

University of Groningen

Aging in multilingual Netherlands

Pot, Anna

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pot, A. (2019). *Aging in multilingual Netherlands: Effects on cognition, wellbeing and health*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

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CHAPTER 6

Enhancing language awareness to promote wellbeing

Abstract | This chapter concerns the abilities and resources that exist for older adult migrants to take up second/foreign language learning in their so-called ‘Third Age’ in the Netherlands. The previous chapters (4 and 5) have outlined the language barrier that exist for some older individuals with a limited L2 proficiency in accessing healthcare and information. Learning the language of the environment, however, has proven to be challenging, especially for low-literate individuals. Other than for other third age groups, such as retirees who spend their holidays in Spain and learn the language for pleasure, for the group of older Turkish adults in society, and in particular their older women, foreign language learning is more of a necessity to enable healthy aging, as we have seen in the previous chapters. This chapter provides an extensive overview of the materials available for older, low literate language learners in the Netherlands, and reviews the best practises in this regard. The aim of the chapter is to provide an illustration of possible undertakings to set up language interventions to stimulate L2 proficiency and lower L2 anxiety among low-literate adults.¹

¹This chapter has been slightly adapted and is published in: Pot, A., Keijzer, M.C.J. and de Bot, K. (2017). Enhancing language awareness in migrants’ third age to promote well-being. In D. Gabryś-Barker (ed.), *Third Age Learners of Foreign Languages*. (176-200). Multilingual Matters.

6.1 Introduction

Because of increased life expectancies combined with increased international mobility, many people in Western societies grow old in an environment where their mother tongue is not the dominant language. For a majority of these ‘Third Age’ migrant second language (L2) learners, mastery of the dominant language is a necessity in obtaining, or maintaining control of their aging process: increased physical and mental frailty intensifies healthcare needs within this group, for which, in order to obtain the desired form of care or assistance, linguistic knowledge is pivotal (see the previous two chapters). Without the necessary language skills and a weak social support network part of the group of older migrants are at risk of becoming isolated from society (see Warnes and Williams, 2006; Gardner, 2002; Treas and Mazumdar, 2002). Paradoxically, not everyone in this group possesses the necessary skills (literacy, educational experience) and motivation to take up and succeed in language learning. This poses a unique challenge for older adult second language acquisition (SLA) research.

One of the countries that witnessed a considerable increase in migration after WWII, and that will be the focus of this study, is the Netherlands, whose ‘first generation’ of migrants - mainly labour migrants from Turkey and Morocco- are approaching the age of retirement (age 65) and are thus now growing old in an L2 environment (van Duin and Stoeldraijer, 2014). From the outset, a substantial number of these older migrants in the Netherlands have failed to reach a sufficient level of Dutch to communicate meaningfully and independently with other members in society (Yagmur, 2011). This is especially the case for migrants with a Turkish background and lower-educated and/or female migrants (Kotwal, 2010). Whereas for the largest parts of their lives communication in Dutch was hardly necessary, as this group ages and their social circle closes in, they need access to healthcare and other social facilities, and thus need the Dutch language in order to communicate more than ever before.

In addition to the social necessity of language learning for this group, research in the field of cognitive aging attests that certain lifestyle variables, such as engaging in physical activity, but also partaking in learning activities may boost cognition and may perhaps even slow down neuropathological damage (Antonou et al., 2013; Duñabeitia et al., 2014). If, therefore, the use of language and

L2 learning can be promoted or stimulated in older, low-literate adults, we might observe beneficial effects in the social domain (gaining more independence), cognitive domain (potential transfer effects) and perhaps even physical domain of aging.

The focus of this chapter is on the special group of third age migrant language learners who may benefit from L2 learning on two levels: the practical, interactional level; to access healthcare and improve quality of life, and the internal, brain level, where language learning may be a stimulating cognitive event that transfers to other cognitive domains. However, this group requires a different approach than most other third age language learners because their learning skills are less well developed as a result of a limited education and often low literacy skills.

We know that language learning at a later stage in life is met with cognitive and motivational/social challenges that differ from early language learning (Singleton and Ryan, 2004)). Also, education seems to be a predictor of SLA success at a later age (Li et al., 2014). Moreover, based on the studies that show that L1 and L2 acquisition are fundamentally different processes (Saville-Troike, 2012), it is likely that, specifically, low-educated, often illiterate language learners may be constrained by a lack of explicit learning skills and strategies and a lack of metalinguistic knowledge. In order to engage this group in language learning, knowledge on specific low-literate learning and teaching strategies is crucial in order to guide the L2 learning process and observe cognitive and social benefits. To this end, the chapter builds up to a discussion of the currently available teaching methods and materials of Dutch as a second language for low-literate (older) migrants in the Netherlands.

