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Interactive acculturation of Turkish-Belgian parents and children in Flanders: A case study of Beringen

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Abstract

This article tackles the relationship between ~~the interactive acculturation patterns of~~ Turkish-Belgian families with the Flemish society, within the specific context of their experiences with early childhood education and care (ECEC) system in Flanders. Our findings are based on a focus group with mothers in the town of Beringen. The intercultural dimension of the relationships between these families and ECEC services is discussed using the Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM). The acculturation patterns are discussed under three main headlines: language acquisition, social interaction and maternal employment. Within the context of IAM, our findings point to some degree of separationism of Turkish-Belgian families, while they perceive the Flemish majority to have an assimilationist attitude. This combination suggests a conflictual type of interaction. However, both parties also display some traits of integrationism, which points to the domain-specificity of interactive acculturation.

Keywords: *migration; integration; ECEC; pre-school; childcare.*

Introduction

Belgium is one of the pioneers in Europe for providing accessible pre-schooling where the history of public pre-schools goes back to mid-19th century. Willekens (2009, p. 55) describes the development of pre-school in Belgium as "a kind of accident of history" since it started to develop even before women's activity in the labour market increased. Currently, as of two-and-a-half years old, every child is expected to attend pre-school until they turn six and start primary schooling. Although pre-school attendance is not compulsory by law, attendance is strongly encouraged by the government and parents consider it as an obligatory step in their children's educational trajectory.

The three (Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking) communities of Belgium have split systems for early childhood education and care (ECEC). In the Flemish region, day care facilities for the 0-3 year-olds are under the responsibility of Department of Child and Family (Kind en Gezin), while pre-primary education (integrated in the system of elementary education) is handled by the Ministry of Education. While private care centres have their own price-setting, parental fees for the publicly subsidised services for 0-3 year-olds ~~is~~ means-tested. Pre-school (2½ - 6 years of age) is free for all children except for meals and extra activities. According to the 2015 figures, the ECEC participation rate of two year-olds is 82.2%, reaching to 99% for five year-olds in Flanders (Vlaanderen Onderwijs, 2015a).

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As a developed country that has been attracting immigrants, 11.6% of Belgium's population consists of non-nationals – among whom one third are citizens of non-EU countries (Eurostat, 2015). Non-national children's ECEC attendance in Flanders is always less regular compared to the nationals (non-national non-EU citizens' attendance is also more irregular than non-national EU citizens') (Vlaanderen Onderwijs, 2015b). Following Moroccan-Belgians, Turkish-Belgians are the second largest non-EU minority group in Belgium who are often disadvantaged due to having lower income, education and social status than Belgians (Baysu & Phalet, 2014; Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011).

Participation in ECEC strongly depends on the family dynamics, education system, and maternal employment. While ECEC is usually the first context in which children with an immigration background face ~~with~~ the differences between their home culture and the majority culture of the country they live in (Mantovani & Tobin, 2016), it is also one of the major instances where immigrant parents have to find their way in the majority culture. Especially pre-school is an integral part of the education trajectory in Belgium, which makes ECEC a major social setting where minority and majority cultures meet each other.[3]

This article tackles the way Turkish-Belgian families are situated in the Flemish society as an ethno-cultural minority group in relation to their experiences with the ECEC system. We make use of the data gathered through a focus group with eight mothers and discuss the intercultural dimension of the experiences of these families with the ECEC system using the Interactive Acculturation Model we borrow from the acculturation literature in social psychology.

Interactive Acculturation Theory

Acculturation means "individual changes in attitudes, behaviours, values and cultural identity" as a result of intercultural contact (Nekby & Rödin, 2007, p. 2). This two-dimensional model for identity formation combines the degree of identification with the majority and the minority cultures, allowing individuals to feel affinity to both groups (Bourhis, Montreuil, & Vanbeselaere, 2004; Nekby & Rödin, 2007). The Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM) has been used in determining the accultural orientation of minority and majority groups (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002). The 'interactive' aspect of acculturation is emphasised because both dominant and non-dominant groups are influenced from each other (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001).

