

Everyday care in the context of multilingualism and dementia: insights and perspectives

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and Multicultural Populations

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Outline

- Theoretical background
 - Language and multilingualism in age and during dementia
 - Methodological challenges
- Insights
 - Linguistic constellations in Germany's nursing homes
 - Two long-term case studies
- Perspectives: How can we integrate multilingualism?
- Discussion

Theoretical background: Overview

- 1) Language and age
- 2) Multilingualism and age
- 3) Language during dementia
- 4) Multilingualism and dementia

Theoretical background: Language and age

- What **do age and ageing mean?** When **can a person be considered old?**

old is a term varying with individuals, gender, culture and country (de Bot et al. 2020, 4)

- Different concepts of *age* (cf. Fiehler/Thimm 2003, 8)
- *Ageing*: Changes at different levels (cf. de Bot et al. 2020, 14):
 - Biological/physical level
 - Psychological level
 - Social level
- Biological changes can lead to linguistic decline, but the rate of decline is affected by psychological and social changes (cf. ibd.)

Theoretical background: Linguistic changes in age

- “Gain/Loss/Preservation” vs. Complex Dynamics Systems Theory
- Cognition and age (cf. Craik 2017):
 - Resistant: **Crystallized** Intelligence, automated knowledge
 - Vulnerable: Fluid Intelligence, conscious access to e.g. lexis, executive control, filtering of relevant information, working memory
- Language and age:
 - Voice and pronunciation, hearing (cf. Gerstenberg, 2011)
 - Grammar (cf. Anthonissen/Petré 2019)
 - Syntax (cf. Hardy et al. 2020)
 - Lexis (cf. Gerstenberg 2015)
 - Narrations (cf. Gerstenberg 2015, Kemper et al. 1990)



Theoretical background: Multilingualism and age

- Multilingualism and age as complex systems (individual effects)!
- Multilingualism and cognition (cf. Craik 2017):
 - Increased exposure to "tip-of-the-tongue" phenomena
 - Better coordination and control over executive functions
- Can multilingualism positively affect ageing?
 - Ongoing discussion (Bialystok/Sullivan 2017, Duncan/Phillips 2016, Bak et al. 2014 vs. Keijzer/Schmid 2017 or Titone et al. 2017)
- Multilingualism **as one of the factors** to build a Cognitive (CR) & Brain Reserve (BR) (cf. Chauvin et al. 2017)
- Effects of aging on the languages? Current overview in Reifegerste (2020)

Theoretical background: Language and dementia



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Theoretical background: Multilingualism and dementia

- Lots of studies on the question: Does multilingualism protect against **dementia or can it delay it?** (cf. Mendez 2019)
- Studies on impact on the spoken languages (e.g. Ardila/Ramos 2008, Costa et al. 2012, Gollan et al. 2010, Hyltenstam/Stroud 1993):
 - Sometimes contradictory
 - Case studies
 - Differences between the stages of the disease
 - Differences between longitudinal and cross-sectional decline (Ivanova et al. 2014)
 - Ongoing discussion, need of further / **additional** studies
- Methodological challenges!
- The languages undergo a different attrition with a longer preservation of the dominant language

Theoretical background: Multilingualism and dementia





www.pflegezentrum-online.com/demenz-betreuung/

Insights, Part 1: Overview

- Example of Germany's nursing homes
- Ongoing discussion about intercultural opening and diversity in care (cf. Schmachtenberg et al. 2020)
- No fixed standards, depends on individual institution (cf. Schwarzer 2018)
- Different realisations and language policy
- Three different possible constellations regarding the used languages (cf. Karl 2021)

Insights, Part 1: First constellation

- Monolingual German speaking environment, no possibility to use other languages than German
- Impact on multilingual person in need of care depends on language skills in German and cognitive resources
- Case-study: Woman, suffering from dementia (2nd stage), with Russian as L1, German as aL2
- Audio German morning nursing 
- Vs. Audio Russian Narration 
- In German only very limited possibilities of expression, in Russian almost fluent
- No difficulties for German speaking caregivers, care is possible
- For the person concerned: lack of possibility to communicate **because of** the actual cognitive abilities
- Even if the language skills are good enough to communicate, the persons can not make use of their linguistic resources in other languages

