This study deals with the interaction of the two levels of elicited narrative discourse in preschool monolingual German-speaking children. Elicited narratives are usually analysed at following two levels which represent two distinct areas of discourse: macrostructure and microstructure (Liles et al., 1995). The macrostructure of a narrative refers to its higher-order hierarchical organisation including an episodic structure and story grammar components (Heilmann et al., 2010, Stein and Glenn, 1976). The microstructure of a narrative incorporates linguistic devices that establish referential and relational coherence on the sentential and intersentential level (Hasan and Halliday 1976).

The analysis of the macrostructure in this study are based on the three-component outline of the story grammar theory (Stein and Glenn, 1979) and causal network model (e.g. Trabasso and Sperry, 1985; Trabasso and Nickels, 1992). This framework identifies an initiating event (containing a character's goal/s), attempts and outcomes, known as goal-attempt-outcome (GAO) sequences. Three levels of story structure are as follows: sequence level: Attempt-Outcome, abbreviated episode: Goal-Attempt, Goal-Outcome and full episode: Goal-Attempt-Outcome. For analysing microstructure we employ the narrow view (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) and concentrate on the cohesive devices which establish referential and relational cohesion.

The goals of this study are at first to elaborate the GAO components of the macrostructure and to trace the complexity levels, second to establish the features of the referential and relational cohesion on the microstructural level and third to trace the interaction between both levels, if any. In particular, the analyses (a) of the additive connective und and its functions to mark reference maintenance, to coordinate NPs/VPs and to mark the reference shift, (b) of the adversative und/aber and their functions of contrast interpretation, inconsistency and denial of expectation and (c) the three subsequent mentions of the main referents were performed.

Method

Subjects and Material. The data consist of the elicited narratives of 45 monolingual German speaking children at age four to six speaking the Berliner variety of high German. Children were shown two stories containing 6 pictures each (The Fox Story, Gülzow & Gagarina, (2007) and the Cat Story, Hickman(2003)) and were asked to tell the story in a non-shared attention modus.

Analysis. The elicited narratives were recorded, transcribed and coded according to the CHILDES format (MacWhinney 2000). For the analysis of macrostructure, sentences containing GAO were extracted for more detailed analysis. For analysis at the level of microstructure, sentences with the pronouns, connectives and other devices establishing referential and relational coherence underwent the exact examination. Sentences with imitations, repetitions, frozen and unclear forms were excluded.

Results & Discussion

For the macrostructure the results show a clear spurt in the development of the story structure for the 6 year-olds children. While only 5% of four year olds are able to produce the full GAO sequence, this number increases to one third by the group of
six year olds. The results also show the decrease - in the older children - of the incomplete episodic structure, which consists of only Goals and Attempts/Outcomes. For the microstructure the results show in all age groups the whole range of functions of /und/ and /aber/. There are significant differences between the oldest and the youngest group. The main used functions are to organize the sequential order, at second to mark a reference shift and third to maintain the topic. The use of the adversative connective /aber/ is very infrequent and increase with age. The analysis of the three subsequent mentions shows an integration of new-given information. In all age groups the children maintain the referents using definite NPs, pronouns or demonstrative pronouns. Reintroduced referents are marked in the most cases by a definite NP. First analyses show no interaction or correlations between the two observed levels. We explain it by methodical deficiency.