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From delayed immediate imitation through metadialogue to play

A Vygotskian perspective¹

Abstract:

Vygotskij argued that thinking and speech have different genetic roots. During the first year of life the child's intellectual development takes place independently of speech, on a preverbal level, while speech develops without any direct relationship to thinking, on a pre-intellectual level. The child communicates feelings and wishes, not ideas. At about two years of age, however, the child's pre-intellectual vocalisations begin to cooperate with his practical thinking, indicating that thinking becomes verbal and speech becomes intellectual.

From this crucial point in the developmental process, thinking and speech intersect. The unit which makes co-operation possible is word meaning, which Vygotskij claimed is a phenomenon of both speech and intellect. Word meaning is a phenomenon of thinking to the extent that thought is connected with the word and embodied in it. It is a phenomenon of speech to the extent that speech is connected with thought and illuminated by it. Word meaning is a phenomenon of verbal thought or of the meaningful word, and is a unity of word and thought.

However, word meaning is inconstant. It is not static but a dynamic formation. According to Vygotskij word meaning changes during the child's development and with different modes of the functioning of thought, a discovery that Vygotskij saw as one of his fundamental contributions to the theory of thinking and speech. The child, therefore, cannot discover word meaning once and for all at the age of two, Vygotskij claimed. He has to discover it over and over, on different levels and in different contexts. When the child first learns a new word, the development of its meaning is therefore not completed, but has only just begun.

In my paper I will discuss how word meaning develops and changes. I will not address this question on a general basis, however, but restrict my discussion to how children in role-play develop their command of language, taking the child's egocentric speech in delayed imitation as my point of departure. As Vygotskij did not address the problem of speech development in play explicitly, at least in his one and only essay on play, the challenge I will try to meet is to reconstruct a Vygotskian argument on role-play based on his more general perspective. I will do this by considering two kinds of dialogue, which appear in role-play as closely tied to the child's imitation of significant adults. Further, I will consider the two kinds of dialog as an indication of functional differentiation, a principle of explanation Vygotskij preferred in his latest manuscripts. In this way I hope to show that role-play is a most powerful mechanism as far as the development of word meaning and speech is concerned.

¹ The paper is written within a project about Vygotskij funded by The Norwegian Research Council

Memory in action or imitation

I must emphasise that my argument in this paper is tentative. Let me start by pointing out what Vygotskij considers to be some important initial characteristics of play:

“There is very little of the imaginary. It is an imaginary situation, but it is only comprehensible in the light of a real situation that has just occurred. Play is more nearly recollections of something that has actually happened than imagination. It is more memory in action than a novel imaginary situation” (Vygotsky 1978:103, italics, TOE).²

Thus children’s initial play can be understood primarily as an expression of their memory of a real event, which has just occurred.³ We may also state that: «The activity is directly dependent upon the individual’s experiences, and the extent and degree of variation of these experiences ... » (Vygotsky 1972:29-30, Lindqvist 1995:46, italics TOE).⁴ This presupposes that the event is called to mind – necessarily – as memory in action, not as an independent internal conception, the reason being that the child initially cannot memorise without acting at the same time. At this age: “Internal and external actions are inseparable: imagination, interpretation, and will are the internal processes in external action.” (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:550, Italics TOE). This may be connected to the hypotheses that the infant’s mental life can be described as: “...a system of instinctive consciousness developing under the dominating action of affects and drives (Vygotsky 1932 / 1998, C.W. volume 5:chap. 7:226, Italics TOE).⁵ Children’s play is thus best characterised as memory in action.

What the child imitates is events

In my opinion, initial play may thus also be understood as delayed imitation. Stating this, we have to emphasise, however, that what the child initially imitates is an event, or rather an experience, not a person, at least not directly. Imitation is the child’s subjective or perspectivised version of an objective event. Vygotskij states this point by suggesting that the child does not just symbolise in his early play: “...this is play, and not symbolism (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547).⁶ Instead of symbolising, the child “...wishes and realizes his wishes by letting the basic categories of reality pass through his experiences, ... (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:550). Even in this perspective, however, we can claim that the child reconstructs through memory in action, because: “The child, in wishing, carries out his wishes;” and (...) “...in thinking, he acts.” (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:550). This argument confirms the idea that the child imitates an experience, but suggests at the same time that the child is not consciously aware of this. At this point of development imitation is a spontaneous process rooted in affect.

This point may be developed from Vygotskijs conception of why the child is wishing (or imitating):

”From the viewpoint of the affective sphere, it seems to me that play is invented at the point when unrealizable tendencies appear in development. (...) Towards the

² Vygotsky, L.S.: *Mind in Society. The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press 1978.

³ I think we should interpret play here in accordance with Vygotskijs own conception, see below. Vygotskij does not make his comment thinking of children’s earliest playlike actions.

⁴ Lindqvist, G.: *The Aesthetics of Play. A Didactic Study of Play and Culture in Preschools*. Acta Universitatis Upsalensis. Uppsala 1995

⁵ Chapter 7 in *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, volume 5 Child Psychology. Edited by Robert W. Rieber. New York and London: Plenum Press 1998:207-242

⁶ Vygotsky, L.S.: Play and its role in the mental development of the child. In: Bruner, J. S., Jolly, A. & Sylva. K.: *Play – Its Role in Development and Evolution*. Penguin Books 1976:537-554

beginning of pre-school age, unsatisfied desires and tendencies that cannot be realized immediately make their appearance, while the tendency to immediate fulfilment of desires, characteristic of the preceding stage, is retained. For example, the child wants to be in his mother's place, or wants to be a rider on a horse (Vygotsky 1933/1976:538-39, Italics TOE).

...a child over three will show his own peculiar conflicting tendencies; on the one hand, a large number of long-term needs and desires will appear. Which cannot be fulfilled at once but which, nevertheless, are not passed over like whims; on the other hand, the tendency towards immediate realization of desires are completely retained (Vygotsky 1933/1976:539, Italics TOE).

While the distance between wishing and fulfilment in infancy is very small, in the second year of life, however, the child is expected to postpone satisfaction of needs and show more socially accepted forms of behaviour. Psychoanalytics have therefore suggested that the child plays in order to find indirect satisfaction of needs. Vygotskij is not opposed to this position. But at the same time and in this way he claims that children do find immediate satisfaction.

Thus play emerges from the child's spontaneous wish, his wish to experience the world as the adult does, implying that the child begins to reconstruct experiences after the event has occurred and independently of the adult's immediate participation. When the child plays with dolls, he thus reproduces the actions of his caretakers (Vygotsky 1978c: 69-71, cited after Minick 1987:29).⁷ When the child wishes "...to be in his mother's place, or wants to be a rider on a horse..." he on the one side identifies with the adult, while on the other side he carries out his wishes by reconstruction in action. This confirms both that the child imitates, and that he is not consciously aware of doing so. But at the same time as the child imitates actions, he recreates them in a certain perspective, from a certain point of view, which he tries to reconstruct in the same process.

