

Who is chasing whom in that story? On the acquisition of referentiality in children's narratives.

Natalia Gagarina & Natalie Suermeli (ZAS Berlin)

The production of a well-formed narrative requires a coordination of semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels and is related to the acquisition of specific linguistic forms and semantic relations (Berman, 1988, Karmiloff-Smith, 1987). The principal task for a young narrator is to learn various forms of language specific referential expressions and to select the appropriate one that will clearly identify a referent for a listener. How to choose an adequate reference in a language like Russian, in which referential choice is usually made between the two basic options – full NPs and third person pronouns?

Referential adequacy was defined according to the cognitive multi-factorial approach to referential choice (Kibrik, 2000) and its score was *calculated* on the basis of interaction between a reference in discourse and working memory: the interpretation of activation correlates with the degree of referents' activation in speaker's working memory.

The development of referential adequacy was examined in dependence of the referential functions of all characters in the text: *introduction*, *maintenance* and *reintroduction*. Referential adequacy was based on the analyses of all mentions of a story character. The linear distance to the antecedent was counted in clauses after Givon (1990) and the rhetorical distance was coded after Kibrik (2000).

The elicited narratives of ninety preschool children were analyzed. The children composed three groups, each including thirty participants – Russian-German early sequential bilinguals, Russian-speaking monolinguals with typical development (TD) and with specific language impairment (SLI). Each of these three groups was divided into two age cohorts with the mean ages 56 months and 72 months respectively.

The results showed no significant difference in referential adequacy between bilingual and monolingual TD children. Surprisingly, the younger SLI group showed significantly higher adequacy scores (in %) than the bilingual and the monolingual TDs (SLI vs. bilingual: $W = 142$, p -value = 0.014, SLI vs. monolingual TD: $t = 2.13$, $df = 25.53$, p -value = 0.042). This high level of the *proper* use of referential expressions might be due to the therapeutic training, which these children regularly get in the kindergarten.

As far as the developmental tendency is concerned, the increase of referential adequacy was documented for the two TD groups, however the p -value was slightly above the significance level (bilinguals: $W = 66.5$, p -value = 0.068, monolinguals: $t = -1.9289$, $df = 22$, p -value = 0.066). This might be due to the low number of children per group. As expected, the referential adequacy was higher for the function of *introduction* as compared to *maintenance* and *reintroduction*.