the externalized dramas. The following is the most elaborate. It was part of a play telephone conversation with a monkey, who only says “hello,” “OK,” and “bye.” The narrative was apparently based on a real memory, with some reported speech and ending with a moral.

(7)  
VOICE A: Telephone, it goes zero, three, two, one, five, four three, two one, zero. Hi.  
VOICE B: Hello.  
VOICE A: Hi, monkey.  
VOICE B: Hi.  
VOICE A: Remember you could do lots of things? And, um, and you did lots of things for us? Remember that time?  
VOICE B: Yeah.  
VOICE A: But now, our ducks, our dogs. Mickey, Nickey, Blickey, Bickey, Nickey, and, and your chickies are lost. Here’s friend horse. Know what? Don’t never pick this up cause, um, never pick this up cause it might chip and break. And Jenny gave it to me and it’s very fragile. Once a little kid wanted to play with this and I said “no” and he cried. And my papa came up and said, “What’s wrong?” And I said, “Well, he was gonna play with this and this is very- careful, have to be very careful with this.” And um, so, and um, so, when little people come over, don’t let them come over. Cause they might break this. OK? Cause they woosly come from- from in the monkey. So when you let- when somebody comes from that crack, you say, “Don’t hit that!” And then I’ll be happy. OK?  
VOICE B: I will do it.  
VOICE A: Always do that when somebody comes up and I’m not here or else when I am here. OK?  
VOICE B: OK. Bye.

**Contents of Conversational Acts: Dominant Themes**

The preceding examples have shown that many forms of dialog were established in this period and that Heida was actively engaged in contrasting fantasy and reality, using a range of grammatical constructions and rhetorical devices. At the same time, the examples cited from externalized dramas strikingly reveal major concerns of this 3–5 age range: coping with positive and negative emotions, affiliation and rejection, promises and reciprocity, fears of loss and injury, killing and death. These themes are also found in diary notes of the same period. Conversations with parents anticipate and echo the inner dialogs that go on in the child’s mind.

**Exploration of causes of emotional states**

She was concerned with why people have the feelings they do, sometimes adding her own moral judgments. The diary records often indicate an emerging self-awareness. And there are striking early generalizations over these reflections, reflected in generic “when” statements and modifications with “sometimes.”
(10) (a) When I’m sad I do bad things because I don’t like it, and sometimes I get tired. (3;3)

(10) (b) [discussing bad people, I point out: “Nobody’s bad all the way through.”] Everybody’s bad I know. [=Everybody that I know is bad.]

(10) (c) When people doesn’t come in the door, I’m not shy and when people does come I’m shy. (3;4)

(10) (d) Maybe she’s sad because she’s been hit very hard by another person. (3;5)

(10) (e) [to mother] I was happy but I am now sad because papa’s been shouting at me and you been shouting at me. (3;6) [note the contrast of generic past was, present am now, and extended recent past been shouting]

(10) (f) I feel like tearing up something. I really feel like tearing up it. (3;4)

(10) (g) [to father] You’re not promising to be nice to me [=not keeping your promise]. (4;5)

Concerns, with violence, killing, and death

We’ve already seen these concerns acted out as threats in internalized dramas. At home, she reports that she is afraid of physical attacks from other children. At 3;4, commenting on a boy who was a neighbor and preschool friend:

(11) (a) FATHER: Do you want to see Jess tomorrow?
HEIDA: No.
FATHER: Why?
HEIDA: Cause I’m afraid of Jess. He hits me.

Threats of violence were part of play at home. For example, at the same age, she made pictures and then tore them out, and shot at magazine pictures with imaginary guns.

(11) (b) Let’s make mama dead. Let’s make somebody dead. Let’s kill them because they’re sad and they want to be dead.

At 3;5 the diary notes: “for about the past two months, frequent preoccupation with death and fear of being killed.” In a discussion about killing, she says she’s afraid of being killed by a cop:

(11) (c) I don’t want to shoot him because then he will shoot me.

