**The nature of dual language skills at the time of school entry**

**among children from minority language homes**

**Erika Hoff**

**Florida Atlantic University**

Many children entering school have had early home exposure to a language other than the majority language of the country in which they live. These children’s skills in the majority language often differ from the language skills of children from monolingual, majority language homes. Early education policy should be informed by evidence regarding the factors that influence the early development of language skills in children from minority language homes. School policies and practices should be informed by evidence regarding the nature of the dual language skills such children have at the time of school entry.

My lab has been studying the development of English (the majority language) and Spanish (a minority language) in children born in the U.S. to immigrant families who use Spanish, and often also English, at home. Based on longitudinal data covering the period from 1 ½ to 5 years, I will describe these children’s development of English and Spanish in the preschool years. The research findings point to several factors that shape children’s English and Spanish language development trajectories. Some of these factors are malleable potential targets of intervention. The research findings describe the multiple patterns of dual language skill that children from minority language homes have at the age of 5 years. Knowledge of these patterns of dual language proficiency should help classroom teachers better understand the abilities and challenges of children from minority language homes.