Before delving deeper into the workings and effectiveness of the available learning materials with regard to social L2 enhancement and possible cognitive benefits, the next part of this chapter presents an overview of the literature on cognitive aging, with a particular attention to the relationship between foreign language learning and cognitive and social wellbeing.

What follows is an investigation into the workings and effectiveness of those L2 (Dutch) methods that have been designed and implemented over recent years in the adult L2 learning classrooms in the Netherlands. The chapter then finishes with an assessment of those materials or teaching elements that display the

most potential in engaging low-literate older L2 learners in language learning, and whether, in reference to the literature on cognitive aging, L2 learning for this special third age group could indeed be beneficial to their social and cognitive health.

6.2 Background

6.2.1 Defining aging

Although this chapter focuses on ‘Third Age’ language learners, this label is, in this particular case, not entirely accurate. In the definition of Laslett (1987), the Third Age denotes an era of ‘personal achievement and fulfilment’, after a period of ‘maturity, responsibility and earning’ (the Second Age) and before the era of ‘final dependence’ (the Fourth Age) (1987, pp. 134-135). When viewing age as a chronological variable, the older migrants in this study (roughly between 50-70 years of age) have indeed reached their Third Age – when the responsibilities of a working life are a concern of the past and they can enjoy their retirement.

However, for the majority of this group, their daily lives more closely resemble the ‘Fourth Age’. They do not have the physical strength or social/financial means to live as a Third Ager and have generally, perhaps already when they would still be categorised as Second Agers, reached a stage of great physical deterioration and are largely dependent; van der Wurff et al. (2004) note a higher degree of physical limitations among older migrants compared to Dutch natives, which in turn were found to be related to symptoms of depression, and (Uitewaal et al., 2004) indicate a higher prevalence of type-2 diabetes for Turkish immigrants. Therefore, although these labels may provide a crude categorisation of age, for the study of aging these definitions fall short.

In order to objectively define age, it is much more useful to consider aging as an integrated individual process of biological/physical, psychological and social factors that interact and foster change over time. In this way, changes in the physical domain, such as for example stiff joints or hearing loss, may foster psychological changes and influence one’s social life: a declining confidence to perform daily activities, decreasing mobility and retreating from communicating in noisy environments, for example (Christopher, 2014; de Bot and Makoni,

2005).

6.2.2 Cognitive aging

Finding the underlying causes of and means for optimal (cognitive) aging are currently hot topics in aging research, with a great emphasis on countering cognitive impairments and degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease. With increasing age, aspects of cognition decline, roughly explained as resulting from a loss of functional brain connectivity (Damoiseaux et al., 2008). This may be observed in a slowing of information processing speed (Salthouse, 2000), reduced working memory capacity (Engle and Kane, 2004), and deficits in inhibitory control (Verhaeghen and Cerella, 2008), but also speech production, and perception (Burke and Shafto, 2008; Wingfield and Grossman, 2006).

Cognition research more or less consistently reports that certain lifestyle variables, such as physical activity, occupational status, and also partaking in educational activities may have a positive effect on cognition, and may even slow down or delay neuropathological damage and associated mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Termed 'cognitive reserve', these lifestyle benefits may functionally alter neural pathways and connections and as such induce either a higher threshold for brain injury to take effect (Satz, 1993) or help sustain brain plasticity through calling upon alternative neural networks to perform a cognitive task (Stern, 2002). If cognitive decline can indeed be slowed down by being actively engaged in cognitively stimulating activities (Hall et al., 2009; Wilson et al., 2003) – both studying the effect of cognitive stimulation on delayed cognitive impairment and dementia, then learning may be an important asset in advancing optimal aging (see Kliesch et al., 2018).

What is more, it has been claimed that speaking multiple languages boosts cognitive activity and helps delay the onset of cognitive impairment (most widely cited and critiqued is the 4-year delay in the onset of dementia as found by Bialystok et al. (2007), see also Woumans et al. (2015)). As bilinguals constantly need to juggle both languages, and have to inhibit one when speaking the other, they allegedly have an increased inhibitory control mechanism, which, in turn, allows them to regulate and control their attention in a host of other (non-linguistic) cognitive tasks.

