

## Cassirer, Benveniste, and Peirce on deictics and “pronominal” communication

Han-liang Chang

Comparative Literature and World Literature,  
Department of Chinese, Fudan University  
220 Handan Road, Shanghai 200433, China  
e-mail: changhl@ntu.edu.tw

**Abstract.** For all his profound interest in Secondness and its manifestation in various kinds of indices, including deictics, Peirce rarely addresses the inter-pronominal relationships. Whilst the American founder of semiotics would designate language as a whole to Thirdness, only within the larger framework of which deictics can work, the German philosopher Cassirer observes that “what characterizes the very first spatial terms that we find in language is their embracing of a definite ‘deictic’ function”. For Cassirer the significance of pronominals, especially the I-Thou relationship, lies in its impact on the development of spatial concept that lays the foundation of symbolic forms. It may look strange why the “designatives” of I, Thou, He, in Peirce’s own terms, so obvious in their categorial and empirical differentiation, should fail to be reducible to the triad of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. It is interesting, however, that in his 1906 correspondence with Lady Welby, Peirce should refer to the strange “*Communicational Interpretant*”, or “the *Cominterpretant*, which is a determination of that mind into which the minds of utterer and interpreter have to be fused in order that any communication should take place”. Peirce asserts that this communication of a Form, say, being in love, is made possible by sign. This paper discusses Peirce’s and Cassirer’s references to deictics or indexical sign, in particular, inter-personal relationships, in light of Benveniste’s concept of discourse, and probes into a possible subtext underlying the Peirce-Welby correspondence.

**Keywords:** Benveniste, Cassirer, deixis, Jakobson, Peirce, post-structuralism, pronoun, structuralism

## 1. Introduction: Is Cassirer a semiotician?

In his “A glance at the development of semiotics”, delivered at the opening of the First International Congress of Semiotics in Milan on June 2, 1974, Roman Jakobson (1974: 199–218) refers to Ernst Cassirer’s lecture given at the New York Linguistic Circle (Cassirer 1945) to the following effect: “The relationship of the science of language and languages with that of the sign and of different signs was defined briefly and explicitly by the philosopher Ernst Cassirer in his address to the New York Linguistic Circle, pointing out that ‘linguistics is a part of semiotics’” (Jakobson 1974: 212). In the same survey Jakobson (1974: 201–202) attempts to negotiate and bridge the gap between Husserlian phenomenology and semiotic thinking about language before Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure.

I would like to take my cue from Jakobson’s quotation from Cassirer in the post-Saussurian enquiry into Cassirer’s concept of linguistics and semiotics. It is worth noting that Jakobson’s quotation, which can be misleading, is a partial one, while Cassirer’s full sentence reads: “Linguistics is a part of semiotics, not of physics” (Cassirer 1945: 115), and the immediate context of his discussion is not semiotics, but physics. Cassirer uses the term *semiotics* only in passing, and he does so as a critique of natural sciences, represented by physics, which, to him, perhaps best qualifies the definition of “a science that deals with physical objects” (Cassirer 1945: 114). As if following in the footsteps of Wilhelm Dilthey who declared the independence of *Geisteswissenschaften* from *Naturwissenschaften*, Cassirer (1945: 111) believes linguistics belongs appropriately to the former domain.

In the paragraph from which the quotation is taken – in fact, of which the quotation is the concluding sentence – Cassirer first discusses how linguistic phenomena could be studied, albeit wrongly, as physical phenomena, and then he crosses “the borderline that separates human language from the physical world” (Cassirer 1945: 114). As can be expected by the time the lecture was delivered, the borderline is no other than his well-known “symbolic form”:

Language is a “symbolic form”. It consists of symbols, and symbols are no part of our physical world. They belong to an entirely different universe of discourse. Natural things and symbols cannot be brought to the same denominator. Linguistics is a part of semiotics, not of physics. (Cassirer 1945: 114–115)

Here as elsewhere, Cassirer is not clear as to what he means by semiotics. The use of the word is an isolated instance in the lecture delivered shortly before his sudden death. One plausible interpretation is that it is a parody of the famous Saussurian statement that “linguistics is only one branch of this general science [i.e., semiology]” (Saussure 1983: 16).

