Thanks to the Master IT! Scholarship scheme, I was able to go to Leiden in The Netherlands to read for a Masters in Child and Adolescent Psychology. This programme was something I had been dreaming of doing for a long time, and the financial support from this scholarship scheme made it all possible.

Living and studying away from home is not just an academic experience, but a holistic one. You learn about cultures, independence, responsibilities, time management and most of all you learn more about yourself as an adult and soon to be professional. I made friends from all over the world – from places I didn’t even know existed and this has changed me into someone who is hungry to learn more about the world. This experience is one that I will surely cherish for the rest of my life.

Leiden University is a university I would recommend to anyone. The lecturers are supportive and understanding and we mostly worked together as teams to discuss case studies and work on assignments in class.

My thesis topic was that of Semantic interference in children. Semantic interference is a phenomenon in which semantic similarity produces an interfering influence in speech production tasks like picture naming (Damian, Vigliocco, & Levelt, 2001). Various studies have been done to test this phenomenon and why it occurs in adults – for example; Belke, Meyer, & Damian, (2005); Marful, Paolieri, and Bajo, (2014); Crowther & Martin, (2014). Only one study could be found that tests this in children, namely that of Snyder & Munakata, (2013). All these studies used a similar blocked cyclic naming task in which participants were cyclically presented with stimuli in the form of pictures in either homogenous (e.g. all animals) or mixed (e.g. animals, furniture, clothes) sets and they had to name each picture as fast as possible.

The term ‘cyclic’ derives from the fact that participants have to repeatedly name the randomly presented pictures in each set. The Semantic interference or blocking refers to the finding that reaction times were greater in the homogenous sets than in the mixed ones.

My study tested whether children experience this difficulty of selection, as well as whether there are any age differences between the two groups (the younger group being from 5 to 7.99 years old and the older group 10 to 12.99 years old) tested. The differences in reaction times between the age groups as well as the interaction between cycles were also tested. A blocked cyclic naming task was used in which children had to repeatedly name pictures presented from homogenous and mixed list categories. Results revealed that children of both age groups show
significant amounts of semantic interference from the third presentation cycle onwards, with the younger group having significantly slower reaction times. When one compares this to the similar results found in adults, it can be concluded that when it comes to word selection and semantic interference, children and adults are more similar than one might think.

Now that I graduated, I am looking forward to my future as a child and adolescent psychologist – to do my best to help young people thrive academically, socially, emotionally and creatively. On this note I would like to thank the Master It! Scholarship scheme for making this unforgettable year possible.

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