Over the last decade, this so-called ‘bilingual advantage’ has been extensively debated (e.g., Paap et al., 2015) and, mostly because of methodological inconsistencies, been downscaled to a possible positive contributor to cognition for only a small set of balanced bilinguals and active but not inactive bilinguals (see a recent publication by Keijzer and Schmid (2016), who call for an individual differences approach in bilingual effect studies, and de Bruin and Della Sala (2016)).

Yet, foreign language learning might be beneficial to cognition. Antoniou et al. (2013) review the neurological and behavioural underpinnings of cognitive reserve, bilingualism, and language learning, and hypothesise that neurologically, FL learning requires ‘long distance neural connections’ for which it recruits ‘a larger brain network than other forms of cognitive training’, especially since the neural network involved in language learning shows considerable overlap with the network of age-related cognitive decline (2013, p. 2693). Thus, learning a new language qualifies as a cognitively stimulating activity and may be a fruitful asset in maintaining cognitive functioning (also see Kliesch et al., 2018).

Of course, it is doubtful whether, when training one cognitive aspect, this benefit transfers to other cognitive domains (Grant et al., 2014). Willis et al. (2006), for example, found that cognitive training resulted in improved cognition only for the abilities that were targeted. General transfer effects were also noted for the bilingual advantage – inhibitory effects could be a general boost of executive functions – but this is not always consistently found (e.g., de Bruin et al., 2015). Moreover, in reference to Kliesch et al. (2018), it can be questioned whether language training generally boosts cognitive performance, independent of other individual contributing factors such as physical fitness, SES, level of education, and so forth.

A recent study by Ramos et al. (2017) is one of the first experiments to test whether L2 training at an old age may enhance domain-general executive control. They trained 26 Spanish monolingual elderly speakers in Basque for a year, and recorded their performance on a colour-shape switching paradigm before and after the training. Hypothesising that foreign language training may boost switching between mental sets and increase inhibition ability, they failed to find a significant difference in switch costs between their experiment and control group (Spanish monolinguals who received no L2 instruction). Although the participants acquired basic knowledge of Basque, their executive functions, opera-

tionalised as switching and inhibiting, did not improve significantly.

This finding is interesting in light of the research on brain changes following cognitive exercise. In an overview on structural brain changes and cognitive exercise, Li et al. (2014) note that although learning other skills at an older age, such as juggling, shows cognitive effects as soon as a couple of weeks into training, for language it takes much longer, with the shortest term effects having been observed after three months of intensive training. The year-long Basque language training is a substantial time period which, in line with Li et al. (2014)'s review and Antoniou et al. (2013)'s proposal, would expectantly have yielded some cognitive effects. Absence of any significant difference could perhaps be due to the measure of cognitive control performed. Ramos et al. (2017) looked at improved switching ability, as supposedly it is better in demonstrating transfer-effects emerging from bilingualism, as opposed to e.g. inhibitory control (as switching is regarded to reflect a broader spectrum of processes, of which inhibition is only a part) (Paap et al., 2014). For lifelong bilinguals, sustained switching and inhibiting abilities have been inconsistently reported (cf. Prior and MacWhinney (2010) but see Paap and Greenberg (2013)) and thus also for late L2 learners, switching ability proves to be a problematic measure.

6.2.3 Social benefits

Cognitive abilities stretch further than executive functions, and benefits of (language) learning may indirectly be observed in remoter, subjective areas related to (social) wellbeing: Shapira et al. (2007), for example, observed enhanced cognitive abilities that subsequently increased wellbeing for older adults after completion of a computer course. This social aspect of aging is, however, still greatly overlooked as most emphasis is placed on cognitive aging. Also Ramos et al. (2017) make no provision about social engagement benefits, even though cognitive engagement and stimulation, especially through language learning, may have reciprocal effects in the social or biological domain of aging (recalling aging as a process in which these three domains interact and change over time; de Bot and Makoni (2005)). It is not only a meaningful activity; it also stimulates social participation and interaction and increases independence for this group (see Antoniou et al., 2013). Very practically, being able to communicate independently with the

doctor, the household help, or the taxi driver literally broadens an individual's horizon and strengthens his or her self-worth and wellbeing. Research on these experiential effects remains, however, scarce.