Precursors: Foundations of fantasy play

The fantasy of externalized drama is well-grounded in developments from early in symbolic life, as documented in detail by Piaget (1945) and many other investigators of cognitive, linguistic, and social development. In the year before the first recordings of externalized drama at 4;3, there are numerous diary notes documenting concern with pretense and counterfactuals, as well as evidence for awareness of inner speech and the contents of other minds.
Pretense: fantasy, and reality

As already mentioned, fantasy and role play were first noted in the diary at age 3;3. At 3;4 she began to play around with relations between words and things.

(8)  (a)  I wanna be called “Jess” [name of a friend]. Sometimes Jess can be called Jess and I can be called Jess. I will have two names: Heida and Jess.

And at 3;5 she explicitly referred to the play of changing objects by changing their names as “pretend.” She told her mother that she couldn’t dance because she wasn’t wearing a dress:

(8)  (b)  HEIDA: Call it a dress, please.
        MOTHER: It’s not a dress.
        HEIDA: Tend! [=pretend]

Later, at 4;3, she created a verb for pretending: “You’re make-believing.” And around that time she showed an explicit interest in pretense. At 4;6 she said to me:

(8)  (c)  When I drink orange juice or apple juice like wine I think I’m a grownup—I pretend. [laughs] Funny thing, pretend. Did you do that when you were little?

At 4;8, I entered her room in the midst of a play scenario involving a queen doll who was overseeing piles of things. When I asked what the doll was doing, she clearly explained the play scenario she was setting up, referring to two real friends, Amy and David, who also figured in many of her externalized dramas at that time.

(8)  (d)  See, this is Amy’s pile. I’m pretending David and Amy are here. And this is Amy’s pile. This is my pile. And this is David’s pile. (4;8)

Long before, however, beginning at 3;3, there are indications of a concern with fantasy and reality. The diary records numerous “what if” questions, role-playing games, and even identity shifts. Here are some examples:

(8)  (e)  If I would eat this plate, what would happen? (3;3)

(8)  (f)  What happens if I eat not any food? What happens if I wouldn’t eat any food? (3;4)

And role-playing games were carried out with and without props:

(8)  (g)  This little person wants to go home. This little person doesn’t want to go home. [role-playing game, with props] (3;5)

(8)  (h)  I’m a baby kitty what doesn’t know how to talk. I’m a kitty who only can talk like this: meow, meow. (3;6)

In the midst of this buzzing period of pretense, role-play, and externalized drama, she was trying to work out the borders between fantasy and reality. There is a telling diary note to this effect, from age 4;8: “She enjoys attempts to deceive us, and comes up with questions beginning with ‘Do you think…’,
expecting us to take the wrong option. But she isn’t good at it, and can’t understand how we can tell which option is true.”

**Awareness of inner voice and other minds**

During this period there were indications that she was explicitly aware of mental processes. At 3;4 she talked about her own inner voice:

(9) (a) I said to myself, “I want my mama and my papa to play with me.” (3;4)

At 3;10 inner speech apparently includes self-directives and assertions of autonomy:

(9) (b) I wanna wear those things that I tell myself to do. (3;10)

She even seemed to show an awareness of her mind and other minds, as reflected in this rather surrealistic assertion at 4;8:

(9) (c) I’m the bosser in my room. I’m the bosser in your head. I’m the bosser in everyone’s head—everywhere—except in my ogubohagu.

**Discussion**

The literature on children’s “private speech” or “speech for self” in this age range is generally concerned with the executive function, as realized through verbal self-regulation, focusing on the planning and imperative functions of speech as instrumental in cognitive development. This focus is clear in the title of a recent book by Winlser et al. (2009): *Private speech, executive function, and the development of verbal self-regulation*. As Vygotsky saw it, these functions begin interpersonally, becoming intrapersonal—“from the social to the individual” (1962, p. 20). When Piaget first encountered Vygotsky’s posthumous work, in 1962, he reported that he shared Vygotsky’s view with regard to the cognitive functions of speech for self, summarizing that “this interiorized language can serve … logical thinking” (Piaget, 1962, p. 7). Heida’s externalized dramas, however, do not seem to be on their way inward in the service of logical thinking or the learning of scientific concepts in school, though they may play a role in some kinds of self-regulation.