That the child primarily imitates experiences, and persons only indirectly, is supported by the fact that the infant does not have an independent I, because as Enerstvedt (1982:275)⁸ emphasises, it is only an "I" who can "identify" and pretend to be someone else. Initially the child according to Vygotskij operates within a social contact with the mother which is so close, that we must rather speak of a merged existence than of contact (Vygotsky 1932 / 1998, C.W. vol.5: chapter 7:213).⁹ The child's first consciousness is thus a collective or social "we» that can in no way be compared to the mobile and complex consciousness of a "we" that includes an "I". Such a consciousness emerges only when the child gets older. (Vygotsky 1932 / 1998, C.W. vol.5:chap. 7:233). The infant's life is thus organised so that he is another person. Every relation of the infant to things is a relation accomplished with the help of another person (Vygotsky 1932 / 1998, C.W. vol.5:chap. 7:216). In his merged existence the child's consciousness is therefore characterised by a mental communality which precedes the child's consciousness of his own personality (Vygotsky 1932 / 1998, C.W. bd.5: chapter 7:233).

Even in delayed imitation the child operates within the mental communality with the adult, or rather within its immediate extension, based directly on the child's merged existence with the adult. The child's reconstruction of experiences is therefore closely related to the adult's way of judging phenomena, allowing him to recall the actions only in a certain perspective, and

⁷ Minick, N.: The Development of Vygotsky's Thought. I: Rieber, R.W. & A.S. Carton (Eds.): *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of general psychology*, (Trans. N. Minick). New York: Plenum 1987 (1st ed. in Russian 1934).

⁸ Enerstvedt, R. Th.: *Mennesket som virksomhet (Man as activity)*. Oslo: Tiden 1982.

⁹ Vygotskij refers to H. Wallon, which was even familiar to G.H. Mead.

creating a shared attitude with the adult. This is indicated by the observation that the child's "... thinking (according to Vygotskij) (...) comprises a number of affective-volitional thoughts he expresses in which the intellectual content is secondary (Vygotsky 1933-34,1998, C.W. volume 5:chap. 8:256).¹⁰ By "affective-volitional thoughts" Vygotskij meant that the child in his speech expresses an affective colouring, an affective attitude, an emotional reaction or a volitional tendency corresponding to the adults judgement (Vygotsky 1933-34,1998, C.W. bd.5: chapter 8:256). This is why "...judgement arises in the child's thinking earlier than separate, isolated concepts" (Vygotsky 1934 / 1987:164, italics TOE).¹¹

Thought is not born out of other thoughts. Thought has its origins in the motivating sphere of consciousness, a sphere that includes our inclinations and needs, our interests and impulses, and our affect and emotions. The affective and volitional tendency stands behind thought (Vygotsky 1934 / 1987:282, italics TOE).

A shared perspective

From this argument it may be suggested that the most important aspect of the child's imitation is not that he reconstructs external actions based on experiences. At the same time he also recreates actions in a certain perspective, from a certain point of view, which he however also have to reconstruct, even if he takes it for granted operating within the merged existence. The perspective that the child spontaneously reconstructs in imitation, is therefore the perspective of the adult, growing out of the initial mental communality. While imitating an experience, the child therefore indirectly and subconsciously even imitates the adult's way of conceiving. He establishes a preverbal and preconscous point of view, a perspective that he shares with the adult, long before he develops an "I". It further means that the "I" is differentiated from the "we" of the merged existence.

The shared perspective is therefore social, even if it is preverbal and preconscous. It may further be considered as preceding what Resnick et al. (1991, see Skodvin 1998:247)¹² calls "shared cognition". According to Cole (1991:398, cited after Skodvin 1998:247) "shared cognition" can be interpreted both as experiencing in the same way as someone else, and as a kind of cognitive division of labour. I consider these two interpretations as successive phases, both onto- and microgenetically. In my opinion the shared perspective therefore is a key mechanism in development. It not only helps the child to recollect, but it also allows the experience to be recreated in a certain way, i.e. as memory in action, not only as isolated behaviour or activity.¹³ But most important, the shared perspective is also the main

¹⁰ Chapter 8 in *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, volume 5 Child Psychology. Edited by Robert W. Rieber. New York and London: Plenum Press 1998:Vygotsky 1998, C.W. vol.5: 243 - 260.

¹¹ Vygotsky, L.S.: Thinking and speech. I: Rieber, R.W. & A.S. Carton (Eds.): *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of general psychology*, (Trans. N. Minick). New York: Plenum 1987 (1st ed. in Russian 1934).

¹² Skodvin, A.: Kommunikasjon og kognisjon. Piagets og Vygotskijs syn på voksen-barn-kommunikasjonen i forhold til førskolebarnets kognisjon. En teoretisk drøfting og empirisk konkretisering. Oslo: Pedagogisk forskningsinstitutt, Universitetet i Oslo 1998.

¹³ Leontjew's concept activity (deyatel'nost) is an equivalent to Marx's concept *Tätigkeit*, which according to Leontjew has to be understood in contradiction to *Aktivität* (Veresov 1998:83). In all his texts between 1924 and 1927, however, Vygotskij used *activity* in the sense of *Aktivität*, and not in the sense of *Tätigkeit*. It was not until 1929-30 he began to distinguish between these two senses of activity, when he focused on the role of children's *work* in their mental or intellectual development (Veresov 1998:84). It was thus only in 1929 or 1930 Vygotskij began to consider intellectual development as an *aspect* of the general development of human consciousness and began to consider mental development as a certain aspect of the development of the "mind as a whole". This means that the development of consciousness and the development of personality cannot be reduced to the development of intellectual structures only. In this way Vygotskij differs markedly from Leontjew and other Soviet social realists, and it is doubtful that he may be considered as the founder of activity theory (Veresov

motivating factor as far as imitation is concerned, because it means that events are experienced in an emotional atmosphere that is shared. It is exactly the shared perspective that mobilises the child's memory, and it is the shared perspective that mobilises it as memory in action, and not as pure motor memory.

At this point I will draw the readers attention to the fact that the word act in my dictionary has six different entries, and thus several meaning zones (in English) in addition to the pure motor activity of to do, which may be the most obvious. The meaning zones include deed, work and operation, as well as performance (with its associations to acting on stage and pretension). On this basis I think there is a weak foundation for interpreting the word action as isolated motor activity, which may be reasonable in a behaviourist or even a Piagetian tradition. From a Vygotskian point of view, I think that performance including both motor activity and speech are a better interpretation. Even if the roots are only perspectivised memory in action, action as performance points clearly to the emergence of play at some later stage. It even implies that the speech aspect of memory in action has a communicative content, i.e. an expressive content, although speech at this point is weakly understood semantically. Even this argument will be discussed further below.

