

Teaching Languages to Older Adults – Online workshop
 Centre for Research in Language Development throughout the Lifespan, University of Essex
 19 October 2023 – Programme

Participation is free, but [registration](#) is required.

Time (UK)		
12:00-13:00	Pre-workshop seminar (Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex): Language (re)learning through structural priming: Evidence from healthy older adults and people with aphasia Willem van Boxtel (Purdue University, USA) – Zoom link t.b.c.	
	Zoom Room 1 (link t.b.c.)	Zoom Room 2 (link t.b.c.)
13:00-13:10	Welcome and opening remarks	
13:10-14:10	Older adult foreign language learners: needs, abilities and preferences Agata Słowik-Krogulec (University of Wrocław, Poland)	
14:10-14:20	Break	
14:20-14:50	Teaching Papua New Guinean languages to older Berberophone adults in rural Morocco	Language learning paths of older adult learners of English Satu Radcliffe (University of Jyväskylä, Finland)

	Hannah S. Sarvasy ¹ , Andrew Milne ¹ , Mohamed Naciri ² , Mark Antoniou ¹ (¹ MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development, Western Sydney University, Australia, ² Université Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco)	
14:50-15:20	Learning an additional language in the third age: Comparing a monolingual and a multilingual approach Helga Donnerer (University of Essex, UK)	Examining digital competence and attitudes in foreign language learning among senior students: An andragogical perspective Jose Belda Medina (University of Alicante, Spain)
15:20-15:50	The motivation of scholars to learn languages in their late career Katarzyna Morena (The Pedagogical University in Kraków, Poland)	Older learners' live and vicarious participation in online language learning Christine Pleines (The Open University, UK)
15:50-16:15	Break	
16:15-16:45	Teaching Chinese language to older adult learners in the UK Chuyi Wang (University of Glasgow, UK)	VINT-AGE: a language teaching model suitable for an elderly audience Maria Cecilia Luise ¹ , Tatiana Temporale ² (¹ University of Udine, Italy, ² ANILS - Italian National Association of Foreign Language Teachers)
16:45-17:45	Language learning within care home settings: a practitioner's perspective Robbie Norval, Rosi Mele (Lingo Flamingo, UK)	
17:45-18:30	Concluding discussion	

Abstracts

Pre-workshop seminar

Language (re)learning through structural priming: Evidence from healthy older adults and people with aphasia

Willem van Boxtel

Purdue University, USA

Abstract: Sentence processing deficits are a hallmark of acquired language disorders such as stroke-induced aphasia. Additionally, processing efficiency and speed may decline across the lifespan. With ever increasing incidence of stroke and general increases in life expectancy, techniques that could ameliorate sentence processing deficits are becoming more salient. One such technique is structural priming, where exposure to a grammatical structure facilitates subsequent processing of the same structure. By using structural priming as a learning technique, clinicians and researchers may be able to train older and language-impaired individuals to correctly process and produce complex grammatical sentences. This talk summarises data from three studies in which younger (age 18-25), older (age 65+), and aphasic groups took part in structural priming experiments. Converging evidence from all three studies suggest structural priming can be used as an effective tool to facilitate grammatical learning and relearning, including in production, comprehension, and across these modalities. Participants with aphasia showed immediate and persistent improvements in the production of complex grammatical structures, and both older and younger groups showed significantly facilitated processing. These results suggest that structural priming has applications in the fields of aphasia rehabilitation, language learning, and in psycholinguistics more widely.

Plenary talks

Older adult foreign language learners: needs, abilities and preferences

Agata Słowik-Krogulec

University of Wrocław, Poland

Although there is still much to be explored in the studies of clinical, biological, and social gerontology, recent research has ensured a better understanding of various aspects of ageing, including factors influencing healthy ageing, longevity, and cognitive decline (Tollefsbol, 2007). These advancements are also vital for second language acquisition studies and foreign language geragogy (FLG) in particular. Yet, the currently available materials and curricula designed for older adults as well as teaching and assessment techniques used in foreign language classrooms still fail to acknowledge limitations and specific educational needs of third-age learners.

The purpose of this talk is, therefore, to consolidate the already existing knowledge regarding FLG and to present needs, abilities and learning preferences of this age group, analysed from two perspectives: students' and their teachers'. The subjective views related to foreign language education that are investigated in this study will move us one step closer towards discovering the reasons behind problems with creating a non-threatening and stimulating classroom environment. As a result, this paper will highlight the

issue of (mis-) understanding the principles of learning languages in later life, challenge the most common preconceptions or even stereotypes related to old age and FLG, point to the differences between often incompatible views regarding teaching and assessment techniques used in the language classroom, and, finally, provide solutions to the most common problems.

