

Social robot interacts naturally with young children

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In cooperation with a consortium of European universities and companies, researchers at the Tilburg center for Cognition and Communication (TiCC) at Tilburg University are developing a social robot that is designed to interact naturally with young children to help them learn English or Dutch. The experiment that was launched in Tilburg is the first in the world in which a social robot offers a language program for toddlers from various cultural and language backgrounds. The ultimate aim of the project is to develop a series of language programs in various domains, for instance, numbers and spatial concepts.

As a result of increasing globalization, it is crucial to learn at least one [foreign language](#). For immigrant children who speak a different [language](#) at home, for instance, it is vitally important that they learn the school language at an early age. Better language skills will allow them to

perform better in school and improve their chances to successfully integrate into our society. Children's sensitive period for first as well as for second-language acquisition begins at a very early age. This is why the project opted to do experiments in preschool settings. In close cooperation with the Servicebureau Kinderopvang in Tilburg, five preschools and daycare centers were selected. The parents of all three-year-olds were approached and a large group agreed to participate because they whole-heartedly support this study.

By the beginning of July, the researchers will complete their first experiment, in which they investigated the best way for the robot to communicate with three-year-olds such that they experience the interaction as safe and pleasant, and to ensure that it is sufficiently educational. The contact between the robot and the children is filmed. In general, the toddlers react positively and spontaneously to the robot. The first research results are expected in August.

Provided by Tilburg University

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