Even though the child is unaware that he is imitating, not least that he is imitating from a certain point of view, others may easily observe the perspective inherent in memory in action, especially in the child's speech act. From the outside, it may thus appear like the child is imitating a person. This is a very important argument as far as the emergence of play is concerned, which I will show later.

An imaginary situation

Even if there is "...very little of the imaginary..." play is still "...an imaginary situation..." The conception of this idea requires some elaboration. Let me start by pointing out that the imaginary aspect of memory in action appears quite early, at least from the spectator's point of view. Before the child is two years of age, he can pretend phoning, even if he is dependent on a realistic toy, e.g. a play telephone (Berk & Winsler 1995:55).¹⁴ According to Garvey (1979:54)¹⁵ conventional use of a things is common when the child is about 15. months old. Around the age of two the child can use a less realistic toy (a pivot) and still be able to pretend that it phones, while during the third year of life it can pretend by means of hand movements alone (Berk & Winsler 1995:55).

In all three phases we recognise a pretence aspect, even if it is hardly distinguishable from the child's memory in action. Already when the child is dependent upon a play telephone, he pretends that he phones. The child who can use a less realistic toy, also pretends that he phones, at the same time as he pretends that the object represents something else. This illustrates the observation (see Skodvin 1998:230) that children at the age of two can distinguish between imagination and reality, by pretending in relation to an object. Investigations show that two-year-olds can pretend that they pour water from a pretence - "cup", at the same time as they utilise their knowledge of liquids as well as of cause and effect. Finally, we can say that the child, who phones by means of hand movements, pretends, without any material support. The child can apparently conceive of both objects and events without any direct material support, and operate with them on a pretence level.

1998:85). See Veresov, N: *Vygotsky before Vygotsky. The path to the cultural-historical theory of human consciousness (1917-1927). Historical and methodological analysis.* Oulu: Acta Universitatis Oulensis 1998.

¹⁴ Berk, L.E. & Winsler, A.: *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education.* Washington D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, vol. 7.

¹⁵ Garvey, Catherine: *Lek. Barn i utvikling.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1979. Original edition 1977 edited by J. Bruner, M. Cole and B. Lloyd.

Although it gradually decreases, the child's dependency on memory in action is a common denominator to all three phases, which means that he also imitates in a certain perspective in all phases. But because even the perspective must be reconstructed, even if it is taken for granted, the child does not only recall, he imagines as well. In other words, imagination emerges in – and out of imitation, as a function of imitation being a perspectivising process. Accordingly, memory in action and imagination are two aspects of the same process, imagination supporting itself on memory:

«Imagination is not the antithesis of memory; it supports itself on memory and is using its contents in forever new combinations» (Vygotsky 1972:31, Lindqvist 1995:46, italics TOE).

But memory also presupposes imagination, as memory in action is impossible without some element of imagination being mobilised. This follows from the assumption that the experience is reconstructed in a certain perspective, which is given, but reconstructed at the same time. Thus imagination has to be mobilised in recollection, affecting the nature of memory.

The way the memory material is put into reality shows that imagination is not a simple process. According to Vygotskij imagination is a complex of transformations, distinctions, regroupings, exaggerations and restrictions, creating forever-new combinations and new meanings: «The impressions which originate from reality will alter in nature, grow or shrink in relation to its natural dimensions (Vygotsky 1972:45, Lindqvist 1995:47, italics TOE).

Vygotskij further conceives of imagination as a circular process. First it takes fragments out of reality (memory in action, TOE). These fragments the child tries to understand or give meaning, by transforming them to some subjectively understandable form (based on memory in action, TOE), which is determined by the internal predispositions as well the external experiences. Then the new imagination products are put into reality (Vygotskij 1972:38, Lindqvist 1995:46).

According to Vygotskij imagination has an socio-emotional source (cf. Nicolopoulou 1988 / 1999:429).¹⁶ The special nature of imagination, the kind of passion which a child has for exaggerations, (which also affects memory in action), "...can therefore be traced far, far back ... (to) the influence which our emotion exerts ... of viewing it from an exaggerated angle. (Vygotsky 1972:45, Lindqvist 1995:47, italics TOE). This means that experience is perceived from an exaggerated angle even in memory in action, making memory in action a reconstructive process. In addition it is perceived in a certain perspective. Imitation can accordingly not be reduced to a mechanical copying activity.

Because the child tries to reconstruct an event in action and in a certain perspective, memory in action always implies thinking. According to Vygotskij there exists a very close connection between memory and thinking in the infant (Vygotsky 1978:50): "... to think means to remember...". But imitation at the same time also presupposes imagination. Imagination thus has a thought mobilising power, as Vygotskij states (Vygotskij 1972:38, Lindqvist 1995:46), awakening a special combining activity in the child. This implies that memory in action first mobilises imagination as an emotional process, and then interacts with imagination, making reconstruction an intellectual project.

In the beginning the child's intellectual work in imitation is preverbal, however, taking place independently of speech. It may be compared to the kind of thinking that represents an "...understanding of mechanical connections and the invention of mechanical means for

¹⁶ Ageliki Nicolopoulou: Play, cognitive development, and the social world: Piaget, Vygotsky, and beyond. I: Human Development 36, pp. 1-23, reprinted in Peter Lloyd & Charles Fernyhough (Eds.) *Lev Vygotsky. Critical Assessments*. Volume II, Thought and language. London and New York 1999, Routledge: 419-446.

mechanical ends" (Vygotsky 1934/1987:110), confirming only that «Action (is) subjectively intelligent and consciously purposeful before the appearance of speech.» (Kohler/Vygotsky 1934/1987:110, *Italics TOE*), and that practical and active thinking arise long before the formation of concepts (Vygotsky 1934/1987:164).

From Berk & Winsler's examples it also seems clear, however, that the child's ability to pretend changes, not least in the way that the ability to imagine independent of concrete situations gradually emerges. The function of play is thus transitional – it constitutes an intermediary between the purely situational constraints of early childhood and thought, which is totally free of real situations (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547, *italics TOE*). Through pretence-play the child thus becomes able to differentiate the realm of meaning from the realm of immediate perception, and create a permanent imaginary situation where meaning is dissociated from its objective referents. By giving imagination an opportunity to emerge, play thus prepares the child's abstract "internalised" thinking (Nicolopoulou 1988/1999:430-31). The relation between play and imagination even enable us to understand the relation between cognitive and social development (Vygotsky 1987, cited after Minick 1987:30).