In his citation of linguistic structuralists, Cassirer does begin with the Swiss linguist, then he mentions Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, and other members of the Prague Linguistic Circle, all in passing. If one is allowed to bracket the ill-defined “semiotics”, one would notice Cassirer is rehearsing his life-long obsession with the word *form* and its various derivations, either etymological or conceptual, without which it would not have been possible for him to ramble from Goethean biological morphology to Humboldtian linguistic types, and finally to Gestalt psychology. The governing principle, indeed the master-code, if you like, of both natural and human sciences, is form, albeit an extremely complex pre-linguistic concept harkening back to Immanuel Kant. Maybe one could simplify the matter by saying that what differentiates the two kinds of *Wissenschaften* is the humanities’ titular honour, the “symbolic”. However, from the perspective of semiotics, a logical consequence would be the production of a higher-order meta-semiotics of *form* that serves to model and negotiate all the branches of knowledge, or, in our parlance, object-semiotics, such as physics and linguistics, which are already in themselves meta-semiotics. This procedure would ironically put into question the very concept of “symbolic form” as a prerogative of the human sciences, not only because all the exact sciences are symbolic, but because the discourse that mediates and represents them, linguistic or otherwise, is itself symbolic. Let me briefly digress to Peirce for his curious comments on symbol.

## 2. Peirce on symbol – not symbolic form

We are all familiar with Peirce’s famous apology in which he says: “The word *symbol* has so many meanings that it would be an injury to the language to add a new one” (Peirce 1998: 9). Peirce’s statement was made as early as 1894, and for all his insight, the founding father of modern semiotics failed to foresee other injuries added to one language after another – granted that the major European tongues derived the word from the Greek *σύμβολον*. A major injury is probably done by Cassirer, who, through a metonymical substitution, has come to be identified with the “symbolic form” – the term being an instance of heteroglossia combining Greek and Latin. Given the Indo-European languages’ historical shifts and ruptures during the past millennia, this resort to etymology may not be relevant and carry little hermeneutic force in our attempt to negotiate Peirce and Cassirer. One must seek clues from elsewhere, such as from both philosophers’ common Kantian heritage. The assertion of Cassirer (1955: 86) in the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that “all truly strict and exact thought is sustained by the *symbolics* and *semiotics* on which it is based” is revelatory. The statement not only equates a

theory of symbols to a theory of signs, but also asserts the mediating function of the sign between subject and object, experience and world, which reminds one of the Kantian schemata.

Cassirer observes that “the object of knowledge can be defined only through the medium of a particular logical and conceptual structure”, and each science, from its standpoint, subjects nature “to a special interpretation and formation” (Cassirer 1955: 76). That functional unity lays the foundation for natural sciences as well as human sciences, including language and arts. The position can be aptly recast in the Peircean logic of sign. For example, what precedes and indeed underlies each object-semiotics is a meta-semiotics; we may call it Thirdness, interpretant, or even *tertium relationis*. Having said so, rather than dwelling on Peircean semiosis in general, I shall address one particular kind of linguistic sign, the pronominals, and I hope to be able to demonstrate that the interaction of pronominals, not short of power relationships, represents an important facet of semiosis.

### 3. The pronominal sign in discourse

For all his interest in Secondness and its manifestation in various kinds of indices, including deictics, Peirce rarely addresses the inter-pronominal relationships. Whilst Peirce would designate language as a whole to Thirdness, only within the larger framework of which deictics can work, Cassirer (1957: 151) observes from a phenomenological point of view that “what characterizes the very first spatial terms that we find in language is their embracing of a definite ‘deictic’ function”. For Cassirer, the significance of pronominals, especially the I-Thou relationship, lies in its impact on the development of the spatial concept that, together with other *a priori* categories, lays the foundation of symbolic forms. It may look strange why the “designatives” of I, Thou, He, in Peirce’s own terms (1908), so obvious in their categorical and empirical differentiation, should fail to be reducible to the triad of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

Full-length discussions of human subjectivity as a pronominal category had to wait for a few more years when Emile Benveniste and Jakobson began to treat the issue. If some kind of critical anachronism is allowed, one could say that neither Peirce nor Cassirer was a linguist in the Benvenistian or Jakobsonian sense, or at any event, both failed to fully address the relationship between discourse and subject. However, it would be unfair to say neither of them was interested in the issue. I shall begin by rehearsing Cassirer’s discussion of the sphere of inner intuition, then introduce Benveniste’s discussion of subjectivity, and finally move on to Peirce as an unwitting accomplice in the I-Thou pragmatics, especially in his correspondence with Lady Victoria Welby.