6.2.4 Age and second language learning

In his chapter on 'really late learners' Singleton (2018) discusses the age factor in language learning and notes that research is not conclusive on the earlier=better point of view. Although older L2 learners may face learning difficulties pertaining to either their (differentially) deteriorating cognitive disposition or what Singleton terms 'age-related defeatism', there are certain areas in which older learners do very well, such as vocabulary learning. Moreover, in line with Li et al. (2014) and what is said above, Singleton hints at the beneficial value of FL learning for cognition, brain plasticity and memory. But although the brain does remain plastic enough to learn new skills, there is evidence that older adults learn in different ways. Antoniou et al. (2013) note motivation as a crucial component, which can be enhanced through making sure that the learning material has immediate practical value and is rewarding. This resonates with previous research on meaningfulness or having a purpose in life, which contributes to healthy aging (Boyle et al., 2009). The section on language learning below explores this in more detail.

6.2.5 Language learning in a dynamic, usage-based framework

From the above discussion on cognition it has become clear that it is still possible to learn new skills at a later age and that this might possibly be beneficial to cognition in general, but also transfers to social and biological aspects of aging. Still, the notion that older people struggle more with learning persists. As Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) suggest, these struggles are much more likely due to the social and psychological environment in which a language is learned. As such, rather than regarding the language learning process as an isolated event that is systematically influenced by distinct factors such as age, it makes more sense to view language as an individual and dynamic system that changes based on the interaction with its environment.

This view is at the core of Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), which posits that language is a dynamic system and (second) language learning is a highly individual process with lots of variability, both internally in the form of an individual's initial (cognitive, biological and social) conditions, and externally in the availability and type of input. These factors are in constant interaction and continuously shape and change the language system. Development progresses in a non-linear way, with instances of rapid development or transitions (phase-shifts) when new patterns of use emerge through self-organisation of the system following iterations of the input (De Bot et al., 2007). An individual's learning trajectory may therefore be highly idiosyncratic: s/he is making sense of the input using his/her available internal and external resources, through which 'mistakes' may sometimes be made that, according to a linear view of language development, the learner should already have mastered. These ideas resonate with the finding by Kliesch et al. (2018), of the complex and individually distinct array of factors involved in attaining learning success. As such, they hold valuable insights for language pedagogy and teaching practice, where this contextually embedded view of language development is compatible with a usage-based (UB) framework of language learning (Verspoor and Phuong, 2015).

UB theory regards language learning as a bottom-up process that is exemplar-based and always rooted in (social) context. Increased exposure to exemplars of a language (through authentic input) leads to better entrenchment and the ability to abstract away from the idiosyncrasies of the input and note patterns (form-meaning mapping) (Roehr-Brackin, 2015). Frequency of occurrence, prototypicality of meaning and contingency of form-function mapping are key elements in constructing linguistic categories that shape an individual's L1 (Ellis et al., 2014).

From a UB and a CDST perspective, the learning environment plays a crucial role in the language learning process. The concepts in UB-theory, together with the insights from cognitive aging research may inform a set of best practices or optimal learning strategies for older adults learning a second language.

6.2.6 Best practices in (older) adult L2 learning and instruction

Best practices in older adult language education have developed little since the 1980s, when Joiner (1981) devised an optimal, goal-driven (building communica-

tive competence) learning programme with individualized, self-paced instruction at its core, and the inclusion of real-world materials to link learning to practice and boost motivation (an ‘immediate payoff’ (1981: 33)). Similarly, Schleppegrell (1987) argues that building self-confidence and lowering anxiety are core elements that enable successful learning. Therefore, fast-paced, irrelevant (i.e. not directly applicable to practice), error corrected teaching has a negative effect on older adults self-confidence and motivation to learn.

In a recent book on adult classroom (L2) learning, Johnson (2015) reiterates most of the above strategies, additionally stressing that an adult’s life experiences are the richest source of learning. She therefore calls for a ‘post-method’ approach to language teaching, where language learning always occurs in a context where internal and external factors shape the learning process (motivation, identity, and intercultural competence). Especially intercultural competence (the ability to move between cultures) is a critical feature to minimize the social and psychological distance of learners to the target culture and thus enable successful learning (Johnson, 2015, p. 44). Also, repeated exposure to input helps learners to not only consolidate certain language patterns, but it is also a useful strategy in building language awareness. Each time a learner is confronted with the same input, s/he pays attention to something different, and as such forwards learning. As the language system thus goes through similar iterations, complex patterns may emerge that change the system and direct the learner’s development (Verspoor and Phuong, 2015).