But to distinguish thought from the immediate perception of concrete phenomena is a challenging task, which the child needs a long time to fulfil, as Berk & Winsler's phases clearly illustrates. When the child begins to use a piece of wood as replacement for a doll, or a stick as replacement for a horse, i.e. when the child can replace the realistic toy with a less realistic object, however, something important happens. Vygotskij suggests that this indicate that action is defined by thought (i.e. by stable conceptions of social phenomena) rather than by the immediate perception of the object, (as may be the case when the child is dependent upon a realistic toy in order to recall in action). When the stick becomes a pivot for the child to isolate the meaning "horse", the child therefore begins to operate in accordance with the phenomenon's social meaning. In this way one of the fundamental psychological structures which defines the child's relation to the world is changed, Vygotskij states (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547f.).

In play, therefore, the child is able to reverse the relation between action and meaning (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547ff.), so that meaning will gradually dominate action. The child becomes able to determine action – i.e. his memory in action and his spontaneous imitation – by means of his conception of a real horse, instead of being dependent of a concrete play horse as a stimulus (through spontaneous recognition). On a more general level this means that the child gradually becomes able to look away from the perceptual traits, and behave more in accordance with shared meanings. In this way action is no longer determined from below, by characteristics of the object, but from above, by social rules and norms (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547ff.).

I want to emphasise that Vygotskij perceives meaning as a fraction, i.e. as a relation with a numerator and a denominator, indicating that meaning has a relation to action that is internal. The relation is internal even when action dominates meaning, because the word's meaning exists in relation to experience, and not associated to objects. But this internal relation between action and meaning changes. In the beginning subjective meaning is particular and based on the action's expressive contents, i.e. "...*(to) the influence which our emotion exerts*" (Vygotsky 1972:45, Lindqvist 1995:47, *italics TOE*). Later it becomes more general and related to the cognitive content of action. Initially action determines meaning; i.e. meaning is determined from below. Gradually, however, meaning determines action, i.e. action is determined from above. The reversal occurs when action begins to constitute the (concrete) denominator for the (general) numerator meaning. In this way the numerator meaning has a growing number of somewhat different denominators. To create a concept may thus be compared to the operation of defining a common denominator for several actions. This is done differently in different phases, however, and it requires the generalising function of words.

This further means that action (as opposed to activity) does not exist without meaning, subjectively, and that action therefore cannot be reduced to pure motor activity. But it also implies that meaning (as opposed to the indicative function of words) ontogenetically does not appear without action. Word meanings appearing in play are qualitatively different from relations between the word and the object established earlier, which are associative and external (cf. Vygotsky 1934 / 1987:152). The internal relation is in my opinion a good illustration of the assumption that «The relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a movement from thought to word and from word to thought» (Vygotsky 1934 / 1987:250, italics TOE).

Already when the child depends on a stick in order to think of (imagine) a horse, he can isolate thought from the object. But he cannot isolate thought from real actions with real objects (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547ff.), i.e. not mobilise thought without memory in action. The child cannot recall without action and not in a way that mobilises thought without imitation. This he cannot do in the next phase either, because he still has to act in order to imagine. But in the third phase he can pretend that he phones without any concrete pivot. Through the whole process the child is thus fundamentally dependent upon his memory in action, i.e. his perspectivised imitation mobilising imagination's combining power. Imitation takes on a quite different character, however, when the child can recall by means of stable conceptions, not being dependent upon a pivot or a concrete toy.

I will therefore argue that on the basis of his immediate spontaneous imitation, based on an affective relationship to the event, the child develops mediating imitation, implying an intellectual relationship. At the same time the nature of imagination is changed, from being a spontaneous affective process, to becoming a conscious and voluntary process. This means that imagination becomes differentiated from imitation, as a function of imitation being transformed from spontaneous to mediated reconstruction, enabling the child to determine actions from above. At this stage "Internal and external actions" are no longer inseparable, while as neither imagination nor interpretation nor will are the undifferentiated internal aspects of external action. Quite the contrary, imagination and will are differentiated internal aspects of external action, because the child gradually creates a greater distance between thinking on the one hand and action on the other, by means of speech. Still, however, it is imitation as such which constitutes "...an imaginary situation..." and which awakens imagination as a thought mobilising process.

Not all memory in action is play

Vygotskij seems to assume that play does not emerge until the child is around three years of age (Nicolopoulou 1988/1999:427-28), appearing in the phase when the child is able to phone by means of hand movements alone. The child being able to pretend by means of a realistic object, or being able to pretend that an object represents something else, is not sufficient for memory in action to be conceptualised as play. But why is this, when the child is obviously pretending also in the two first phases? Is there a qualitative difference between the child's initial and more mature pretence activity?

I believe that the child's memory in action in the first two phases cannot be understood as pretence activity in the common sense of the word. The child only realises wishes by letting categories of reality pass through his experiences. Activity in the first two phases is therefore subordinated to the child's memory in action, the content being determined by spontaneous imitation. Action is the numerator, meaning is the denominator. In the same way as that the child initially is not aware of its own perspectivised imitation, he is not aware of the pretence aspect of its own imitation either. Reconstruction occurs, but it is unmediated. Therefore the child does not pretend subjectively. The expression "...an imaginary situation..." may

therefore imply that the spontaneous imitation activity constitutes an imaginary situation, objectively, imitation not being mechanical copying, but perspectivised reconstruction. But it is not an imaginary action subjectively, as the child is totally unaware of what seems to be pretence activity.

For pretence activity to be considered as play, the condition seems to be that the child is pretending consciously, which implies that he can also pretend to be someone else. Pretending by means of a pivot is not conscious, however. Enerstvedt (1982:275) therefore specifies the argument when he suggests that the child being conscious of playing express the nature of role-play, which is also why he can play different roles. Vygotskijs formulation is that the child must learn to relate his wishes to "...a fictitious «I,» (or) to her role in the game and its rules, before he can play (Vygotsky 1933/1976:549, Italics TOE). But it is only after the third phase, that he can pretend to be another person, being able to imitate social functions consciously, i.e. roles.

What the child does in the first two phases may therefore be summarised in this way: The child imitates spontaneously by recalling experiences in action. Imitation is motivated by the emotional appeal of experience, which emerges from the shared perspective with the adult. Only later, in mediated imitation, can the child recall the phenomena by means of their social meaning. Only at this stage he can pretend consciously, i.e. play. The most important development that takes place in the child's pretence activity is therefore the change that takes place from spontaneous, unconscious imitation, to mediated imitation and conscious and voluntary imagination, which means that the child can isolate memory in action from its purely situational constraints (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:547). How this comes about, I will return to in the next section.

