Who is going to büyükanne? The impact of teacher-pupil interaction, including or excluding home (languages), on early second language acquisition

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In Flemish schools, a high proportion of children with an ethnic minority background underachieve (OECD, 2010). Since the 1980s it has been widely recognized that limited proficiency in Dutch is one of the most serious educational challenges minority children are facing. To help them overcome this challenge, the government has introduced extensive support programs but these have not succeeded in helping minority children close the language gap with the mainstream school population (Verhaeghe & Van Damme, 2007). The limited success of educational attempts to bridge the language gap has been related to the question of the nature of second language acquisition (SLA) (Jaspaert, 2010). Especially with regard to younger children it is argued that their success in learning a second language depends on implicit rather than explicit learning processes (Paradis, 2004; 2009).

During the school year 2013-2014, we monitored the language development of 109 six-year-old Turkish children in 11 Flemish kindergarten classrooms. A set of tests containing standardized and innovative language tasks was used to reveal explicit and implicit language learning processes. Furthermore, data were gathered on the learning context: daily classroom interaction (e.g. Black, 2004), teachers’ beliefs, subjects’ school liking and perceptions of multilingualism in a – except for one classroom – monolingual learning environment. Finally, an affective priming experiment (e.g. Banse, 2001) has been set up to test whether reference to subjects’ parents as significant in-group members in the school environment can be used to boost SLA. In this presentation, we will focus on the results of the affective priming experiment and on the question which characteristics of teacher-pupil interaction and the broader learning environment are related to successful SLA. We will especially pay attention to teacher-pupil interaction in the exceptional classroom where home languages are welcomed and used in everyday life.

Keywords: affective priming, inclusion of home languages, multilingualism, teacher-pupil interaction.