

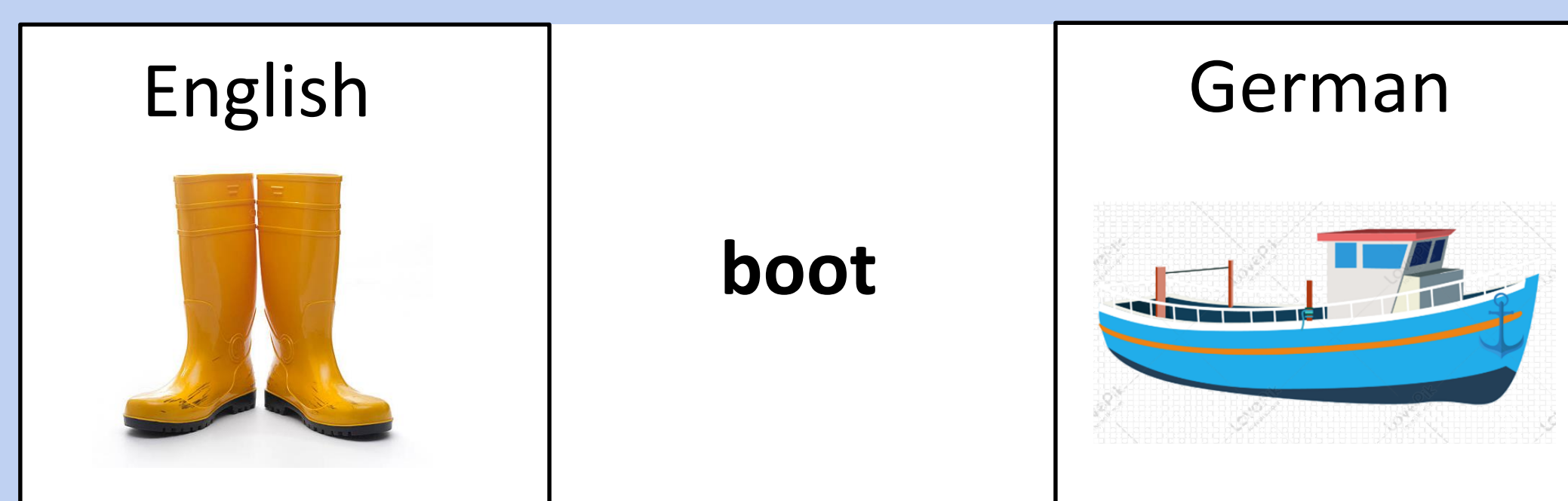
The Role of Systematicity in Early Referent Selection

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Background

- Word-object associations are generally arbitrary (Hockett & Hockett, 1960).