My argument is that imitation and play can be understood as two successive phases in one and the same developmental process, where imitation constitutes a necessary fundament for play, both ontogenetically and microgenetically. This implies that even play can be conceived of as a kind of imitation, but as imitation of a certain quality. Not all imitation is play. I further assume that play's two main processes are imitation, understood as memory in action awakened by affect, and imagination, understood as the ability to pretend, first as an undifferentiated unconscious aspect of imitation, then as a differentiated conscious aspect. My hypothesis thus implies that the relation between memory-in-action and the combining power of imagination not only cause the emergence of play, it is also fundamental for consecutive changes and development. Play, however, appears only when the ability to pretend becomes subjectively conscious – i.e. voluntary, as a function of imitation becoming mediated by the social meaning of phenomena. This transformation is dependent upon the intervention of the other. Two stages in this process I will outline in the second part of this paper.

Some central characteristics of the child's imitation

Let me first summarise three some central characteristics of the child's imitation. It is recollections in action of something that has actually happened, but occurs only when the event is completed. It is therefore reasonable to use the term delayed imitation (cf. Vedeler 1997:64,¹⁷ Garvey 1979:67), not least because it occurs when the child is about 12 months old, according to Vedeler (1997:19).

That imitation is delayed, however, refers only to the time dimension. Reconstruction of the memory material is not delayed, in the sense that it is mentally distanced from experience, i.e. intellectually categorised. Quite the opposite, delayed imitation is immediate,

¹⁷ Vedeler, L.: *Lek og kommunikasjon i de første utviklingsår. Observasjon og pedagogisk bruk av lek for barn med og uten handicap*. Namsos: Pedagogisk psykologisk forlag 1997.

spontaneous and unconscious. We therefore have to suggest the rather paradoxical concept of delayed and immediate imitation, implying that the child recreates his experience when the event is concluded, while at the same time he lacks conscious awareness of that, and whom and what he imitates. Finally and accordingly, he also lacks conscious awareness of the objects which are included in imitation, exactly as social phenomena. The object is however perceived in the shared perspective, explaining why basic categories of reality – and not just abstract forms – can pass through the child's experiences.

A third central characteristic of delayed immediate imitation, may be inferred from the assumption that "The child, in wishing, carries out his wishes;" (...) ", because "Internal and external actions are inseparable: (so that) imagination, interpretation, and will are the internal processes in external action" (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:550). It is true that the child in delayed immediate imitation activates recollection, but memory in action cannot be reduced to pure motor activity. As shown, it is more action in the sense of performance, than action in the sense of motor activity. Because delayed imitation is based on experience as a whole; memory in action further also includes speech, the speech that is included in action. Even speech in delayed immediate imitation may be considered as an action, or maybe as a Speech Act:¹⁸

A child first acts with meanings as with objects and later realizes them consciously (...) In play a child unconsciously and spontaneously makes use of the fact that he can separate meaning from an object without knowing he is doing it; (...) just as he talks without paying attention to the words (Vygotsky 1933 / 1976:548, Italics TOE).

Thus speech and action are two undifferentiated aspects of the same experience. Speech most often appears in immediate imitation as the verbal – not yet differentiated – aspect of action, understood as (spontaneous) performance. As Meltzoff, Kuhl and Moore points out elsewhere:

...the neonate's encoding of the adult's act is neither exclusively visual nor exclusively motor, but rather is a modality-free description of the event (Meltzoff, Kuhl og Moore 1991:406).¹⁹

Therefore speech is a verbal action related internally to a motor action, so that the meaning of imitation has a motor aspect and a speech aspect (cf. the relation between meaning and action as in a fraction). Initially speech is subordinated to action, as shown earlier, but within a unity of speech and action. This does mean that: "Initially speech follows action, is provoked by and dominated by activity (Vygotsky 1978:28). But speech is not associatively related to action. Action and speech are related internally as in a unity. Meaning is thus constituted by both. We can therefore assume that speech and action in immediate imitation for the first time form a unit, the inherent contradiction of which constitutes a quite new form of behaviour which is verbal thinking (cf. corresponding argument in Vygotsky 1934/1987:110). We can thus conceive of speech in immediate imitation as an early and perhaps prototypical occurrence of egocentric speech. Anyway it is a:

¹⁸ According to Bruner (1987:6) Vygotskijs argument is surprisingly modern. He is quite close to Austin's (1962) and Searl's (1969) Speech Act Theory, and Grice's (1968) distinction between the speaker's and timeless meaning. See Bruner, J.: Prologue to the English Edition. I: Rieber, R.W. & A.S. Carton (Eds.): *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky, Volume 1: Problems of general psychology*, (Trans. N. Minick). New York: Plenum 1987:1-16 (1st ed. in Russian 1934).

¹⁹ Meltzoff, Andrew, Kuhl, Patricia and Moore, M. Keith: Perception, Representation, and the Control of Action in Newborns and Young Infants: Towards a New Synthesis. I: Weiss and Zelazo (red): *Newborn Attention. Biological Constraints and the Influence of Experience*. Norwood: 1991

"... function that facilitates intellectual orientation, conscious awareness, the overcoming of difficulties and impediments, and imagination and thinking (Vygotsky 1934 / 1987:259, kursivering TOE).

Based on this argument I will assume that the child initially is compelled to imitate events by means of a unit where action is not as yet differentiated from speech, but where the unity of speech / action in its turn is not differentiated from the child's shared perspective with the adult. This unit emerging in delayed imitation I will tentatively call perspectivised action / speech. It may therefore be considered as a certain expression of what Vygotskij calls "The unity of perception, speech and action, which ultimately produces internalization of the visual field, (and which) constitutes the central subject matter for any analysis of the origin of uniquely human forms of behaviour (Vygotsky 1978:26), which implies that children are compelled to "... solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes and hands (Vygotsky 1978:26, italics TOE).

McNeill (1981)²⁰ suggests that we should consider spoken language and its accompanying physical gestures as a synthetic whole, which should not be decomposed further for analytical purposes. McNeill (1985)²¹ further claims that Vygotskijs choice of the word as the smallest unit of analyses ought to be replaced by a unit, which includes both word and its accompanying gestures. This he considers being a better way of indexing the action-inferred "schemas" or "procedures" which constitute both forms of communicative behaviour (McNeill 1985). Apart from claiming that the phrase speech and its accompanying gestures might give some wrong associations, I will suggest that perspectivised action / speech in immediate imitation perhaps considered as one such unit that McNeill suggests.