Discussions of deictics are scattered in Cassirer’s writings on language; most of those are passing references, although they can be thematically unified. The following samples may give us a rough picture of his conceptualization.

- (1) Sensory-physical grasping becomes sensory interpretation, which in turn conceals within it the first impulse toward the higher functions of signification manifested in language and thought. We might suggest the scope of this development by saying that it leads from the sensory extreme of mere “indication” (*Weisen*) to the logical extreme of “demonstration” (*Beweisen*). From the mere indication by which an absolutely single thing (a *τόδε τι* in the Aristotelian sense) is designated, the road leads to a progressively general specification: what in the beginning was a mere deictic function becomes the function of “apodeixis”. (Cassirer 1955: 181–182)
- (2) However, it must be borne in mind that neither “imitation” nor “indication” – neither the “mimetic” nor the “deictic” function represents a simple, uniform operation of consciousness, but that elements of diverse origin and the significance are intermingled in both of them. (Cassirer 1955: 83)
- (3) Aside from mere interjections [...] there is scarcely any class of words in which the character of “natural sounds” is so pronounced as in those which designate here and there, the near and the distant. (Cassirer 1955: 201)
- (4) For the beginnings of Indo-Germanic language, Brugmann distinguishes a threefold form of indication. “I-deixis” is distinguished, both in content and linguistic expression, from “thou-deixis” which in turn merges with the more general form of “that-deixis”. (Cassirer 1955: 201)
- (5) Wherever the definite article has developed, it can clearly be recognized as an offshoot of the demonstrative pronouns. It grows out of the form of “that-deixis”, designating the object to which it refers as “outside” and “there”, and distinguishing it spatially from the “I” and the “here”. (Cassirer 1955: 205)
- (6) In nearly all languages, spatial demonstratives provided the foundation for the *personal pronouns*. (Cassirer 1955: 213)
- (7) It is the same half-mimetic, half-linguistic act of indication, the same fundamental forms of “deixis”, which gave rise to the opposition of *hier, da, dort* and to that of “I”, “thou” and “he”. (Cassirer 1955: 213)

These samples derive from Cassirer’s first volume of *Symbolic Forms*, a volume devoted specifically to language. A few ideas can be abstracted from the samples. First, personal pronouns belong to the general linguistic category of deictics, viz. demonstratives (Examples 5 and 7). Second, this category includes adverbials of time and space, which serve presumably secondary but supporting functions of pronominals (Examples 3, 5, 7). Third, the pronominals can be divided into three types, as clearly indicated by traditional Latin-based grammar (Examples 4, 5 and

7). Finally, deictics represent the indicative or demonstrative function of language as opposed to the imitative function.

With these abstractions one may examine the context of Example 1, which is taken from the chapter entitled “Language in the phase of sensuous expression” (Cassirer 1955: 177–197). Here language is being treated as an immanent spiritual form which calls into question not only the prior existence of an exterior metaphysical entity that determines it, but the dichotomy between outward and inward spheres of reality. Cassirer’s observation that spiritual content and sensuous expression are inseparable, that “the two, content and expression, become what they are only in their interpenetration”, and that only through the latter relation is signification produced, can be read as a paraphrase of the Saussurian configuration of linguistic sign as consisting of the “sensuous” signifier (“*image-acoustique*”) and the “spiritual” (i.e., conceptual) signified, though there is a major difference between Cassirer’s psychologism and the physicalism from which Saussure tries to distance himself.

For Cassirer, the immanent nature of the linguistic sign applies both to its representational (imitative) and demonstrative (indicative) functions. And even the concept, or rather, the consciousness of the “I” is produced through the same mechanism.