'Interactive acculturation' refers to the degree of willingness to maintain one's culture (cultural maintenance) and to engage in contact with the other (contact and participation). Different combinations of these two form different acculturation attitudes. Willingness for cultural maintenance and contact with the other group leads to *integration*. Unwillingness for cultural maintenance and willingness to interact with the other leads to *assimilation*. Willingness for cultural maintenance and reluctance against contact with the other leads to *separation* (by the minority group) or *segregation* (by the majority group). Rejection of both cultural maintenance and contact with the other results in *marginalisation* (by the minority group) or *exclusion* (by the majority group). Finally, when the individual does not define himself or herself as a member of either the minority or the majority group, the attitude is called *individualism* (see Table 1).

[3] Pre-school is deeply rooted within the overall education system in Flanders and the pre-school experiences of children and their families are very similar to their experiences with primary education. Consequently, Belgians simply use the term "school" when speaking about pre-school. Adhering to the cultural terminology, the terms "pre-school" and "school" are used interchangeably throughout this article.

Table 1: Acculturation patterns

Non-dominant Group's Perspective

Attitudes towards contacts with host country		Attitudes towards their own cultural identity: Positive	Attitudes towards their own cultural identity: Negative
	Positive	Integration	Assimilation
	Negative	Separation	Marginalisation Individualism

Dominant Group's Perspective

Attitudes towards contact with immigrants		Attitudes towards immigrants' cultural identity: Positive	Attitudes towards immigrants' cultural identity: Negative
	Positive	Integration	Assimilation
	Negative	Segregation	Exclusion Individualism

Combinations of acculturation orientations of dominant and non-dominant groups result in consensual, problematic or conflictual acculturation patterns. As long as both groups adopt the same strategy for the acculturation of the immigrant group, the acculturation model would be 'consensual'. If there is discordance in the attitudes on cultural maintenance, the relationship would be 'culture-problematic'; and if the discordance is in the mismatch of the attitudes about the contact between these groups, the relationship would be 'contact-problematic'. Finally, if there is a mismatch on both contact and cultural maintenance, the relationship would be 'conflictual' (Bourhis et al., 1997; Piontkowski et al., 2002).

Table 2: *Interactive acculturation outcomes resulting from combination of patterns*

Host Community \ Immigrant Community	**Integration**	**Assimilation**	**Separation**	**Marginalisation**	**Individualism**
Integration	Consensual	Culture-problematic	Contact-problematic	Conflictual	Culture-problematic
Assimilation	Culture-problematic	Consensual	Conflictual	Contact-problematic	Culture-problematic
Segregation	Contact-problematic	Conflictual	Consensual	Contact-problematic	Contact-problematic
Exclusion	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual	Conflictual
Individualism	Culture-problematic	Culture-problematic	Contact-problematic	Contact-problematic	Consensual

Acculturation patterns of both majority and minority groups have been studied for several decades. (Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998) assessed the attitudes of both the majority (Dutch) and the minority (Moroccans and Turks) in the Netherlands. They found that the Dutch majority valued *integration* and *assimilation* the most. Minorities also valued integration as the ideal acculturation pattern, however did not live up to their own expectations and ended up in *separation*. Van Acker and Vanbeseleare (2011) studied the majority views in Flanders towards Turkish immigrant community. From the dominant group's perspective, Turkish immigrants seem

eager to maintain their cultural heritage and have limited contacts with the host culture (Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011).