Of similar importance is the provision of a stress-free environment. Stress, and resulting language anxiety negatively influences success in language learning and may come about through a (high-stakes) environment in which an individual learner feels threatened, inexperience with (certain types of) instruction, or a lack of self-confidence (Pavlenko, 2005) and this effect may be strongest in older adults. Also, Antoniou et al. (2013) stress the importance of fundamentally different learning conditions for older and younger learners, and that mixed learner groups are therefore detrimental to the learning process. However, mixed-learner groups may be favorable on a motivational level. Both Kliesch et al. (2018) and Singleton (2018) remark that language classes of only age-peers may be unappealing, especially when the reason for taking up language classes (partly) concerns broadening one’s social environment.

On a cognitive level, finally, it has been argued that the more complex learning materials have been shown to result in the greatest benefits for older adults. A course on digital photography skills was found to be much more beneficial than learning to quilt (Park et al., 2014). In this light, language learning may prove to be especially effective as it involves a wide brain network and taps into different cognitive processes, ranging from working memory to sound discrimination, task switching and rule learning (Antoniou et al., 2013).

6.2.7 Illiteracy

Previously, it has been outlined which learning strategies are effective in directing adult language learning. However, for a group of older adults with little educational experience and high levels of illiteracy, as is the case for the group of older migrants in the Netherlands that form the focus here, learning in itself is a daunting task. Low-literate learners typically lack metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness (knowledge about language). Literate learners can think of words and language as abstract units, because they are able to visualise words. This gives them valuable metacognitive and strategic skills that illiterate learners typically lack (Kurvers et al., 2015). Processing oral corrective feedback (recasts) on production errors, for example, is more difficult for illiterate learners as they lack the visual representation of their production and how it compares to the recast (Tarone et al., 2009). For illiterate learners, semantic meaning is therefore one of the most valuable resources in learning.

Only recently, research on so-called Low-Educated Adult Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESSLA) has started to emerge (van de Craats and Kurvers, 2009). A study towards teacher-student interaction during oral skills practice in the LESSLA classroom found that the most widely-employed teacher-centered framework of instruction, IRF (Instructing, Response (from student) and Feedback) is beneficial in that, although it might constrain students' spontaneous reactions, the teacher can 'fluctuate between focusing on rote learning, checking (vocabulary or grammar) knowledge, scaffolding, modelling or even challenging the students to think creatively' (Strube, 2009, p. 60). The teachers that collaborated in the study note that the typical LESSLA learner has underdeveloped study skills. They note modelling and scaffolding techniques and pos-

itive feedback as effective teaching strategies (Strube, 2009).

In addition, a longitudinal study towards effective classroom strategies for low-literate adult language learners (Condelli et al., 2008) corroborated that using materials from everyday life links unfamiliar information to what learners already know, which is crucial in building motivation and engaging students in learning. Also, a varied instructional approach (alternating more explicit attention to language patterns and practising language in meaningful ways) helps learners to grasp the complexity of the second language.

6.2.8 Learning materials for low-literate adults.

Having reviewed the literature on cognitive aging, L2 learning and learning strategies for older adults and for older low-literate adults, the next part of the chapter gives an overview of the material that so far exists (in the Dutch context) and that may or may not be useful in guiding low-literate adult language learning. The close examination of a number of adult L2 learning methods may unlock information regarding the practical learning trajectories of older, low-educated adults. Based on the literature above, we hypothesise that those methods that employ a mostly practical and motivational approach are most successful in advancing the language learning process. Other factors that are deemed to be beneficial are small groups, scaffolding techniques, multimodal instruction (e.g. Total Physical Response (TPR)) and connection to already known or previously learned individual experiences. Although the methods are restricted to a Dutch context, the findings may in general be transferable to similar (western) context that host large numbers of lowly educated older migrants with poor L2 skills.

6.3 Methodology

The synthesis below is not an exhaustive list of all available methods relating to language leaning, participation and/or empowerment of adults in Dutch society. Rather, it is a discussion of those programmes that are either successful language learning methods for low-educated groups or that provide a unique approach towards integrating/empowering fragile migrant groups in society. The aim of this overview is therefore to highlight and discuss the most prominent and visible

programmes that have been designed and implemented with regard to language learning for special groups in Dutch society. Inclusion in the discussion is, however, based on a few criteria, described in the following procedure.