It is true that at first this form of expression does not seem to be anything more than a “reproduction” of the inward in the outward. An outward stimulus passes from the sensory to the motor function, which however seems to remain within the sphere of mere mechanical reflexes, giving no indication of a higher spiritual “spontaneity”. And yet this reflex is itself the first indication of an activity in which a new form of concrete consciousness of the I and of the object begins to develop. (Cassirer 1955: 179–180)

According to Cassirer, what differentiates humans from animals is exactly the indicative gesture, which carries spiritual significance and which gives rise to the consciousness of the “I”.

It is one of the first steps by which the perceiving and desiring I removes a perceived and desired content from himself and so forms it into an “object”, and “objective” content [...] The foreign reality is brought into the power of the I – in a purely material sense it is drawn into the sphere of the I. (Cassirer 1955: 181)

The continuity from physical “grasping” to conceptual “grasping” that gives birth to interpretation is represented by the use of deictics from indication to demonstration.

As is characteristic of his idealistic position, Cassirer concedes that when using language we are dealing with “correlative spheres of intuition”, the subjective as well as the objective. Every configuration of objective reality produces a “new picture” of subjective reality (Cassirer 1955: 249–250). However, there is a special feature of language, which is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the “subjective” existence. It is represented by the pronoun. Rather than standing for the noun that represents an entity in the objective sphere, the pronoun, especially the first-person pronoun, as Wilhelm Humboldt asserts, is the first part of speech. Cassirer paraphrases Humboldt to the effect that “for the first element in the act of speech is the personality of the speaker himself, who stands in constant contact with nature and in speaking must inevitably express the opposition between his I and nature” (Cassirer 1955: 250). He further quotes Humboldt as saying:

But in the I, the thou is automatically given, and through a new opposition the third person arises, which, now that language has gone beyond the circle of those who feel and speak, is extended to dead things. (Cassirer 1955: 250)

The statement would sound familiar to anyone who knows Benveniste, as I shall discuss later, but, unfortunately, Cassirer stops here. Being a philosopher rather than a linguist, he insists that the “original” feeling [of the I] described above “cannot be sought exclusively in the explicit *designation* of the I as the first person pronoun”, because otherwise “[t]he philosophy of language would indeed reduce itself to the narrow, logical-grammatical view which it combats [...]” (Cassirer 1955: 250). Cassirer goes on to develop the origin of the self with one’s consciousness of the body, in a way anticipating the revival of the philosophy of the body more than half a century later (See Bermudez et al. 1995; Lakoff, Johnson 1999).

#### **4. Benveniste as mediator of Peirce and Cassirer**

It is by no means strange that Saussure should have bypassed the pronominals because of his interest in language as a system (*la langue*) at the expense of utterance (*le parole*). We shall therefore bypass Saussure and arrive at a key figure in the second generation of structural linguists, namely, Émile Benveniste. According to Benveniste, subjectivity is primarily a pronominal category rather than a phenomenological or psychological category. Discourse is perceived by him as socialized language that necessarily presupposes the participation of interlocutors and interaction between two parties, which are reciprocally registered as the pronominal couple I-Thou. Now, since dialogue suggests logos carried across by multi-vocality rather than shared (so goes the corruption) by bi-vocality,

the subjectivity of dialogue is multi-faceted and multi-voiced. The interlocutors that constitute this trans-subjectivity are mutually implicated, interfered, and contaminated in ideology and shape of belief.

The first volume of Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971) contains five chapters (18–23), which deal with, and are accordingly put under the general heading of, “Man and language”. From among the numerous topics that the author addresses those relevant to us are: (1) subjectivity in language or, more precisely, discourse; and (2) human subjects as pronominal categories. Benveniste pushes the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* to another direction by focusing almost exclusively on *discours* (discourse). In a sense, he abolishes the distinction and reinstates *parole* as *discours*.

His argument can be summarized as follows. Performed by human agents, discourse is language in action (Benveniste 1971: 223); it is an “act of speech” (Benveniste 1971: 224). One could say that man constitutes himself as a “subject” in and through language, i.e., speech or discourse. It goes without saying that Benveniste's use of discourse is different from the American stylistic use of the term in discourse analysis beyond the sentential level, and has little to do with the Foucauldian discourse charged with power, though it may lead to it. Benveniste (1971: 224) observes that whether “subjectivity” is placed in phenomenology or psychology, it emerges “as a fundamental property of language”. Finally, the foundation of “subjectivity” is determined by the linguistic status of “person” (Benveniste 1971: 224). In other words, subjectivity is to begin with the problem of pronouns.