Montreuil and Bourhis (2001) found that the Quebecois majority supported *integration* the most (along with *individualism*). However, these patterns were endorsed for 'valued' immigrants only, while assimilation, segregation and exclusion were deemed more proper for 'devalued' immigrants. Valued immigrants with a common language, ethnic and/or religious background (e.g. French Europeans) are associated with positive stereotypes while negative stereotypes are attached to the devalued immigrants with an uncommon language, ethnic and/or religious background (e.g. Haitians, Moroccans, Algerians) (Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001; Bourhis et al., 2004). The scheme of valued and devalued immigrants was also applied to the case of Flanders – where valued immigrants were Italians and the devalued were Moroccans – and the survey results were similar: majority members had more integrationist and individualist attitudes toward Italians and more assimilationist, segregationist and exclusionist attitudes toward Moroccans (Bourhis et al., 2004). People with a Turkish background are another large group of 'devalued' immigrants in Western Europe (Alba, Sloan, & Sperling, 2011), including Belgium.

Finally, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the emerging literature regarding the minority and majority groups preferring different levels of cultural maintenance and contact with the other specific to the domain they consider, i.e. public versus private (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2004; Rojas, Navas, Sayans-Jiménez, & Cuadrado, 2014; Tip et al., 2015). This literature points to the importance of the domain-specific nature of acculturation, along with the bidimensionality of 'cultural maintenance' and 'contact and participation'. For instance, it has been shown that, Turkish-Dutch minori ving in the Netherlands prefer adapting to the Dutch culture in the functional and utilitarian public domain (e.g. education and language), while cultural maintenance is more important in the socio-emotional and value-related private domain (e.g. child-rearing and marriage) (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2004).

Methodology

The research was conducted in the town of Beringen, located in the province of Limburg in Flanders, known for its coal mines that were very active in the aftermath of World War II and attracted workers from Turkey, Italy, and Morocco. Since the 1970s, coal mines as well as other heavy industries were gradually shut down, pushing many immigrant families into poverty (Wets, 2006; Phalet, Baysu, & Van Acker, 2015).

Our study aims to develop an understanding of Turkish-Belgian mothers' perceptions and feelings about childcare and pre-school in Belgium by listening to their learning from their experiences. As being congruent with the objectives of the study and the relevant theoretical framework, the focus group methodology was adopted (Beaudin & Pelletier, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995; Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus group method is a group interview where "the reliance is on the interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher who typically takes the role of a moderator" (Morgan, 1997, p. 2). In other words, focus groups generate data through the opinions expressed by participants individually and collectively. The definition of "focus group" vary but usually include a semi-structured session with multiple participants, an informal setting, moderation by a facilitator, the use of general guideline questions and/or other data elicitation stimuli such as photos, and a means to record the information generated through group interactions (Carey & Asbury, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

As it is crucial that the selection of potential participants is on the basis of their ability to provide insight into and information about the topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009), we

selected Turkish-Belgian mothers with an experience of the day-care and pre-school education in Belgium to articulate their perspective on relevant issues. Moreover, considering the size of the focus group, it is generally considered that the adequate group size is between 4 and 12 participants, with the optimal size being between 5 and 10 individuals (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000; Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1998).

Our focus group was compound of eight Turkish-Belgian mothers and was held in Turkish by the first author, in April 2015, during one of the meetings of the Mothers' Club of Turkse Unie van België.[4] All participants were residents of Beringen and knew each other from previous meetings. Only four participants were fluent in Dutch as a result of being raised in Flanders (second generation) or having lived in Flanders for a long time. While the participants' children all have attended pre-school, none have attended day care because their mothers were not working at that time.

