

Milena Kühnast, Dagmar Bittner, Natalia Gagarina and Insa Gülzow
Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft
ZAS, Berlin

**Comprehension and production of anaphoric demonstratives by
German-, Russian-, and Bulgarian-speaking children**

Do 12.00 – 12.30

Previous discussions on the criteria guiding the resolution of anaphora show discrepancies in their assumptions about which criteria constitute the basis of the resolution process, and how these various criteria interact with each other. Furthermore, although the notion of salience has been considered the most important criterion in the anaphora resolution since Lewis (1970), there is no common understanding on how salience or different degrees of salience are inferred from the given linguistic data by the language user. There seems to be a consensus on the issue that the complexity scale of the anaphora and the salience scale of the discourse referents are inversely mapped in the resolution procedure (cf. Grosz et al. 1995), but there still exists no agreement on the question which criteria determine the salience of the discourse referents and what components influence the complexity assessment of the anaphora.

In our study, we address the questions (a) which components of the anaphora resolution mechanism – structural and/or semantic and /or any other – play the most prominent role for different groups of toddlers in anaphora resolution; (b) how the components' hierarchy changes with the age and at which point children reach adult-like competence and/or strategy in assessing the mechanism of the anaphora resolution. In order to answer these questions, two experiments with approx. 180 children per language distributed over four age groups from 2 to 6 and a control group of adults were conducted. Children and adults experienced a playing situation with two participants. The task of the production part of the experiment was to repeat the last sentence presented in this situation. This last sentence contained one of the three anaphoric pronoun types: zero, personal 'he' and demonstrative 'that'. The comprehension part of the experiment – induced by a *who-is-x*-question – evaluated the explicit choice of a referent for the anaphoric pronoun presented in the last sentence. The participants were confronted with four types of situations, varying with respect to the combination of the +/- animacy of the Subject and the Object, a total of 12 sentences varied in the two cohorts.

The first results show a preference for demonstrative pronouns with the younger children in contexts containing an inanimate protagonist. The older children tend to prefer the demonstrative pronoun in a situation where the anaphora resolution favors the object. At the moment, follow-up experiments are in progress in order to clarify the previous results and to find out if there is an influence of language specific properties on the anaphora resolution.

Lewis, D. (1970). General semantics. *Synthese* 22, 18-67.

Grosz, B., A. Joshi, & S. Weinstein (1995). Centering: A framework for modeling the local coherence of discourse. *Computational Linguistics* 21 (2): 203-226.