6.3.1 Inclusion criteria

The materials legible for inclusion were identified through the following channels:

- A recent overview of available L2 (Dutch) learning materials in the prominent magazine LES for professional L2-Dutch teachers and researchers (Les, 2016);
- The literature on SLA for low-educated groups in the Netherlands, especially the empirical research conducted with LESLLA (Low-Educated Adult Second Language and Literacy Acquisition) learners;
- Overview of methods that are used at various institutions for literacy in the Netherlands (Strube, 2006);
- The database on Dutch L2 materials compiled by the website ‘Taaluniversum’ (Taalunie, 2013);

The same language learning programmes sometimes occurred in multiple sources, reflecting their prominence. Inclusion of the L2 programmes in this study was based on the criteria shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: *Inclusion criteria*

Selection	Details
Target group	(Senior) migrants, low-educated migrants, migrant women
Focus	L2 learning, social participation, empowerment
Level	Zero, building up to maximally A2 (CEFR)
Skills targeted	Oral skills, very basic (pre)literacy skills, functional and/or social language usage

Also those programmes that are solely geared towards preparing individuals for the entrance exam were excluded from a detailed analysis. These programmes often focus mostly on reading skills and work towards a high stakes direct goal: passing the entrance exam, which is a different goal from those methods that aim to enhance social participation.

The selected programmes are evaluated below on the basis of how the methods are compiled, how effective they are and whether they can be useful to a population of older migrants, if it concerns a general 'adult' target population.

6.3.2 Analysis

Each programme is briefly described in terms of the employed materials and the underlying theoretical construct (if present). Subsequently, the effectiveness of the different methods and materials is determined according to either evaluations that have been conducted by the developers or external parties, or reviews of the methodology by experts in the field. In Table D.1 (in the appendix) each method is briefly described in terms of its target population, year of implementation and theoretical considerations, according to the criteria outlined in Table 6.1.

6.4 Practical relevance and authentic input

The majority of the selected methods in Table D.1 employ a communicative, task-based learning approach (Van den Branden et al., 2009), and include materials that have a clear and direct practical relevance. This is achieved by embedding the method in a social context or situation: either by introducing the learner to a family, as they progress through their first months in the Netherlands (Nieuwe Start!), or introducing individuals and their daily routines and situations (Fatima Tas; De week van Karla; Wij wonen nu in Nederland). Other methods integrate language tasks into social situations or actions, such as talking about the body and health issues (Van top tot teen) or practising different social situations (Praatwijzer, Taalriedels). These connections to 'real-life' are argued to keep the learners interested and motivated, as the relevance of the learning material shows a direct practical application, and they help to structure the lessons and exercises according to a set storyline. This refers back to the observation that older adults

learn differently than their younger peers and reiterates the argument that real-life experiences are crucial in making the learning material relevant and boost motivation (Condelli et al., 2008; Joiner, 1981).

From a UB perspective, the connection of learning material to daily life warrants the use of authentic materials, which has been proven to be an effective tool in L2 instruction (cf. Verspoor and Phuong, 2015). Nonetheless, use of authentic sources is largely absent in the methods. Although dialogues and exercises mimic situations in real life, the recordings and other source material is often specifically designed and adapted to the learning context. Jazz chants (Taalriedels), for example, are controlled dialogues – fun and easy to practice in a group, but taken out of their (rhythmic) context, it will be difficult for learners to actually implement certain sentences in daily conversations. Likewise, *Thuis!* makes use of spoken dialogues in different situations (meeting someone on the street, at a service desk, etc), after which learners dissect the dialogue and practise it themselves. Although this moves closer to the use of authentic-like input, the use of natural language is absent, as the language is simplified, possibly to allow a quicker and fuller understanding of the contents.

Although input is often authentic-like, the dissecting of it corroborates the UB notion of repetition and ‘automatising’ input to become procedural knowledge. In addition to *Thuis!*, most methods (*SpreekTaal*, *Praatwijzer*, *Woord voor woord*, *Nieuwe Spreekrecht*, *Fatima Tas*) place repetition of input material at the core of the lesson. However, as the input is mostly non-authentic, it seems that this mostly results in explicit knowledge, and the question is whether this can ever become proceduralised, implicit knowledge. To ‘consolidate’ the new information from the methods, what happens in most methods here is repetition through exercises, which typically move from receptive and closed to productive and open. Whether this is enough to ‘automatise’ certain constructions is doubtful. Antoniou et al. (2013) have argued that in order to achieve explicit knowledge to become proceduralised, it would be best to have explicit instruction sessions in addition to some speaking practice with a native speaker for the newly acquired structured constituents to become engrained in the older learner’s mind.