Table 3: Profile of participants in focus group in Beringen

Code name	Age	Country of birth	Arrival to Belgium	Education	Work status	Children's age
Zehra	44	Turkey	1991 (14 years of residence)	Primary school	Stay-at-home mother	16 and 7
Rana	37	Turkey	2012 (3 years of residence)	High-school	Stay-at-home mother	13 and 8 (pregnant at the time of interview)
Leyla	40	Turkey	2009 (6 years of residence)	Primary school	Stay-at-home mother	5 and 4
Aylin	57	Turkey	1972 (43 years of residence)	Primary school	Incapacity leave	Children (35, 38, 40) Grandchildren (4, 6, 14)
Yesim	35	Belgium	Birth (35 years of residence)	High-school	Stay-at-home mother	13 and 8
Hale	36	Turkey	2003 (12 years of residence)	Primary school	Stay-at-home mother	11 and 5
Bahar	49	Belgium	Birth (49 years of residence)	Higher	Full-time	25 and 19
Ceren	32	Turkey	Childhood (20+ years of residence)	High-school	Part-time	11, 6, 4,5 and 3

The focus group was audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim following a detailed transcription protocol (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). Thematic analysis was used to explore emerging key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Stone, 1997). The objective of a thematic analysis is looking through the text for central themes and use theoretical preconceptions or empirical word frequencies and word contingencies to address the research question (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Stone, 1997).

[4] Turkse Unie van België (Turkish Union of Belgium) is an umbrella organisation of Turkish and non-Turkish associations in Belgium, whose aim is to build a bridge between the Belgian society and Turkish community living in Belgium.

Findings: Challenges Experienced by Turkish-Belgians

The Language Barrier

Despite the literature that recommends otherwise, policy-makers in Flanders do not see the mother tongue of pupils with an immigration background as an added value but merely an element of identity (Pulinx & Avermaet, 2014). As a result, the Flemish language ideology is constructed upon the premise that proficiency in Dutch is the most important condition for success in school and the job market.

While the Turkish and the Moroccans constitute the largest immigrant groups in Belgium, due to the large language fractionalisation in the Moroccan community, the largest minority language is Turkish (Agirdag, Jordens, & Van Houtte, 2014). The Turkish minority is attached to their language and use Turkish extensively in their daily lives to the point that many adults do not feel the need to learn Dutch. This is the case especially for the ones who were born in Turkey (Altinkamis & Agirdag, 2014).

Half of the focus group participants reported that they spoke only Turkish at home, while the other half spoke both Turkish and Dutch. One of the motivations for the latter was to improve their children's fluency in Dutch. Participants were well aware that, although their children were able to attain the Dutch proficiency necessary to start primary school by the time they finish pre-school, this did not mean that they were at the same level with native Flemish children. The participants stated that the first encounter with Dutch in pre-school is usually not a smooth experience for children with an immigration background, as these children are not exposed to the language outside school.

As Beringen has a large Turkish-Belgian community, some schools in the area have a majority of Turkish-Belgian pupils. Participants say that this is sometimes a handicap for their child to master Dutch since their children tend to speak Turkish among themselves. In line with the findings of Agirdag et al. (2014), some Turkish-Belgians deliberately send their children to schools with the least number of Turkish pupils. In Belgium, children are typically enrolled in schools closest to their home and, as various minority groups tend to get concentrated in certain neighbourhoods, these schools may have an overwhelming majority of students from similar backgrounds. Previous studies show that school segregation may have a negative effect on immigrant children's success (Baysu, Phalet, & Brown, 2014; Nordin, 2013; Szulkin & Jonsson, 2007). School segregation in Beringen is increasing, not only because the neighbourhood is increasingly populated by Turkish immigrants, but also Flemish families prefer other schools with the fear of quality being diminished.

More studies report that learning one's mother tongue properly is critical in learning a second language (Leseman & Slot, 2014), and that speaking Turkish more frequently does not necessarily have an effect on academic achievement in Dutch (Agirdag et al., 2014). Some teachers in the Flemish education system also agree that properly learning one's mother tongue should be one of the goals of education and that forcing children to speak Dutch exclusively in school is doing more harm by alienating them (Agirdag et al., 2014). Still, one of the consequences of the monolingual ideology in Flanders is the prohibition of speaking one's mother tongue at school.

Aside from the ones who prefer to avoid the Turkish community in their children's education, there were also participants who preferred their children to socialise and go to school with other Turkish children. They believe that it would be easier for their children to learn Dutch if they are already proficient in their mother tongue.