Proposing this, I would like to add that even Vygotskij – towards the end of his life – argued in favour of a unit of analyses which represents an individual-surrounding relationship. He suggested "experience" as a suitable psychological construct: "The child's experience is the kind of simple unit of which it is impossible to say that it is the influence of the environment on the child or a characteristic of the child himself. Experience is a unit of personality and environment as they exist in development...Experience must be understood as the internal relationship of the child as an individual to a given aspect of reality (Vygotsky 1984c: 382, cited after Minic 1987:32).

In my opinion even the unit perspectivised action / speech may be considered as such a unit, because the child exactly reconstructs his experience in memory in action. In my view perspectivised action / speech satisfies both the requirement of being a unit of personality and environment as they exist in development and of taking care of the internal relationship of the child as an individual to a given aspect of reality.

To pretend for the other – an objective invitation to play

Because the child recalls an experience, which is completed, he must necessarily reconstruct the experience. As shown earlier this means that memory in action is affected by the nature of imagination itself, so that: «The impressions, which originate from reality (will) alter in nature, grow or shrink in relation to its natural dimensions." In this way, however, the child indirectly signals that his actions do not take place in the immediate situation, which may lead the other to believe that the child pretends.

²⁰ McNeill, David: Action, thought and language. Repr. In Peter LLOYD & Charles Fernyhough (Eds.) *Lev Vygotsky. Critical Assessments*. Volume II, Thought and language. London and New York: Routledge 1999:23-30.

²¹ McNeill, David: Language viewed as action. In: J. Wertsch (Ed.) *Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985:258-70

In other words, I will propose that the child in delayed immediate imitation will pretend for the other, but not for himself, confirming exactly that "There is very little of the imaginary." Even if it is an imaginary situation, the action is only comprehensible in the light of a real situation that has just occurred. This hypothesis may be substantiated by the empirical observation that at a very early stage children can identify and recreate certain traits of adult behaviour, more precisely such traits that appear to be typical of the action (Garvey (1979:91-93, cf. Smilansky 1990,²² see even Vedeler 1999:74).²³ According to Garvey children are even very proficient in this respect (Garvey 1979:91-93).

One certain trait of action which children seem to identify and reproduce, is the voice production or the speech act. But children will not only copy voice production. In accordance with the nature of imagination, they also seem to exaggerate what they conceive of as characteristic traits of the speech act (see Smilansky 1990, Vedeler 1999:74), due to the influence which our emotion exerts. Schwartzman (1978,²⁴ see even Åm 1984:21)²⁵ suggests that children have a tendency to caricature adult's behaviour, indicating that children need to comment on reality.

What is it more precisely that the child recalls? As mentioned earlier, in the fraction action/meaning there is no action without meaning, and no meaning without action. Initially action is the dominating part, but it is still not totally meaningless. Being perceived in the shared perspective, the speech act has at least an expressive content. This is a content that refers to feelings or internal conditions, and that appears through musical means, like tempo, strength of tone, dynamics, pitch, rhythm and timbre (of voice), in short the prosodic or expressive aspect of speech (cf. Sundin 1995:78-79).²⁶ When children exaggerate and caricature adult's behaviour, it may thus be their way of reproducing the expressive content they have perceived by means of the analogue aspect of speech.

This is a probable explanation, because already the infant distinguishes between speech and singing, according to Sundin (1995:55,78). Even though words and timbre are strongly intertwined through all of pre school age, children use expressive tones before they use articulated words and they distinguish between different accents before they understand words semantically. Thus infants react to language as a «musical system» expressing feelings and wishes more than to a linguistic system. They react to variations in pitch, accent, rhythm, timbre, intensity, intonation etc, even if they do not understand the words' semantically.

Any utterance humans produce is (...) characterized by a large number of nonlinguistic or nonverbal - at best «paralinguistic» - aspects, such as intonation voice quality, rhythm, and pausing. Such phenomena constitute an analogue nonverbal signal system that intermeshes with and modulates the predominantly digital verbal or linguistic code (Scherer, 1982:136 cited from Fjørtoft 1995:66).²⁷

That different musical qualities give (expressive) meaning to speech very early, is exactly why adults intuitively choose strong rhythmic or songlike verbal units when they address infants. When mothers address a baby their voice has "...so many distinctive features that it

²² Smilansky, S. Sociodramatic Play: Its Relevance to Behavior and Achievement in School. In: E. Klugman & S. Smilansky (eds.): *Children's Play and Learning. Perspectives and Policy Implications*. New York: Teachers College Press

²³ Vedeler, L.: *Pedagogisk bruk av lek*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1999

²⁴ Schwartzman, Helen B.: *Transformations*. New York: Plenum Press 1978

²⁵ Åm, E.: *På jakt etter barneperspektivet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1989.

²⁶ Sundin, Bertil: *Barns musikaliska utveckling*. Stockholm: Liber Utbildning, 1995, 3. omarb.uppl.

²⁷ Fjørtoft, Frode Jan: *Følelse - stemme - musikk : refleksjoner omkring stemmens rolle som basisreferanse for vår opplevelse av musikk, med særlig utgangspunkt i nyere spedbarnsforskning*. Trondheim: Dronning Mauds Minne, DMMH's publikasjonsserie ; nr 2 1995, 92 s

qualifies as a distinct register of human speech, called «baby talk» or «motherese» (Trevvarthen, 1988:16, cited from Fjørtoft 1995:19, italics TOE, cf. von Tetzner et al. 1993:86, Smith & Ulvund 1999:364.).²⁸ This is also why musical elements (the analogue aspect²⁹) continue to give additional meaning to speech even when the child has learned to understand word's semantic meaning.

This line of reasoning was by no means unfamiliar to Vygotskij, as he considered social interaction in early infancy as an immediate interaction that only later changes to mediated social interaction, depending on the ability to use sign (Van der Veer & van Ijzendoorn (1985 / 1999:384).³⁰ Further, Vygotskij claims that in phonetics, morphology, vocabulary and in semantics – even in rhythm, metrics, and music – the psychological category lies hidden behind the grammatical or formal category (Vygotsky 1987:252). A wide variety of meanings can thus be produced through one and the same grammatical structure.³¹

As small children do not understand the semantic or cognitive content of the words, speech functions primarily as timbre phenomenon, meaning that musical attributes give the utterances their nuances of meaning or an expressive content. It is this expressive meaning that children receive they produce in delayed imitation, but in order to do so, they exactly need to use the quality of voice production as their main instrument, not the words as linguistic/semantic units. When they identify and accentuate typical traits, it is based on their conception of the expressive content of speech.

Recent European work (...) has shown that although fundamental frequency parameters (related to pitch) are undoubtedly important in the vocal expression of emotions, the key to the differentiation of discrete emotions seems to be voice quality, that is, the timbre of the voice, acoustically determined by the pattern of energy distribution in the spectrum. (Scherer, 1986:45, second italics by TOE).