Benveniste further distinguishes between the personal and a-personal systems in the pronominal category. The persons that construct, and are thus involved in, the discursive situation are the first-person “I” and the second person “you”, while “he” or “she” are reduced to the a-personal (Benveniste 1971: 217ff). Jakobson (1971), following Otto Jespersen (1922), calls these personal pronouns “shifters” precisely because of the shifting role they play in identifying and defining human relationship. Jespersen does not restrict shifters to personal pronouns though he admits they are the most important class. This class of words, which puzzles children in their language acquisition, also includes *father*, *mother*, *enemy*, and *home*. According to Jespersen (1922: 123),

[a] class of words which present grave difficulty to children are those whose meaning differs according to the situation, so that the child hears them now applied to one thing and now to another.

The child says “I”, but hears its interlocutor also say “I” and is therefore confused. According to Jakobson (1971: 134), discursive categories that imply a reference to

the speech event (*procès de l'énonciation*) are “shifters”. A notable example would be a situation involving both the narrated person and the speech performer. As he observes, [f]irst person signals the identity of a participant of the narrated event with the performer of the speech event, and the second person, the identity with the actual or potential undergoer of the speech event (Jakobson 1971: 134). Both persons are therefore “marked”, not only by the indexical signs “I” and “you” because, for that matter, the third person is also likewise marked by a “he” or “she”, but also by the discursive and dialogic reciprocity which serves to construct their subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

The preliminary observation one might make here is that enunciation does not amount to a monologue or a dialogue but serves as its foundation, indeed the very foundation of all linguistic signification and communication. It is a manifestation of corporeality, in the manner of mobilization and discharge of physical energy known as articulation. This physical aspect of language belongs to semiotic Firstness, so to speak, irrespective of the participation of Secondness, i.e., without the subject, e.g., the child, being called upon. When a person, whether male or female, newly born or moribund, utters a sound, however incomprehensible and meaningless, he announces his existence as a human subject though not yet as “subjectivity”:

The “subjectivity” we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit him as “subject” (*la capacité du locuteur de se poser comme «sujet»*). It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself [...] but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. (Benveniste 1971: 224)

What follows from this initial enunciation is appropriately interpersonal discourse, which Benveniste defines in terms of I-Thou relationship. Posing the human capacity of enunciation does not suggest a transcendental I. Nor does it mean that subjectivity can be equated to enunciation. In fact, subjectivity develops along with the sophistication and socialization of enunciation, which includes the distinction between enunciation (*énonciation*) and enunciated (*énoncé*), as well as between locutor, allocutor, and interlocutor. That’s where and why Benveniste introduces the second person. Ideology gets involved only when this semiotic secondness has a role to play. One cannot reverse the order of the first and second persons; nor can one at any rate resurrect the third person who is not available in the speech situation, or, in Humboldt’s words quoted above, the third person who can be “extended to dead things” (Cassirer 1955: 250).

#### 4. Peirce's pronominal discourse

Earlier, I mentioned that Peirce rarely dwells on the linguistic notion of pronouns. If at all, it is designated as a type of indexical sign (or even sub-index) in relation to other types, like demonstratives. But it would be inaccurate to say that Peirce has relegated the notion to obscurity, given his profound interest in rhetoric as one of the three language-related disciplines carried over from classical antiquity. In the celebrated introductory essay to *Allegories of Reading* entitled "Semiology and rhetoric", already the late Paul de Man suggests the intricate and subtle link between speech act, rhetoric and Peircean semiotics (de Man 1979). To Peirce, a man is a sign, and an external sign at that, and the content of consciousness, being part of the man-sign, is also a sign resulting from inference. From this it follows that the *I-think*, the *cogito* and the I, is also a sign (Peirce 1991: 83). What about the second person? In one of his last pieces, *MS 682*, written in 1913, Peirce addresses his reader, the second-person addressee as "your Honor", perhaps half-mockingly, but there is a serious note underneath it:

