Language and perception are two basic cognitive systems, which constantly interact and rely on each other in our daily existence. My research aims to investigate how visually presented actions interact with event and information structure and affect the real time comprehension of ambiguous discourse reference in children of different age groups. Effects of visual actions on language and pronoun interpretation as such have been investigated in the past. However, it has never been examined how they influence each other.

This abstract will present the first of three experiments that are concerned with the interplay of language and perception.

In previous research, Bittner and Kuehnast (2011) have found that three-year-old children mainly use discourse- and context-based cues to process situations and referents, whereas five-year-old children employ syntax and discourse cues to form representations of the latter. Bittner and Kuehnast suggest that the younger children have not yet determined reference on the basis of syntactic cues. The five-year-olds, however, make use of syntax-based cues to form discourse representations and to aid the resolution processes.

The means of focusing an element differ between languages and even within a language. In German, where both V2 and verb-final sentences are common depending on the sentence structure, one way of focusing is to use an it-cleft. In this sentence construction the verb moves to the end.

In order to investigate how visual actions and linguistic focus interact with and affect the processing of ambiguous personal pronouns, I have conducted an eye-tracking study. The participants were three- to seven-year-old children, all native speakers of German.

In the experiment, a stimulus item consists of three sentences. The first one introduces two entities that do not differ in gender and number. The second sentence of the stimulus item contains the description of an action carried out by one of the discourse entities. This action will be either seen on the screen or not. Furthermore, in order to test the interaction with information structure this sentence appears either in canonical or focused (it-cleft) syntactic order. The third sentence includes an ambiguous personal pronoun.

Therefore, each stimulus item appears in four different conditions, taking into account all the possible modifications.

1. Da sind Herr Bär und Herr Tiger. → introductory sentence
2a. Herr Bär **kitzelt** Herrn Tiger. → canonical word order (V2)
2b. Es ist Herr Bär, der Herrn Tiger **kitzelt**. → focus structure (verb-final)
3. Er ist müde. → ambiguous pronoun sentence

Based on Bittner and Kuehnast (2011), the predictions are that the younger children will mainly use the visual cues whereas the older children will employ syntax and discourse cues like order of mention and focus it-clefts to process ambiguous referential relations. When it comes to the acquisition of focus structures like it-clefts, I expect that children take longer to acquire them. These constructions differ from the canonical word order in that the verb is moved to the end and therefore renders the it-cleft more complex. However, I expect that, once acquired, the focus construction aids the resolution process. Although the verb is only encountered in the end of the sentence, information about the prominence of one referent is already accessible in the beginning.

The data collection will be finished by the end of June and will then be analysed.