This argument further illustrates that the child in delayed immediate imitation recreates a content, which is primarily quite personal and particular, but which at the same time is general. The content is particular because action / speech is recreated on the basis of certain personal experiences. The child's action / speech in immediate imitation is general because the child is accentuating what may be considered as a typical trait, based on the expressive content. In the same way as the adult's caricature abstracts general traits from a motive, even the child's imitated speech therefore communicates a general content, not least in the sense that its content may be recognised by others. Reconstruction of expressive content through imagination therefore implies an early occurrence of generalisation, which is codified and communicated by means of prosody. This is a generalisation based on an affective tendency, communicating an expressive content (cf. syncretism). As Vygotskij states:

"At pre-school age the child generalises his affective relation to the phenomena regardless of the actual concrete situation because the affective relation is connected with the meaning of the phenomena..." (Vygotsky 1933/1976:539-40).

²⁸ von Tetzner, S., J. Feilberg, B. Hagtvedt, H. Martinsen, P.E. Mjaavatn, H. Gram Simonsen, L. Smith: *Barns språk*. Oslo: adNotam Gyldendal 1993. Smith, Lars & Stein Erik Ulvund: *Spedbarnsalderen*. Revidert og utvidet utgave. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 1999.

²⁹ Analogue as opposed to *digital*, the latter communicating physical conditions with signs (!!!), cf. mediation.

³⁰ R. Van der Veer and M. H. van Ijzendoorn. Vygotsky's theory of higher psychological processes: some criticisms. I. *Human Development* 28, pp. 1-9 (1985) reprinted in Peter Lloyd & Charles Fernyhough (Eds.) *Lev Vygotsky. Critical Assessments. Volume I, Vygotsky's theory*: London and New York 1999, Routledge:381-391.

³¹ Se Jackendoff, R.: *The Architecture of the Language Faculty*. Cambridge, Mass, London: MIT Press 1997:206-207, presenting som examples.

We have already seen that recalling an experience, necessarily mobilises the child's imagination, meaning that imitation includes both recollection and interpretation. Due to imagination's way of functioning as a complex of transformations, distinctions, regroupings, exaggerations and restrictions which creates forever new combinations and new meanings, "The impressions which originate from reality will alter in nature, grow or shrink in relation to its natural dimensions. (Vygotsky 1972:45, Lindqvist 1995:47, italics TOE). When the child reconstructs the typical traits by means of voice production, he is bound to accentuate them, both because what the child recollects is the expressive content and because recalling in action presupposes imagination. Accentuating the typical traits thus implies a commentary, we might say, even if it is an indirect and subjectively unconscious commentary. At least accentuated voice production appears as a commentary for the other.

In this way the grounds for considering the speech act in delayed imitation as egocentric speech is strengthened:

Subjectively, from the child's point of view, egocentric speech is not yet distinguished from social speech [hence] the illusion that others comprehend it). Objectively, it is not separated from the situation ([hence]) the use of collective monologue). And in its form (vocalized) it is not distinguished or segregated from social speech. (Vygotsky 1956:350, cited after Wertsch & Stone 1985 / 1999:374), Italics TOE.³²

By being able to identify and express typical (i.e. general) traits of action in delayed imitation, the child thus indirectly refers to a context different from the immediate frame of reference. It signals that the situation is different from the real, and by caricature it even signals that the child himself represents someone else. Even if this special quality of the speech act emerges as a function of the imaginary aspect of memory in action, it also means that the child sends out play signals. In a subjective perspective it is only an indication of the child's letting categories of reality pass through experiences. In an objective perspective – i.e. for the other, the child, however, pretends. What subjectively is only a collective monologue, functions in relation to the other because it communicates expressive content by means of the analogue aspect of speech, which at the same time signals a pretence situation.

The emergence of an objective pretence situation

The objective pretence signal is easily recognised by the other, because it accentuates a typical (i.e. general) trait of the speech act. But actions, which the child is used to associate with certain adults, are now introduced and even distorted by peers, implying an estranging effect.³³ Initially, a pretence situation emerges between the children.

As the signalling party is only recalling, it is only the other who can apprehend the accentuated action / speech unit as a play signal. Because of its special quality the invitation, however, calls for a response, which is released immediately, because the other mobilises his related experiences, also as memory in action. Primarily and subjectively even the

³² Wertsch, J.V. & C.A. Stone: The concept of internalization in Vygotsky's account of the genesis of higher mental functions. I: Wertsch, J.V. (Ed.): *Culture, communication, and cognition*. Cambridge University Press 1985

³³ The young Vygotskij was inspired by the Russian formalists (Bruner 1987:7, see even Lindqvist 1999). One of their main concepts was "otstranenie", estrangement, or "making strange the ordinary" introduced by Viktor Sklovskij (cf. Brecht's "Verfremdung"). This concept implies that reality comes mentally alive through contrastation (Lindqvist 1999:186). Even in play the child contrasts different worlds, in this way creating a sufficient distance to his own immediate reality to become able to consider it from the outside. In this way Vygotskij supports Tjukovskijs idea that imagination creates a better feeling for reality. (Lindqvist, G. (red): *Vygotskij och skolan*. Texter ur Vygotskijs *Pedagogiske psykologi* kommenterade som historia och aktualitet. Lund: Studentlitteratur 1999).

reaction is an expression of immediate imitation. Secondly and objectively, however, it also is a response to the actual invitation. Therefore the reaction will have a similar function on the pretence level as the invitation, meaning that even the inviting part will be affected by the estranging effect.

Because the awareness of both parties in this way is directed to the (expressive) content of imitation, action is isolated from the original experience. Children who subjectively only imitates spontaneously an in parallel, are thus enabled to establish co-operative reconstructive actions. And because it becomes possible for children to recreate actions in concert, which means that a context existing only among the participants – an objective context – arises in what we may call delayed parallel imitation. This in turn supplies an ontogenetic fundament for children to be able to pretend even subjectively, i.e. consciously. This fundamental change takes place through the emergence of dialogue about play.

The emergence of a metadialogue

Even though children can recognise action / speech because of its general expressive content, they will necessarily have somewhat different particular experiences. Therefore some disagreement concerning the interpretation of the individual speech act, is unavoidable. In order to be able to pretend in concert, children have to sort out the different interpretations appearing in immediate imitation. This requires that children have to articulate for the other what they so far have taken for granted individually. In this way children must exceed the limitations of the imitated speech act (cf. collective monologue), especially the characteristic that meaning are being communicated only by the analogue aspect of speech.