Note that, although the Turkish-Belgian participants fully support and encourage their children to learn Dutch, some participants stated that they are unable and unmotivated to learn Dutch themselves. Mothers who were born and raised in Turkey and arrived in Belgium via family reunion found learning Dutch very difficult. Some noted that their husbands did not speak Dutch either.

Social Barriers between Turkish Families and the Flemish Majority

Turkish-Belgian mothers in the focus group report having minimal interaction with native Flemish people in Beringen. The schools their children attend have either a few or no Flemish pupils. Only two participants' children attend schools where Turkish children are the minority. Turkish children usually socialise either with other Turkish children or with other minority groups such as Moroccans. Rana said that her child socializes with Flemish children and deliberately avoids Turkish children (due to the 'bad words' those Turkish children use), which triggered a discussion on the preservation of Turkish culture. Some participants approved their children 'hanging out' with Flemish children, while others argued that this would mean giving up on a part of their identity, which is undesirable. Ceren noted that in her teenage years, her father discouraged her from having Flemish friends, which is a well-justified attitude in her opinion.

> "Now, when you're a child it's no problem. But as you grow up… […] I used to live in Genk. I went to primary school there. When I started middle school, we started to go to each other's homes with my friends. After a while my father opposed my seeing those friends outside school. […] In any case, as a Turkish teenager you start to step into their culture." (Ceren)

> "But you know in every society there are good people and bad people." (Rana)

> "But we're not saying they're bad. There are cultural differences. For example they can wear miniskirts. It's allowed for them. But it's not allowed in my culture. My daughter cannot wear it. I had two younger sisters who went to a Flemish school. They used to take the bus with their skirts here [showing below her knee], and when they were in the bus they would fold their skirts to make them shorter. [...] I never had such a problem; I didn't need such things. Everyone around me was like me, there was no difference. But this wasn't the case for my sister. Why? Because she was attending a Flemish school. It's not because they're bad people, it's their habit. […] There are cultural differences and (when there's a lot of interaction, our children) start to slip into their culture." (Yesim)

Another participant told the story of her now 19 year-old son's childhood. He had lots of Flemish friends when he was younger and had to change his circle of close friends as he got older.

The mother is glad that her son did not start going on trips with his friends or drink alcohol, which is quite different from the customs and traditions she grew up with.

Participants noted that social interactions are different for adults and that they were discriminated against or at least 'not understood enough' by Flemish people in their own social contacts. Religion seems to play a key role in this context, sharply separating the two cultures. However, they all said their children are not discriminated against at school.

Employment Barrier: Turkish Mothers in the Labour Market

The issue of female employment naturally came up in the focus group. Participants noted that the Flemish majority discriminated against them in the labour market due to the way they look and dress. The participants who did not speak Dutch stated their inability to find work despite their efforts. These statements are in line with the evidence found in the literature regarding the prevalence of negative attitudes towards the Turkish (and Muslims in general) in Western Europe (Baysu & Phalet, 2014).

"First of all, you can't find work because of your name." (Bahar)

"Your name, your face, the way you look…" (Yesim)

"I was speaking with a young man the other day. He said he had applied for a job and they had asked his name. He said his name was Mustafa and when they heard this they told him 'the vacancy is filled'. He told me that this happened on the phone, before they even saw him." (Bahar)

"[Even] for cleaning work, they say 'you should speak Dutch'. Huh! What am I going to do with Dutch? OK, we should speak; after all we live in Belgium. But, you know, they'll build a new mine here. I said, for the love of God, hire people from Beringen. This mine is being built with our taxes here; you should give priority to the person living in Beringen. […] If I spoke Dutch, why would I work for you doing a cleaning job? The year I finished school here I applied for a job. (The hiring person) looked at me and said 'we're not hiring people with headscarves', not even asking my education. […] I lost my motivation." (Yesim)

After this experience Yesim still found a job and worked for a while until she gave birth to her first son who is disabled. From then on, she gave up working due to the very high cost of care for disabled children.

