Referring expressions in the oral narratives of German-speaking children: The influence of local and global accessibility factors and working memory capacity

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Both local and global factors contribute to the accessibility of referents (Vogels 2014). While local accessibility factors, such as referential function, may change from sentence to sentence, global accessibility factors, like protagonisthood or animacy, usually remain constant throughout the discourse. Therefore, it is assumed that keeping track of referents' local accessibility is cognitively more demanding than considering their global accessibility (Lindgren & Vogels 2018). Young children in particular tend to rely more on global accessibility factors than on local ones, such that they use pronouns only to refer to the protagonist of the story (e.g., Karmiloff-Smith 1985). This can lead to ambiguities if the pronouns do not match the local accessibility of the referents. The reason for children's use of ambiguous pronouns has been assumed to be their reduced working memory capacity (e.g., Hendriks et al. 2014). Indeed, there is evidence that children's adequate character reference is linked to their capacity to update working memory (Whitely & Colozzo 2013). Which roles local and global accessibility factors play in this context remains open. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the following question: How is children's choice of referring expressions influenced by local and global accessibility factors and by their working memory capacity? We predict that lower working memory capacities lead to higher proportions of pronouns in general (Hendriks et al. 2014) and that the weighting of local and global accessibility factors is influenced by working memory capacity, in that global factors are weighted higher when working memory capacity is low. To test this assumption, oral narratives were elicited using the picture-book *Frog on his own* (Mayer 1973) from 19 German-speaking children (mean age: 9;2), who were also assessed with four subtests of the AGTB 5-12 (Hasselhorn et al. 2012), a standardized test for assessing children's working memory capacity. In our talk, we present results from the study and discuss how working memory capacity, referential function (maintenance vs. reintroduction), protagonisthood (main vs. secondary character) and animacy (human vs. animate) influence children's use of referring expressions.

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