I address the Reader as "your Honor", simply because I sincerely do honor anybody who is disposed to undertake a sustained endeavor to train himself to reason in such ways as to miss as little as possible of such truth as it concerns him to know, while at the same time, as far as circumstances permit, avoiding risks of error; and I address him in the second person because I think of him as a real person, with all the instincts of which we human beings are so sublimely and so responsibly endowed. (Peirce 1998: 463–464)

Whereas my present belief is a result of inference or reasoning in terms of the triadic relationship of sign, indeed a result of three beliefs amongst which the third one comes to the fore, the fact that I as man-sign am addressing you as man-sign on the topic of my current belief – in this case, pragmatism – is ample evidence that you can be affected, persuaded, convinced to accept my belief. On top of sign inference lie perhaps other indexical signs, such as the discursive or epistolary circumstances, which make us, in Peirce's words, collateral observers.

In the famous essay "Pragmatism" (*MS318*) prefaced with a letter to a second-person Editor, Peirce (1998: 404) gives five examples to demonstrate that the utterer and the interpreter can acquire shared knowledge not only through the uttered sign, but through "previous or collateral source" and "ingredients" of the utterer. One touching example tells us how Peirce in his student days at Harvard underwent the experience of transformation from mistaken interpretation to relatively correct understanding of a fellow-student's remarks about colours, not knowing in the first place that the utterer was blind to the colour red. Here the sign uttered serves only a

partial or even deceptive function in transmission of knowledge, and the remaining or main function depends on the knowledge of the utterer as man-sign.<sup>1</sup> Although the text is a narrative rewrite of a dialogue that took place some forty years ago, in which the original interlocutors have been deprived of their actual verbal exchange, and their dialogue changed into a monologic reportage, one can still imagine the emotional and intellectual impact created by the discursive situation.

The most famous example suggesting the interlocutors’ I-Thou relationship is no doubt Peirce’s correspondence with Lady Victoria Welby. It is interesting that in his 1906 letter to Lady Welby – itself being reflexively a *token* (or *sinsign*) of personalized discursive genre (*type* or *legisign*), Peirce should refer to the strange “*Communicational Interpretant*”, or “the *Cominterpretant*, which is a determination of that mind into which the minds of utterer and interpreter have to be fused in order that any communication should take place” (1998: 478). Peirce (1998: 477) asserts that this communication of a Form, say, being in love, is made possible by sign. To illustrate what he means by Form, Peirce (1998: 478) gives a banal-looking example, “John is in love with Helen”. In this proposition John and Helen are the Object signified, “[b]ut the ‘is in love with’ signifies the form this sign represents itself to represent John-and-Helen’s Form to be”. Cassirer, no doubt, would concur with this linguistic symbolic form.<sup>1</sup>

Two years and a half had passed, when at Christmas of 1908, Peirce picked up the issue again, this time more concerned with the pronominal relationships, thus bringing him closer to Benveniste in the latter’s discussion of subjectivity.

[... S]hall I yield this place to a distinction prominent in every language on earth, that between the three “*persons*”, *amo*, *amas*, *amat*? If *I* and *Thou* are the Objects, we say *We*; if *Thou* and *He* are the Objects, we say *Ye*. But if *I* and *He* are the Objects to the exclusion of *Thee*, I know no other linguistic form than the French expression “*Nous autres*”. *I*, *Thou*, and *He* can be expressed by the *Tri-al* and *Quadral* numbers of Polynesian languages; in English we can