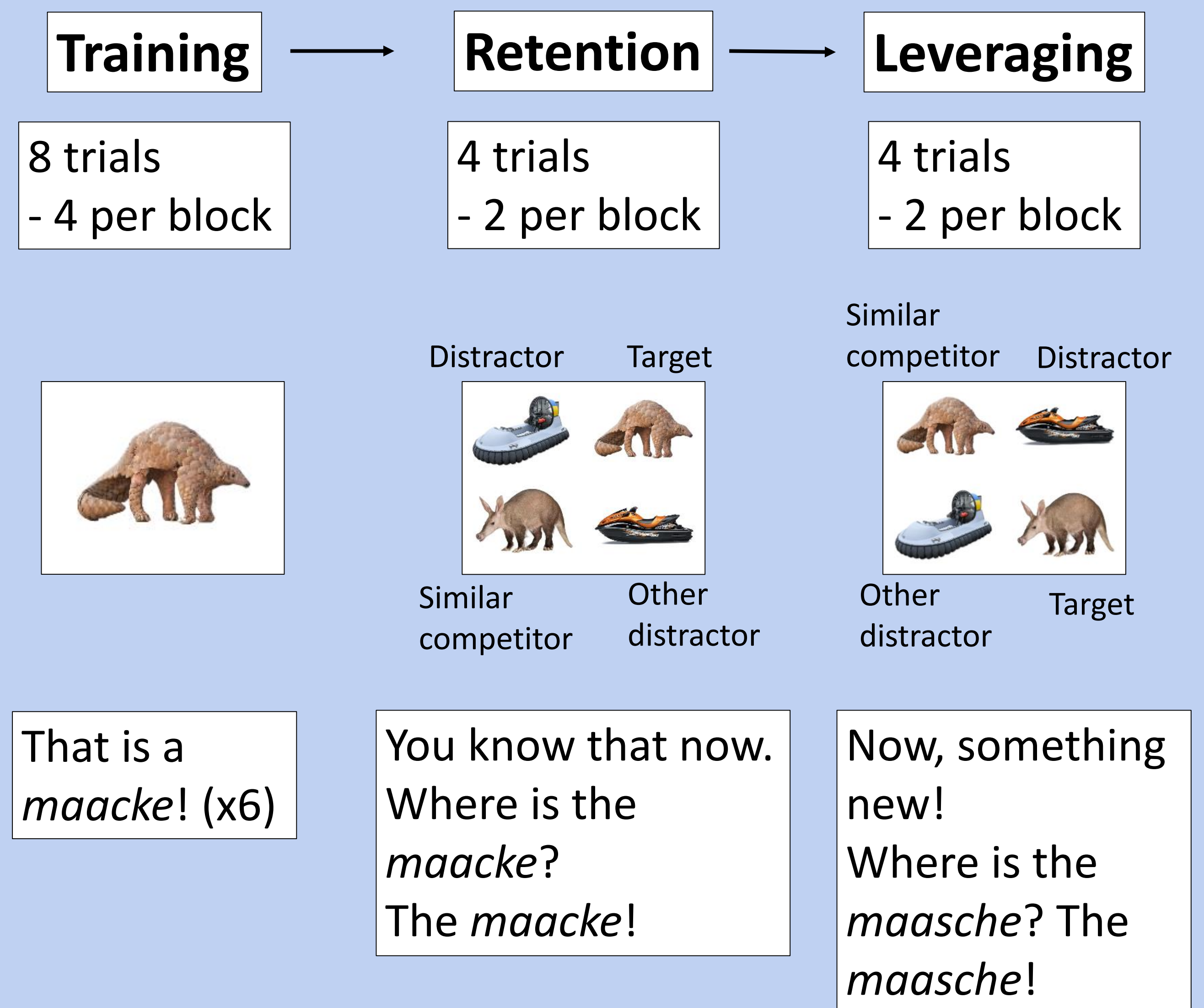
Arbitrary word-meaning mappings

- Allow semantically-related words (e.g., sheep and cow) to be distinguished easily, especially when used in the same context (Monaghan et al., 2011).

Systematic form-meaning relations

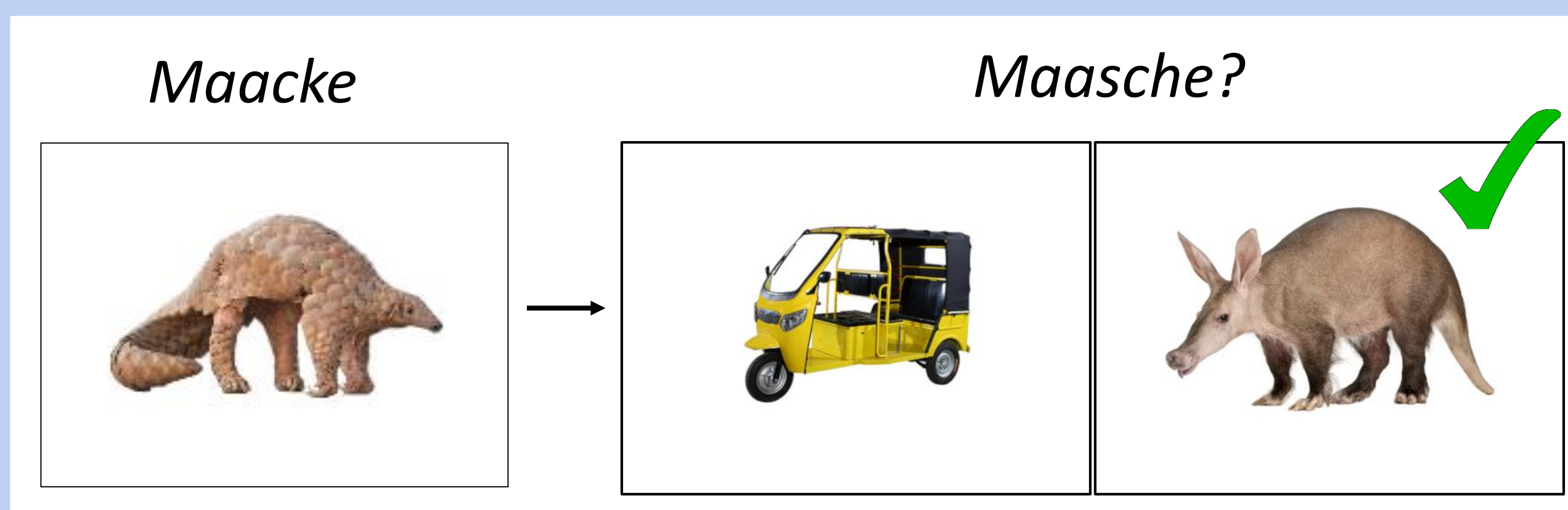
- Can be beneficial for word learning because infants can leverage existing knowledge when learning new words (Monaghan et al., 2014).