Language learning within care home settings: a practitioner's perspective

Robbie Norval, Rosi Mele

Lingo Flamingo, UK

Lingo Flamingo is a social enterprise who teach foreign languages to older adults in care homes and day settings. We do this for three core reasons. Research has shown that language learning can act as a great workout for the brain and can postpone the effects of dementia and brain ageing. Secondly, language learning acts as a way to increase the well-being, self confidence and sense of worth of participants. Finally, through our courses, participants get the chance to do a certified SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) course which enhances their sense of achievement and accomplishment. In our session, we will firstly touch upon the logistics of our projects and provide some contextual and background information. Then we will discuss some of the teaching methods and measures we have developed to teach older learners and to make language learning accessible and inclusive for all. Thereafter we will present some of the challenges of teaching in care home settings and teaching participants living with dementia. Finally, we will highlight some of the benefits of teaching older learners and the impact it has upon their lives as well as the wider care home culture.

Oral presentations

Teaching Papua New Guinean languages to older Berberophone adults in rural Morocco

Hannah S. Sarvasy¹, Andrew Milne¹, Mohamed Naciri², Mark Antoniou¹

¹ MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development, Western Sydney University, Australia

² Université Hassan II, Casablanca, Morocco

We present here the results from a language-learning intervention with older adults in the High Atlas Mountains, Morocco. We taught 123 adults aged 35-75 without any history of formal education either the Papuan language Nungon (spoken by 1,000 people in Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea), the Papua New Guinean creole language Tok Pisin, or Quran memorization. An additional 56 people participated in a passive control group. Participants in the active component were tested for memory and language skills using the CERAD, Auditory Working Memory (AWM), Digits Recall, and Wechsler logical memory tasks, all adapted and translated into Tashelhit Berber, then divided into three groups, matched demographically and for initial test scores. Each group then underwent nine hours of instruction in one of the two languages or in Quran memorization, over three days, and then were re-tested, using counter-balancing to ensure that each participant took a different test version than in their initial test. The passive control group underwent initial testing, then were re-tested five days later.

Using Bayesian modelling, we determined that: all three interventions produced significant improvement in CERAD test scores, compared with the passive control; none of the interventions resulted in significant improvements in Digits Recall test scores; and participants who studied the Nungon language showed the

highest improvements in AWM scores, while those who studied Tok Pisin showed the highest improvements in Wechsler logical memory scores. The results suggest that not all languages convey the same cognitive benefits to older adult learners, and that a similar activity such as Quran memorization can convey similar benefits to language in CERAD test scores, but not in AWM or Wechsler logical memory scores.

Language learning paths of older adult learners of English

Satu Radcliffe

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Today more and more retired people have time on their hands and want to engage in meaningful activities including language learning (Ohly 2008: 18). These activities not only provide learning but also boost well-being. Adult education centres in Finland are accessible and inexpensive places that offer learning in various subjects including languages. It has been shown that one euro invested in adult education is the equivalent of 3.40-5.60 euros in social, identity, human and health capitals (Fields et al. 2019:175). Teachers and course designers would benefit from a better understanding of the thoughts and needs of the heterogeneous group of older language learners.

As a language teacher at an adult education centre, I teach courses where a majority of students are over 60. My study concentrates on the older English learners' beliefs about language learning and their reasons for studying English. The study uses language learning histories to depict how the students' past experiences relate to their current beliefs and agency and their aims in the future (Kalaja et al. 2018, van Lier 2004). The data analysed here consist of semi-structured group interviews of nineteen students on two occasions. The first interview concentrated on the students' past experiences and meaningful events in terms of language learning, while the second one concentrated on why and how they study at the moment. The interviews were also used as a forum to share experiences and help students become more aware of their learning (Kehrwald 2013). Thematic content analysis is used as an analytical method. This paper aims to outline the initial findings of the group interviews. First, it describes the students' meaningful events connected to language learning and second, it shows the trajectory of their language learning beliefs about anxiety, confidence, and motivation from school age to their retirement.

Learning an additional language in the third age: Comparing a monolingual and a multilingual approach

Helga Donnerer

University of Essex, UK

In the field of second language (L2) learning and teaching, there is still the ongoing controversy about which approach provides the best opportunities for successful foreign language learning, the monolingual context, using exclusively the L2, or the multilingual context with a mix of languages that include the L1 and/or other languages known to the learners (Brown, 2021). Existing studies with younger participants have found either superior performances by multilingually taught groups (Brown, 2021) or no differences between monolingually and multilingually taught groups (Hopp & Thoma, 2021), but the question whether one of the two approaches might be more advantageous for 3rd age learners has not been addressed so far.