<sup>1</sup> *Example 2.* I remember a blazing July noon in the early sixties when a fellow-student in the chemical laboratory, in whose company I was crossing the Harvard “College Yard”, while the grass shone like emeralds, and the red-brick buildings, not red enough by nature for the taste of the curator, were blazing in a fresh coat of something like vermillion, – when this fellow student casually remarked upon the pleasing harmony of color between the grass, the foliage, and the buildings. With eyes feeling as if their balls were being twisted by some inquisitor, I at first understood the remark as a sorry joke, like the gibes of some Indian captive at the want of skill of his tormentors. But I soon found that it was the utterance of a sincere feeling, and then, by a series of questions, soon discovered that my friend was blind to the red element of color. A man may have learned that he is color-blind; but it is impossible that he should be conscious of the stupendous gulf between his chromatic impressions and those of ordinary men; although it is needful to take account of this in all interpretations of what he may say about colors. In the course of my examination of that young gentleman, which occupied several days, I learned a more general lesson, worth multiples of the time it lost me from the laboratory. (Peirce 1998: 405)

only say “*We all of us*”. Thus there ought, logically, one would say, to be *seven* grammatical persons, if any at all. But none at all are needed, if we have the Designative pronouns *I, Thou, He*. But hold! When I say there are only seven persons I forgot the differences between *Thou* and *I* are Anglo-Saxon. *Thou* and *I* are correspondents. *Thou* and *I* are endurer and endured. *Thou* and *I* are admired and admirer. *Thou, He, and I* are accuser to and of, accuser of and to, accused by and to, accused to and by, informed of by, informed by of. In short this distinction does not require any special form of sign, nor could any form be adequate without numerous variations. (Peirce 1998: 484)

What does Peirce really mean in this naïve-sounding (reading) but cryptic passage? Is he displaying his knowledge of language – which is quite banal and simplistic? Or is he, rather, playing on the elementary conjugation and inflection of one verb, the prepositions and postpositions surrounding another verb, both governed by the singular pronominals of *I-Thou-He*? Then why must the two verbs be *love* and *accuse*? Are they picked out by accident or automatically as in first-year grammar school Latin? Are *John* and *Helen* names of real persons, or serve but as common names rather than proper names, as *Socrates* or *Quintus*, the subject in syllogistic logic?

If we follow Peirce’s argument above that the uttered sign makes little or no sense, but can be semantically invested only through discursive practice, imputed by the utterer’s and interpreter’s or both interlocutors’ “ingredients” as well as their being determined by a “*Communicational Interpretant*”, what we have here is an epistolary situation in which the dreamy correspondent by the name of Peirce, instead of *John*, is suddenly awakened to the reality – so that he utters a rhetorical apostrophe “But hold!” – that *Lady Welby* instead of *Helen*, and himself are Anglo-Saxon. This trivial detail, almost completely ignored by Peirce scholars, provides us with food for our deconstructive, supplementary reading – a reading that demonstrates that Peirce is a precursor of Benveniste and a vigorous practitioner of language pragmatics.

## 5. Conclusion

It would be naïve to introduce the three categories of personal pronouns recklessly as another Peircean triad. Any such attempt will prove futile in light of Benveniste’s discussion of man in language, because, in the social realization of language, that is, in discursive practice, the pronominal system can be reduced to the personal and the a-personal systems, with the former enacted by the two parties in an ongoing reciprocal *I-Thou* exchange. The present survey has evoked three thinkers on language in the history of semiotics and analysed their respective discussions of

personal pronoun as a common feature of deictics. Trifling as the issue may seem at first glance, this particular discursive sign serves to link the three authors and shed light on the relationship between language and man.<sup>2</sup>

## References

- Benveniste, Émile 1971. *Problems in General Linguistics*. [Meek, Mary Elizabeth, trans.] Coral Gables: University of Miami Press.
- Bermudez, Jose Luis; Marcel, Anthony; Eilan, Naomi (eds.) 1995. *The Body and the Self*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Cassirer, Ernst 1945. Structuralism in modern linguistics. *Word* 1: 99–120.
- 1955. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1. [Manheim, Ralph, trans.] New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 1957. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3. [Manheim, Ralph, trans.] New Haven: Yale University Press.
- De Man, Paul 1979. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jakobson, Roman 1960. Linguistics and poetics. In: Sebeok, Thomas (ed.), *Style in Language*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 350–377.
- 1971[1956]. Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian verb. In: *Selected Writings 2: Word and Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 130–147.
- 1974. *Selected Writings*, vol. 7. [Rudy, Stephen, ed.]. Berlin: Mouton.
- Jespersen, Otto 1922. *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders 1991. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*. [Hoopes, James, ed.] Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders 1998. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol 2 (1893–1913). [Houser, Nathan; Kloesel, Christian, eds.] Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 1983. *Course in General Linguistics*. [Harris, Roy, trans.] London: Duckworth.