Piaget had another interest in children’s quarrels—namely, as functional in bringing the child to decenter: “It may well be through quarreling that children first come to feel the need for making themselves understood” (1955, p. 83). And, in his response to Vygotsky: “…it is precisely co-operation with others … that teaches us to speak ‘according’ to others and not simply from our own point of view” (1962, p. 8). This is, in fact, close to the position of George Herbert Mead, quoted above: “The taking or feeling of the attitude of the other toward yourself is what constitutes self-consciousness” (1934, p. 171).

All of this may be true—exercising executive function, taking the point of view of the other, re-narrating experiences in order to grasp their temporal and causal structure—but these do not seem to be the salient functions of externalized drama. In the practice of externalized drama, Heida was learning, and practicing, types of conversational moves. When these become skilled, she will be able to run through them silently. She will be able to experience a challenge and try out counter-challenges; she will be able to imagine threats and insults and responses to them. The expertise developed in the dramas provides a flexibility for eventually trying out moves internally. The dialogs are different from regulatory speech for self, in which one part of the self talks to another. What emerges here is the ability to mentally create “story-boards” and see where they might lead. Heida’s brief period of externalized dramatic interactions have let us listen in on the work of the script writer. The analogy to stage drama provides a
conception of this variety of speech for self as part of the development of social interaction. At the same time, it shows emerging control of a range of sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills.

Where do these externalized dramas go as the child grows older? In addition to the ways in which the speech of others moves inward and becomes speech for self, inner speech in several voices provides the child with a private stage on which to re-enact and attempt to master complex worlds of social interaction. The child not only speaks to herself in different voices, but echoes the interplay of voices of daily life with other children. There is no “input” here in the classic sense of caregiver speech—that is, there is no internalization of structures and routines received from adults—but there is the input of “sociolinguistic texts” co-produced with peers. On the stage of inner conversation, the child works to reconcile competing voices, to overcome her fears, to establish her own social identity. Do we continue to act out internalized dramas as adults? To some extent this must be true, but—except, perhaps, for playwrights and novelists—our dramas have less fantasy, less make-believe. Or, at least, this seems to be true of conscious listening to inner voices. The voices of dreams, and the voices that are evoked by some kinds of therapy and altered states, show that the dramas of the 4-year-old have not been totally replaced by logical reasoning, planning, and self-regulation. But here we would have to leave psycholinguistics and sociolinguists—the expertise of this volume—and move to the unfamiliar territory of Bakhtin’s (1981) “polyphonic novels,” Hubert Hermans’ (2011) Dialogical Self Theory, Jungian psychology, and no doubt more. Such a trip is not on our itinerary, but it is valuable to at least look at the map and think about different functions of adult inner speech. Hermans (2003, p. 94) gives us a glimpse of the journey not taken in this paper: “The Bakhtinian speaker is not the origin of abstract thinking or analytical thought, so typical of the Cartesian Cogito, but is involved in exterior and interior dialogues in which emotions are expressed in intonations and virtual gestures. The words of other people, invested with indignation, anger, doubt, anxiety, or pleasure, enter interior dialogues and create an ‘inner society of voices’ that, in its oppositions, agreements, disagreements, negotiations, and integrations, does not, in essence, differ from the communications in the outside world.”

In concluding, it is time to bring all of these considerations, all of these intriguing bits of data, back to Eve Clark’s lifelong mission in exploring how children acquire language. In her monumental guide to the field, with its straightforward title, First language acquisition (2003), she lays out the issues of “social dimensions” that are addressed in the sorts of real and imagined conversations discussed here:

Conversation provides a forum for using language. It displays language embedded in larger systems for communication and so should present children with critical material for making sense of language as they try to understand others and make themselves understood. Conversational exchanges … should also be a forum for learning to become a member of the society and the culture (p. 7).

References