Discussion and Conclusions

Turkish-Belgian parents' experiences with the Flemish ECEC system reflect some of the fundamental differences between Turkish and Flemish cultures. The focus group participants are reluctant to become close friends with the Flemish people; and their main motivation is preserving their own culture. Hence, the participants of this study clearly opt for cultural maintenance even to the point of reducing contact with the majority group, which points to a separationist attitude.

On the other hand, the participants value integration a lot in their discourse. They want to learn Dutch and get a job. In this sense, our findings are in line with the findings of Van Oudenhoven et al. (1998) regarding the separationist attitudes of the Moroccan and Turkish minority group in the Netherlands even though they value integrationism more. Our findings also support (Nekby &

Rödin, 2007), who showed that labour market outcomes depend on the strength of the immigrants' identification with the majority culture (i.e. an attitude of assimilation or integration) and not much with the strength of ethnic identity.

As regards the participants' perception of the acculturation pattern of the Flemish majority, the mainstream attitude is more *assimilationist*, which is especially evident in the labour market and language policies. While the Flemish majority members are respectful and accepting in day-to-day relationships in the private domain, when it comes to the public domain of employment and education, monolingualism creates a barrier for many people from the Turkish community. Moreover, the Turkish community in Belgium tends to be 'devalued' due to the combination of uncommon ethnic background, religion, and language, as well as lower education and employment levels.

The combination of the *separation-oriented* attitude from the Turkish minority and *assimilationist* attitude from the Flemish majority leads to a '*conflictual'* acculturation pattern according to LAM. However, note that the acculturation attitudes explained above are not static but fluid. Both parties' acculturation patterns display some degree of *integrationism* as well. For instance, while the Turkish minority parents are reluctant to have close relationships with the Flemish majority in the private domain, they do want to participate in the public domain especially in education and labour market.

In contrast to the multiculturalist attitudes in countries with a historical immigration background such as Australia, Canada and the United States, the national cultures and identities in Europe are more rooted in ethnicity, which makes European countries less open to ethnic diversity (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012; Phalet et al., 2015). Most majority group members in Western Europe expect immigrants to assimilate, i.e. to adopt the majority's way of life and abandon their cultural identity, especially when it comes to Muslim immigrants (Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Phalet et al., 2015). Muslim immigrants' political participation is also more likely to be perceived as a threat if they have a *separationist* attitude and more likely to be accepted if they have an *assimilationist* attitude (Hindriks, Verkuyten, & Coenders, 2015). As regards the minority groups' acculturation, separation is sometimes preferred over integration, and Turkish minority is one of these groups (Phalet et al., 2015).

Finally, in line of the study by Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2004) on the domain-specificity of the acculturation patterns of the Turkish-Dutch in the Netherlands, the present study found that the separationism of Turkish-Belgians is related to the private domain such as friendships, while their integrationism relates to the public domain such as language acquisition and employment. Turkish-Belgian participants of this study perceive the host community as assimilationist in the public domain and integrationist in the private domain. Analysed from this perspective, our findings point to a *culture-problematic* acculturation pattern in the public domain (assimilationism by the majority group and integrationism by the minority group) and *contract-problematic* acculturation pattern in the private domain (integrationism by the majority group and separationism by the minority group).

The present study provides only partial information on the acculturation attitudes of the Flemish majority, and that is based on the perception of Turkish-Belgian focus group participants. Further research that takes into account also the (domain-specific) perspective of native Flemish parents is needed in order to come to a clear conclusion of interactive acculturation of these particular minority and majority groups. However, despite its limitations, this study is valuable because it provides new insights as to how Turkish-Belgian parents' positioning in the Flemish society in relation to their experience of the first years of their children's educational trajectory.

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