---

<sup>2</sup> The paper was originally delivered at the International Symposium on Cassirer, with the title of “Language beyond Power”, which was held at the University of Aalborg and the International Communicology Institute, at Skagen, Denmark, on June 26–July 2 2006. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of a 985 Research Grant from Fudan University in 2011–2012 for the manuscript’s revision and publication.

### **Кассирер, Бенвенист и Пирс о дейктиках и «местоименной» коммуникации**

При всем своем глубоком интересе к вторичности (*Secondness*) и ее проявлению в разных видах индексов, включая дейктики, Пирс редко обращался к отношениям между местоимениями. В то время как американский основатель семиотики отнес бы язык в целом к третичности (*Thirdness*), в более широких рамках которой дейктики только и могут работать, немецкий философ Кассирер отмечает: «то, что характеризует самые первые пространственные понятия, которые мы находим в языке, это их вовлеченность в определенные «дейктические» функции». Для Кассирера значение местоимений, в особенности соотношение Я–Ты, заключается в их влиянии на развитие пространственной концепции, которая лежит в основе символических форм. Может показаться странным, почему «де-сигнаты» Я, Ты, Он, столь очевидные (с точки зрения самого Пирса) в их категориальной и эмпирической дифференциации, не могут быть сведены к триаде первичность, вторичность и третичность (*Firstness, Secondness, Thirdness*). Интересно, однако, что в переписке 1906 г. с леди Уэлби Пирс обращается к странной «коммуникационной интерпретанте», или к «коминтерпретанте (*Cominterpretant*), которая является определением того разума, в котором сознание говорящего и сознание интерпретатора должны быть слиты для того, чтобы стало возможным любое общение». Пирс утверждает, что эта коммуникация Формы, скажем, любви, стала возможной благодаря знаку. Статья рассматривает отношение Пирса и Кассирера к дейктикам или индексальным знакам, в частности – к межличностным отношениям, – в свете концепции дискурса, предложенной Бенвенистом, и исследует возможный подтекст, лежащий в основе переписки Пирса-Уэлби.

### **Cassirer, Benveniste ja Peirce deiktikutest ja asesõnalisest kommunikatsioonist**

Vaatamata oma sügavale huvile Teisesuse ning selle ilmlemise vastu igasugustes indeksites, sealhulgas deiktikutes, pöörab Peirce harva tähelepanu asesõnadevahelistele suhetele. Kui ameeriklasest semiootika rajaja paigutab keele tervikuna Kolmasusse, üksnes mille avaramas raamistuses deiktikud saavadki toimida, täheldab saksa filosoof Cassirer, et “see, mis iseloomustab kõige esimesi ruumilisi mõisteid, mida me keelest leiame, on nende haaratus konkreet-sesse “deiktilisse funktsiooni.” Cassireri jaoks seisneb asesõnade, eriti mina-sina suhte tähtsus selle mõjus ruumilisuse mõiste arengule, mis paneb aluse sümboolsetele vormidele. Võib näida kummalisena, miks “designatiivseid” mina, sina, tema, mis on oma kategooriaalses ja empiirilises eristatavuses niivõrd enesestmõistetavad, pole võimalik taandada Esmasuse, Teisesuse ja Kolmasuse triaadile. On aga huvitav, et Peirce 1906. aasta kirjavahetuses leedi Welbyga viitab kummalisele “kommunikatsioonilisele interpretandile” või “kominterpretandile, mis määratleb selle meele (*mind*), millesse väljenduja ja tõlgendaja meeled peavad sulanduma selleks, et ükskõik milline kommunikatsioon võiks aset leida”. Peirce kinnitab, et sellise vormikommunikatsiooni, näiteks armunud olemise, muudab võimalikuks märk. Käesolevas artiklis käsitletakse Peirce’i ja Cassireri osutusi deiktikutele või indeksikaalsetele märkidele, eriti inimestevaheliste suhete raames, Benveniste diskursusemõiste valguses ning vaadeldakse Peirce’i-Welby kirjavahetuse üht võimalikku allteksti.