Even if children already in delayed imitation comment on actions and objects, as we have seen, they do it only indirectly, via caricature. But as the possibility to articulate meaning in this way, is very restricted, children have to establish a dialogue about the speech act in order to be able to direct action explicitly. This is indicated by the fact that they gradually begin to use speech in order to assign the parts and to determine themes, situations, symbol actions and substitutions (cf. Garvey 1979:95, Olofson 1990:95).³⁴ It is further indicated by the fact that children can import elements not belonging to the concrete situation, solve misunderstandings and guide each other, so that play can move on (cf. Olofson 1990:95).

When Schousboe (1994)³⁵ points out that children in social play alternate between a sphere of fiction, a directive sphere and a reality sphere, it indicates that in play there normally emerges a directive arena, in addition to the fictional arena, implying that children enter and leave a role repeatedly in the course of a play episode. The dialogue with playmates about the content of play, characterised by Sutton-Smith as metacommunication (Åm 1984:20), is often called a directive- or a metadialogue (se Bjørlykke 1989:154³⁶, Vedeler 1999:68), which is about the conception of the play theme and the context of role-plays itself (Vedeler 1999:68).

Aside from and in addition to – the speech act developing into dialogue in play – children therefore establish a dialogue about play, a "time out"-arena where they can retire from fiction in order to direct interaction. But the competencies mentioned above as characteristic of metadialogue, emerge only in a quite developed stage, i.e. somewhat later than the

³⁴ Olofsson, Birgitta Knutsdotter: *Leg for livet*. København: Forlaget Børn & Unge 1990. Originalutgave Stockholm 1989.

³⁵ Schousboe, Ivy (1994). Den onde leg. (The evil play) En udvidet synsvinkel på legen og dens funksjoner. I *Konferanserapport del I*, Nordisk forskerkonferanse om lek i Tønsberg 31/5 - 1/6 1994. Eik Lærerhøgskole, see even Zachrisen 2000:64-65

³⁶ Bjørlykke, B.: *Språkutvikling og språklæring. Språkssystem og kommunikasjon hos barn i førskulealder*. Oslo: LNU/Cappelen 1989

appearance of role-play around the age of three. Already three-year-olds, however, show a stunning ability to alternate without friction between direction and action (Garvey 1979:92-93). At this stage the alternation between acting and directive positions, however, will be smooth and hard to discover (Bjørlykke 1989:155, Smilansky 1990, se Vedeler 1999:74). Initially, therefore, the structural distance between dialogue in and dialogue about play is very small. The two kinds of dialogue can be distinguished only on the basis of their different functions.

At least in the Scandinavian languages it seems that children prefer the past tense of the verb in metadialogue, even if action is future oriented: "In this cup there was coffee" (Reithaug 1979:69 NPT, see even Bjørlykke 1989:155). "Now I was the mother who scolded her children" (Vedeler 1999:69). Children choosing alternative standards of speech, e.g. Standard Norwegian, Swedish or English are other linguistic role marking traits (Bjørlykke 1989:153-54). Most important, however, it seems to be that the children speak in an ordinary voice in metadialogue, while he speaks in a distorted voice, i.e. in the voice or pitch of the model he represents in play dialogue (Garvey 1979:91-93).

The distinction between ordinary and distorted pitch can be considered as the most important initial difference between dialogue in and dialogue about play, because it is fundamental ontogenetically. The ability to distort the voice seems to be decisive for children's willingness to accept others – not least adults – as participants in play (cf. Danielsson 2001).³⁷ The argument above, indicates that the child speaking with a distorted voice, underling the typical traits, produces the general expressive content of speech, as shown earlier. It therefore seems to me that the ability to recognise and generalise an event by means of voice production is quite fundamental, both for the child's ability to interpret the play signals of the other, and to establish an objective pretence situation. The capacity to alternate between normal and distorted voice production therefore seems to be a key factor for the child's ability to distinguish between an objective pretence situation and a real situation, which is the main condition for breaking out of delayed immediate parallel imitation and move on to conscious pretence play. This is supported by Garvey, who on a more general level underlines that the ability to distinguish play from non-play is fundamental for access to play (see even Åm 1984:70).

Even if speech serves a communicative function in both metadialogue and play dialogue, enhancing the child's capacity for explicit articulation, the main function of dialogue about play is still to regulate inter-action. From my argument it seems that the regulative function of speech develops on the basis of the distinction between distorted and normal voice quality. The more speech in metadialogue develops as far as the inter-mental regulative function is concerned, the more it will also enable children to communicate something else than just feelings and wishes, i.e. a cognitive content. In metadialogue speech therefore gets an inter-mentally regulative function, i.e. in relation to the other children's actions, enabling children in metadialogue gradually to create a mental distance to – and begin to analyse – also their own delayed immediate imitation and their own speech in play, as indicated in individual play. Thus speech gets an intellectual function, a function exceeding the ability to just expressing feelings and needs, because it relates to actions and objects children handle together. Other and more linguistically conditioned differences than the distinction between ordinary and distorted pitch, will thus appear as metadialogue develops, creating greater structural differences between dialogue in and dialogue about play.

From this argument it may be inferred that dialogue about play will develop in relation to, but at the same time move away from, dialogue in play – first functionally, but then even structurally. The imitated speech act as a kind of collective monologue (and egocentric

³⁷ Danielsson, Charlotte: Barns uppfatningar av vuxnas förhållningssett till lek. *Paper presented at the Nordic Educational Research Organisation's 29:e kongress*, Stockholm, Sweden, 15-18 march 2001.

speech) is the point of departure for both dialogues, but because of the specific communicative demands of metadialogue in relation to dialogue in play, they will follow quite different lines of development.

When metadialogue is established, reconstruction of action is no longer just immediate and spontaneous. Action is mediated by speech. Thus the child's memory in action is changed from expressing particular experiences immediately, to reconstructing a general content inter-mentally by means of speech. In this way delayed mediated imitation is established, where the reconstruction of action is mediated by the social meaning of words, established on a generalised and articulate level in metadialogue.

In this process speech differentiates from action. The unit action / speech is broken down, and speech begins to determine action from above, by means of word's semantic meaning. At the same time speech in metadialogue also differentiates somewhat from the shared preverbal perspective in immediate and spontaneous imitation, as the children adapt to each others perspectives. The child further develops conscious awareness of both action and objects, and is thus enabled to recreate objects in play even if they are not present. At this stage the context emerges as an internally recalled horizon for the reconstruction of action, which means that the child can pretend also subjectively. On this basis the child can relate to "...a fictitious «I,» (or) to her role in the game and its rules (Vygotsky 1933/1976:549, *Italics TOE*), pretending to be any mother consciously. This therefore marks the transition to real play, understood as conscious pretence activity.