Therefore, 50 L1 speakers of German or English, aged 60-81, took part in an online ten-week Italian course for beginners, taught with either a monolingual or a multilingual approach with the author as teacher. They

were pre- and post-tested for L2 proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge, did a language learning aptitude test, and filled in a questionnaire about their language backgrounds.

Results show a considerable increase in language knowledge and an increase in metalinguistic knowledge in both groups, but no significant differences between the two groups concerning gains in language and metalinguistic knowledge, which means that the multilingual group – as in the studies with younger participants – was not disadvantaged by getting less input in the target language. Gains in language knowledge are significantly correlated with and predicted by gains in metalinguistic knowledge. This means that language knowledge is growing hand in hand with metalinguistic knowledge, which, in other words, is both a prerequisite and product of language achievement (Cox, 2017; Hofer & Jessner, 2019). Therefore, boosting learners' metalinguistic awareness might help reach high language gains and effectively contribute to successful language learning for older adults.

Examining digital competence and attitudes in foreign language learning among senior students: An andragogical perspective

Jose Belda Medina

University of Alicante, Spain

The digital divide among generations has widened over the past two decades, resulting in significant economic, social, and personal consequences for older adults, as evidenced by the isolation experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although several studies have examined the age-related digital divide in various socioeconomic contexts, there is limited research on technological competence among older learners, particularly in the field of foreign language learning. To address this gap, a longitudinal research was conducted over a two-year period (2020-2022) to evaluate the technological skills and attitudes of senior students (aged 50+) enrolled in four English subjects as part of a lifelong learning program (LLP) at the University of Alicante in Spain. The study involved 123 older adults who participated in synchronous and asynchronous, online and face-to-face learning activities utilizing various digital resources, including learning management systems (LMS), online communication tools, instant messaging (IM), and interactive learning tools. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting quantitative data through pre- and post-intervention surveys to analyze digital skills and attitudes, as well as qualitative data through classroom discussions and semi-structured interviews. The statistical analysis using SPSS revealed more positive attitudes towards educational technology after the digital intervention, with some differences based on age, gender, and technological affinity. The results indicated a positive impact of educational technology on English language learning among senior students, leading to increased interaction and frequency of use of the target language (L2) both inside and outside the classroom. While senior students demonstrated adaptability and learning abilities in digital environments, they expressed the need for more specialized teacher training and tailored educational technology programs for their age group.

The motivation of scholars to learn languages in their late career

Katarzyna Morena

The Pedagogical University in Kraków, Poland

Teaching and research are central and time-intensive aspects of university scholars' work. Therefore, in order to provide a high quality of teaching and research scholars are required to learn and develop professionally throughout their career. Only recently, some empirical studies that focused on academics' motivations and

emotions attempted to explain key outcomes related to their research, teaching, and professional development. The primary aim of this study was to explore the motivation of academics to learn foreign languages (FLs) adopting a self-determination theory lens and using the Polish version of the Language Learning Orientations Scale-Intrinsic, Extrinsic, and Amotivation (LLOS-IEA, Noels, et al., 2000). The secondary aim was to determine whether age and job seniority differentiate older academics from younger ones in terms of their motivation to learn FLs. 593 academics from nine public and one non-public higher education institutions in Krakow, Poland filled out the questionnaire. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 65+. The most numerous group included younger participants aged 25-34 (N=133) and 35-44 (N=289), whereas a less numerous group included older participants aged 45-54 (N=86) and 55-65+ (N=85). Of the 593 participants, 330 identified as women, 263 identified as men.

A statistically significant negative correlation was found between participants' age and External regulation ($r = -0.28, p < 0.01$) and Identified regulation ($r = -0.098, p < 0.05$). Similarly, a slight but statistically significant negative correlation was found between participants' job seniority and External regulation ($r = -0.27, p < 0.01$) and Identified regulation ($r = -0.13, p < 0.05$). The results suggest that, in contrast to their younger counterparts, older scholars were characterised by a more intrinsic type of motivation to learn languages. Scholars with this type of motivation engage in learning because of the interest, inherent appeal and satisfaction derived from exploring new ideas, developing knowledge and learning. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation has been associated with higher-quality learning and performance, greater intensity of effort, greater self- and linguistic confidence, and low anxiety. On the other hand, younger scholars displayed extrinsic motivation to learn languages, which implies that these individuals engage in behaviour to earn self- and other- approval (or avoid disapproval).