Especially illiterate learners, who cannot rely on written information for support and have to rely solely on visual and auditory cues and their memory skills to understand the learning material, benefit from information repetition through

various modalities (Strube, 2009). To aid the process of automatization, techniques that rely on other cognitive modes (motoric, pattern-recognition/ musical, visual, etc.) to decipher the target input material, such as TPR or the jazz chants with their rhythmic mode of instruction, may strengthen the consolidation process.

6.5 Evaluations

Apart from the methodological considerations of each method, one major disadvantage is that almost none of the methods in Table D.1 have been formally evaluated in terms of their pedagogical success. Sometimes, the material is still too new to warrant any evaluation, such as in the case of *SpreekTaal*. Hardly any records exist of formal evaluations of the methods discussed here, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the techniques used. Only the (dis)continuation and number of reprints of other methods give an indication of the degree of success. *Taalriedels*, for example, recently commissioned a reprint (2015) and its presence in a variety of methods discussed here demonstrates some of its effectiveness in teaching. *Thuis!*, on the other hand, has been discontinued, possibly because the offered material was too high stakes for the target population (notable older low-educated adults) (Veth, 2006).

The most well-documented method is *Themis/IDEAL*, which is more of a social empowerment than a language learning method (focusing on empowering disadvantaged, uneducated, non-western immigrant women), but which provides a number of useful techniques and insights into language pedagogy that may be effective for language teaching to older adults.

The success of *Themis* (first commission in Leiden (NL), followed by a Europe-wide implementation and evaluation) derives from its central pedagogical focus (the participatory psycho-social approach), which is to create a 'safe learning environment'; and the adaptability to individual situations, through the portfolio-approach in the form of a 'Themis-tree' that functions as a self-evaluation tool (van Dijken et al., 2006).

At the end of one year of instruction the most notable – and important – observation was the increase in self-esteem, which not only increased the use of the L2 in the lessons, it also allowed the participants to take a more communicative

stance in society, by visiting the doctor independently and having more effective contacts, outside their own language group (cf. Ramscar et al. (2014), who claim that low self-esteem is detrimental for wellbeing and even physical health). Their level in general increased towards A2 of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) (van 't Rood, 2013). The Themis module advocates a dual language approach – moving gradually from instruction in the mother tongue to instruction in the target language and a facilitator (role-model) from a similar cultural and linguistic background, which proved effective throughout the learning trajectory.

Themis differs from the other methods discussed here in viewing language as a tool towards social participation. By placing the group dynamics and the environment at the core of the method, it shows that language follows communication, which stimulates an intrinsic motivation to learn (about) the L2 in its speakers. The consequence is that it is not an efficient method in terms of time. The content requires a lot of repetition, negotiation and discussion and, because of the small groups (10-15 participants), individual attention is feasible but also pretty intense. Whereas the other methods discussed here might also deploy role-play games, questions, and portfolio-based learning, they are more time-efficient but less focused on building individual self-confidence and empowerment. Across the methods, there seems thus to be a trade-off between individualised, time-consuming instruction versus efficient group-based learning (which is the preferred manner of instruction for most methods).

The current further absence of any evaluation or longitudinal studies towards the immediate and long-term effects of the different methodological techniques used within this sample prevent any conclusions being made on sustained and possibly enhanced L2 use.

6.6 Language training for older adults

As highlighted in the beginning of this paper, language training may hold beneficial effects for cognition. This is not entirely undisputed (cf. Ramos et al. (2017) who failed to find such effects for the cognitive domain), and from the discussion of the methods above it has become clear that there are numerous approaches to adult L2 teaching - making a clear one to one mapping of language

training and cognitive benefits difficult to establish. However, rather than just highlighting potential cognitive benefits, L2 acquisition may hold important social consequences, such as lowering L2 anxiety (cf. Pavlenko, 2005) and increasing self-esteem (cf. Ramscar et al., 2014), which may in effect have an impact on an individuals' cognitive disposition (cf. Kliesch et al., this volume).

The Themis approach is exemplary of these social pay-offs. By placing the notion of empowerment (through language) at the core of the method, language is successfully introduced as a tool to promote active social participation. This contrasts with the other, full-fledged language methods (Thuis!, Nieuwe Start!, Breekijzer), which place building L2 proficiency at the core of the method, and employ strategies that not necessarily pose benefits for low-educated adult learners (non-authentic material, written cues, and homework that may well requires participants to step outside of their comfort zone).

