

The development of Dutch Object Naming Constructions in bilingual Turkish-Dutch children receiving low amounts of Dutch language input

A frequently used Dutch Object Naming Construction is [DEM_{pro}_neuter COP DET Name]. A typical instance is (1), produced by one of the preschool teachers in the present study:

(1) *TEA: *dit is een poes* 'this is a cat'

When one of her pupils, the three-year-old Turkish-Dutch Yunus, talks about names for objects, he uses utterances like (2).

(2) *CHI: *die poes* 'that cat: that is a cat'

Yunus does not use the copula *is* 'is', nor the indefinite article *een* 'a'. Moreover, he uses the non-neuter demonstrative pronoun *die*, whereas his teacher uses neuter *dit*. The structure of Yunus' utterance seems to be similar to the Turkish Object Naming Construction [DEM_{pro} Name], an instance of which is given in (3).

(3) *CHI: *bu kedi* 'this cat: this is a cat'

The study reported in the presentation investigates the use of Object Naming Constructions in longitudinally collected speech data of seven bilingual Turkish-Dutch children between the age of two and four. Five children regularly visited a preschool playgroup or daycare centre. At home, most children spoke almost exclusively Turkish. During the audio-recordings, the children interacted with monolingual Dutch preschool teachers or their own mothers and usually talked about picture books. The data of the bilingual children are compared to Object Naming Constructions used by four monolingual Dutch children, for whom data are available in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney, 2000). For all children, the Object Naming Constructions are compared to their use of demonstrative pronouns and copular forms in other utterances.

The results show that the bilingual children have a hard time learning the Dutch Object Naming Construction. Monolingual children master this construction at about the age of 2;6-2;10 and after that age only incidentally use non-neuter demonstrative pronouns in the construction. None of the bilingual children had reached that stage at the end of the period of data collection at age 3;6-4;0.

The path of development is in general similar for both groups: from constructions without a copula and incidental formulaic use of correct forms, to constructions with the copula but not always the correct demonstrative pronoun. A more qualitative difference between the groups was observed, however, in the use of specific demonstrative pronouns. The bilingual children have a significantly stronger preference for non-neuter demonstrative pronouns in their Object Naming Constructions than the monolingual children.

Explanations for the observed similarities and differences are sought in the amount of Dutch language input, the influence of Turkish as a first language, and the influence of bilingualism in general. In addition, the advantage of focusing on constructions in child language research is discussed.