The Pragmatics of Children’s Pronoun Comprehension and Usage
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**Topic:** This paper will examine children’s comprehension and usage of third-person pronouns as vehicles for reference in their everyday discourse. Children often start by omitting many pronouns in their speech, whether that be replaced by the already-mentioned noun or eliminated altogether. Eventually, their pronoun use becomes more adult-like and they begin to use pronouns more frequently and more correctly. I will examine how their pronoun usage changes over time as they mature and their speech becomes more adult-like.

**Example:** In [1], the child appears to use and comprehend pronouns just as an adult would by replacing the word “campfire” with the pronoun “it.” However, in [2], the child eliminates the pronoun at the beginning of the exclamation, one that would be used in adult speech.

   CAR: what does a campfire do?
   CHI: sets on fire.
   CAR: what does it feel like?
   CHI: it feels like flaming hot

[2] CHILDES: Eng-NA/Weist/emi02.cha (2;6.20)
   CHI: goes up to the sky
   CAR: what goes up to the sky?

**Methodology:** I will use two spoken English databases to collect data. First, I will use CHILDES to collect pronoun usage data from various English-speaking children’s conversations with English-speaking adults. Second, I will use the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English to collect data from normal, everyday English-speaking adult conversation to use as a comparison to the children’s speech. In both sources, I will look for examples of pronouns used by the subjects specifically for the purpose of referencing some entity in the discourse or in their environment. I will also look for examples of times where the full noun phrase was used in place of where a pronoun could have gone to see a lack of pronoun usage.

**Significance of this phenomenon:** This phenomenon is important because it contributes to a greater understanding of children’s language acquisition. This topic goes beyond the phonology and semantics of acquisition, but truly tests what children are able to understand beyond just the words. By studying this topic, we can gain a better idea of when children’s entire system of reference comprehension grows to resemble that of a fully competent adult.

**Bibliography**