Although objective evaluations of the methods are missing, the fully integrative methods seem to be too tightly packed with learning material and strategies. As such, they try to do too much in a restricted timeframe (the language class) and often with heterogeneous groups (cf. Schleppegrell (1987), who notes the great variety in adults' initial conditions and previous life experiences, that they all, as individuals, bring to the classroom).

Moreover, little attention is directed towards shaping the learning environment, which is pivotal in advancing the learning process and noting social – and perhaps even cognitive – benefits (Antoniou et al., 2013). By marginalising the role of self-esteem and independence, and sometimes overlooking cultural differences (cf. Johnson, 2015), who argues that intercultural competence is of critical importance to learning), the social pay-off of fully integrative methods may be less (but note: Thuis! And SpreekTaal pay attention to building intercultural awareness by discussing learner's experiences with certain themes).

On the other hand, the more functional approaches (such as Taalriedels and Fatima Tas) are often incorporated into the full-fledged methods (indicating their popularity) and may be beneficial in group-wise learning as they (1) stimulate the learning process by calling on additional cognitive modalities, and (2) are inherently 'safe' and playful group tasks that reduce speaking anxiety.

Most importantly, it follows from the discussion above and the literature on (older) adult L2 learning that L2 learning needs to be regarded not as a goal in

itself but as a tool to promote social interaction and integration, and it is through the stimulation of social wellbeing that cognitive effects may potentially be observed. L2 training is foremost a social and interactional process. Benefits may therefore only be observed if participants feel 'safe' and at ease in the learning environment. This is equally achieved by small (homogeneous) groups (Schleppegrell, 1987), a positive stance towards participants' L1 (Themis), and the use of non-threatening material in the form of relatable, restricted content (Fatima Tas, De week van Karla, SpreekTaal), visual cues for illiterate learners and therefore also absence of digital materials (despite the individualised adapted learning benefits) - since only a minority of the older illiterate learners are digitally literate.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen that 'third age L2 learning' is becoming more and more of a necessity for older adult migrants who grow old in an L2 environment. The extensive focus on the cognitive benefits of language learning in old age has paved the way for promising research looking into the remedial or boosting (neurological) effects of foreign language training on the aging process. However, the social element of language learning has so far been mostly overlooked. We have highlighted that especially the vulnerable group of older, low-literate migrant learners may not only benefit from language training on a cognitive level, but that engaging in a communicative and social activity may equip them with vital social tools and self-confidence to access healthcare services and information and prevent social isolation.

The aspect that sets these learners apart from other type of third age language learners is their limited educational experience, low-literacy, and hence restricted learning skills. Through an evaluation of some best practises in the teaching of an L2 to older adults, this chapter has built up towards an investigation of those L2 learning materials that are available in the Dutch context, specifically geared towards low-literate (older) adult learners. In order to engage these adults in language learning and to be able to potentially observe cognitive benefits, it seems that the driving force behind successful learning is how language learning is perceived. Rather than viewing language mastery as the goal, language is a tool – not only in the practical sense of better social participation and communication, but

also in enabling larger cognitive changes in an individual. Crucial to this view is the interaction of language and learning with its environment, both external in the form of materials and methods, as well as internal in the form of an individual's initial cognitive capacities and previous language experiences.

Although cognitive capabilities change over the lifespan, the brain retains much of its plasticity well into old age, which makes learning new skills in an individual's Third Age not an impossible task (cf. Singleton, 2018). However, in L2 learning, proficiency increases have only been observed after a substantial amount of time invested in L2 learning (cf. Ramos et al. (2017), who note increased rudimentary L2 proficiency after a year), and cognitive effects surface sooner, but still only after at least three months of training (cf. Li et al., 2014). Based on the discussion above, social effects are suspected to appear sooner. Especially for the group of dependent older migrants with low educational experience and high levels of illiteracy, L2 training may be beneficial first and foremost in decreasing L2 anxiety and increasing self-esteem, through which independence and social wellbeing is boosted.

At the beginning of this chapter we stated that older migrant learners may benefit from L2 learning on two levels: the practical, interactional level, and the internal, brain level. We believe that, in order to observe positive effects on both levels, an effective L2 training uses the cognitively enriching and challenging experience of learning a new language as a tool to first and foremost promote social wellbeing through increasing self-esteem and lowering anxiety. This can be achieved through group-wise learning with a direct practical relevance, whereby a safe learning environment is the key element at the start. Building L2 proficiency is at the outset therefore of secondary importance.

PART III

Discussion and conclusion