The secondary aim of this study was to explore the factors that might contribute to intrinsic motivation for learning languages in scholars' late-career. The findings shed light on the positive role of international exchange programs, projects, and sabbaticals as determinants of optimal motivation to learn languages in the context of scholars' professional activities.

Older learners' live and vicarious participation in online language learning

Christine Pleines

The Open University, UK

In part-time study contexts, languages attract a higher number of learners aged 60+ than other subject areas, and documented motivations for study include leisure interest, the development of communication skills needed for travel or maintaining family connections as well as potential benefits of language learning as a mental workout supporting the building of a cognitive reserve (Bialystok, 2021), possibly mediated through the stimulation of social well-being (Pfenninger and Kliesch, 2023). This is the case at the Open University, UK, where third-age language learners register for part-time distance study with the aim of completing a Higher Education qualification, and assessment results indicate that these older learners are highly successful in navigating the online environment to support their learning in clear contrast to previously held views of diminishing success in language learning for older adults (discussed in Derenowski, 2021). At the same time, learner analytic data point to significant differences in learner behaviour by age group.

This presentation will report on findings from a mixed-method study using learner analytics ($n=977$) and semi-structured interviews ($n=13$) to explore perceived benefits of recorded tutorials across age groups. Quantitative data show that older learners engage significantly more with both live and recorded tutorials and that this increased engagement with interactive learning events is independent of employment status,

reflecting the behaviour not only of retired learners but equally older learners who are still in full-time or part-time work. Qualitative data from learner interviews support previous findings of a strong social orientation of older learners, as well as perceived challenges with listening and interactional fluency (Green, 2016) which, it will be argued, are well-served by combining live and vicarious participation in (online) tutorials. Findings are relevant in terms of theorizing language learning as a social and cognitive activity and developing a supportive learning environment for older learners.

Teaching Chinese language to older adult learners in the UK

Chuyi Wang

University of Glasgow, UK

In this presentation, I would like to talk about my experience of teaching Chinese languages to older adults in the UK, based on my experiences at Reading College and Confucius at the University of Leeds. Chinese language teaching to older adults brings unique dimensions of interest. The character writing system in Chinese is particularly intriguing, as my students suggested their motivation for learning Chinese is to prevent Alzheimer's disease; although the specific effects of learning Chinese characters on Alzheimer's disease prevention are not well-established, research has indicated that engaging in mentally stimulating activities may have a positive impact on brain health and potentially reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Additionally, the rich Chinese philosophy and culture offer a fascinating aspect that often captivates older learners. Exploring the influence of these factors on learning outcomes and motivation is a significant aspect of this presentation. I will then delve into the extent to which approaches to teaching and learning languages require adaptation to suit the needs of older learners and how teachers can best serve this specific demographic. By drawing on my teaching experiences, I will present insights into what can and cannot be achieved when teaching Chinese to older adults. When discussing the benefits of language learning for cognitive health, self-esteem, and social engagement among older learners, I will also address challenges related to cognitive decline, memory retention, and physical limitations that may affect the language learning process. The role of the teacher is crucial in catering to the needs of older learners, in terms of effective teaching strategies that promote a positive learning environment, enhance learner engagement, and address individual differences in affect, cognition, and social interactions. It is important to adapt Chinese teaching materials and methods to align with the unique characteristics and preferences of older language learners.

VINT-AGE: a language teaching model suitable for an elderly audience

Maria Cecilia Luise¹, Tatiana Temporale²

¹ University of Udine, Italy

² ANILS - Italian National Association of Foreign Language Teachers

Our purpose is to present some data from the research called "VINT-AGE: a research project on the teaching of foreign languages to older learners." The starting point of the project can be identified in the demographic change taking place in the 21st century. It highlights the fact that education for the elderly is an area that is increasingly developing in parallel with the increase in the active elderly population.

The longitudinal research was carried out between October 2021 and May 2022 with sixty-two informants over sixty years of age. They followed training courses at the University of the Third Age of Udine. The data emerging from the qualitative analyses will then be presented with the aim of creating and experimenting an

A1 English textbook adapted to the specific needs that this age requires. In fact, a specific book titled "Vintage. English for seniors A1" was used in the experimental classes of the project.

We initially submitted a questionnaire to respondents to define their socio-personal and cultural profile and identify ideas, perceptions and beliefs about old age and learning in old age; the collected data were used to define the characterizing points of a "glottogeragogy" – intended as a language teaching model suitable for an elderly audience - then applied in the conception and drafting of the volume. Here we will present some of these data, the didactic effects that we have gathered from them and the ways in which they have been realized in the Vintage volume.