Design



Current study

- To date, the effect of form-meaning systematicity on word learning has yet to be tested empirically.
- Question:** Do toddlers rely on form-meaning systematicity during referent selection?
- Hypothesis:** Toddlers will associate a novel word that sounds similar to a word they know with an object that means something similar to the referent of the known label (i.e., reliance on systematicity)



- Registered report: In principle acceptance in Developmental Science (<https://osf.io/7mbsh/>)

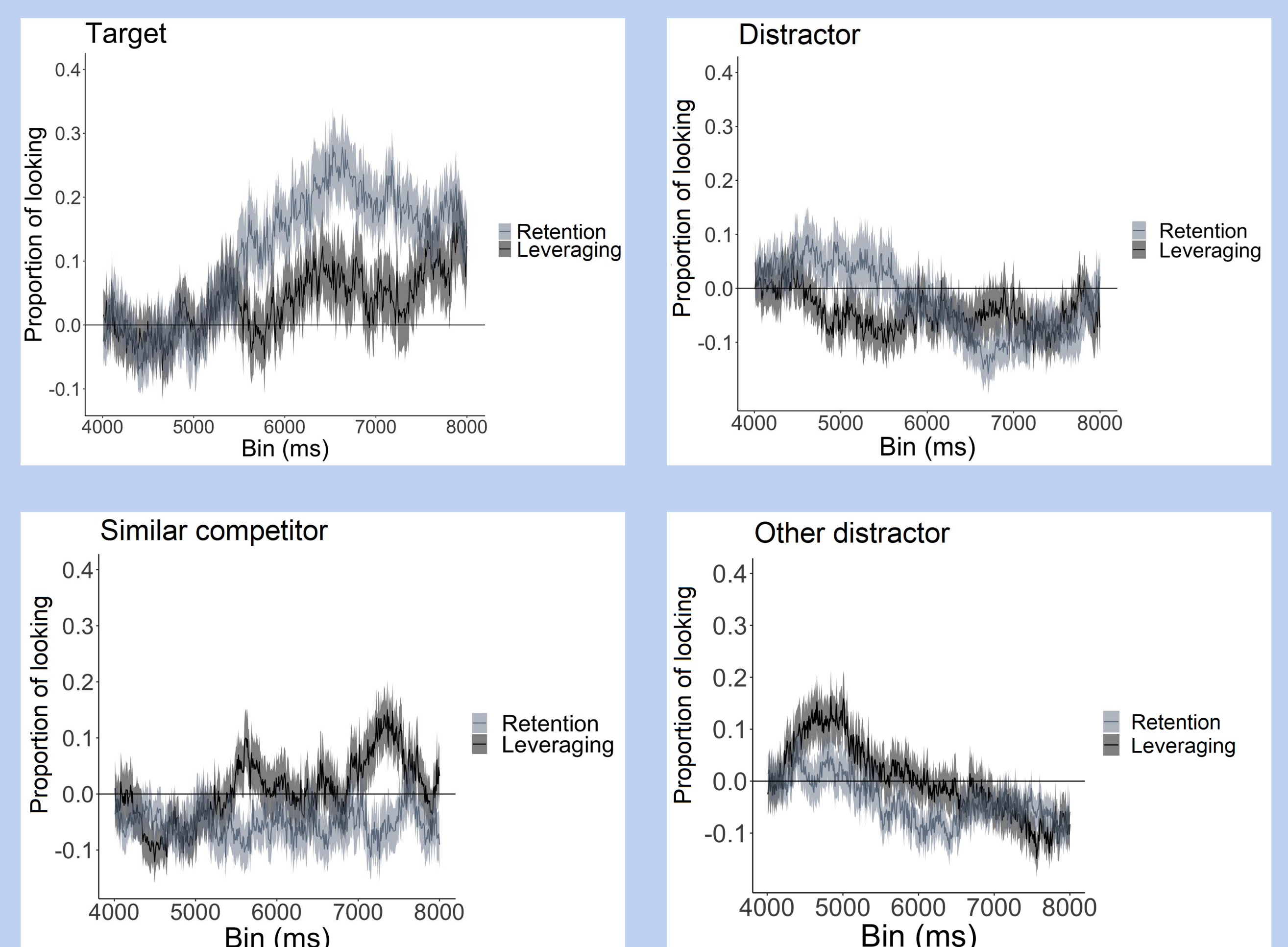
Participants

- 53 German monolinguals (ongoing)
- 21 – 27 months old

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Results



Conclusion

- Toddlers retained the trained novel word-object associations.
- Toddlers relied on systematicity during referent selection.

References

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- Monaghan, P., Christiansen, M. H., & Fitneva, S. A. (2011). The arbitrariness of the sign: Learning advantages from the structure of the vocabulary. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 140(3), 325–347.
- Monaghan, P., Shillcock, R. C., Christiansen, M. H., & Kirby, S. (2014). How arbitrary is language? *Philosophical Transactions of The Royal Society B*, 369.