Insights, Part 1: 2nd & 3rd constellations

- Second constellation:
 - Multilingual environment: multilingual caregivers
 - Depending on spoken languages: possibility to use all available languages
 - Preservation of multilingualism and possibility to use all linguistic resources
 - Impact on multilingual person in need of care depends on cognitive resources
- Third constellation
 - Monolingual non-German speaking environment
 - theoretical possibility to use German, in practice: Use of other languages (mostly L1 of the Person in need of care)
 - Avoidance of multilingual input, might be right for persons with very advanced degrees / **stages** of dementia or cognitive impairment to relieve them cognitively

Insights, Part 1: Summary

- First constellation (monolingual German)
 - Loss of one (or more) languages, hence of possibilities to make use of the linguistic resources in these languages
- Second constellation (multilingual)
 - Preservation of multilingualism and possibility to use all linguistic resources
- Third constellation (monolingual non-German)
 - Avoidance of multilingual input

Insights, Part 2: Two case studies

- First constellation (same nursery home)
- Woman, Russian L1 (dominant), German aL2 (non-dominant)
- Man, Polish L1, German L2 (adolescence), fluent in both languages
- Both suffering from dementia (Alzheimer's Disease), 2nd stage
- Long-term case studies: Differences in the languages and their attrition

Insights, Part 2: Case study 1 (cf. Karl in press)

- Woman, Russian L1 (dominant), German aL2 (non-dominant)
- Period of observation: 4 years
- Data base:
 - Interviews with caregivers
 - Recordings of the communication between resident and caregivers during morning nursing
 - Controlled linguistic data, including a **picture-based narration**, **semantic fluency tasks** and **tasks on production and reception of grammar, syntax and lexis**
 - **Half-controlled narrations of the (linguistic) biography of the resident**
 - **Everyday communication between the resident and a familiar bilingual person (visiting student)**

Insights, Part 2: Case study 1 (cf. Karl in press)

- Linguistic portrait and changes over time
 - German:
 - No change over time
 - Receptive abilities in word- and sentence-level
 - Productive abilities in word-level (almost no verbal communication)
 - Russian:
 - Change over time
 - First year: interested interlocutor, can express fluently at all levels
 - Over time: decreasing willingness to interact, loss of syntactic complexity
 - Productive Russian skills on word- and sentence-level (yet simpler) remain
- Conclusion
 - Language skills are different in the involved languages
 - Asymmetrical distribution: danger of one-sided assessment of general abilities
 - Loss of possibility to communicate in the dominant language massively limits the ability to communicate

Insights, Part 2: Case study 2 (cf. Behrens 2021)

- Man, Polish L1, German L2 (adolescence)
- Period of observation: 3 years
- Data base:
 - Interviews with caregivers
 - Half-controlled narrations of the (linguistic) biography of the resident
 - Everyday communication between the resident and a familiar bilingual person
- At the beginning: German & Polish at nearly the same level:
 - Fluent, communication is possible without problems
 - Conversational behaviour the same in both languages: Determines the topics and steers the conversation

Insights, Part 2: Case study 2 (cf. Behrens 2021)

- Changes over time
 - First year:
 - Distinguishes between the languages
 - Polish as the language of childhood memories
 - Topics: war experiences and plans for the future
 - Second year:
 - Switching between languages increases, conscious change becomes more difficult, but is still possible
 - Sentences and speeches become shorter
 - Topics: family, sports, travels
 - Third year
 - Change of language no longer possible
 - Change in conversational behaviour: Asks questions and listens to the answers, but no longer answers himself
 - Decrease of communication in both languages, at the end: non-verbal communication

Insights, Part 2: Case study 2 (cf. Behrens 2021)

- Conclusion
 - Communicative skills in the two languages are comparable at all stages
 - The languages change relatively similar over time: Decrease in complexity at all levels, incl. conversational behaviour
 - Increase of difficulties to switch consciously between the languages
 - Loss at all levels and in both languages, non-verbal communication at the end

What can we deduce from these case studies?

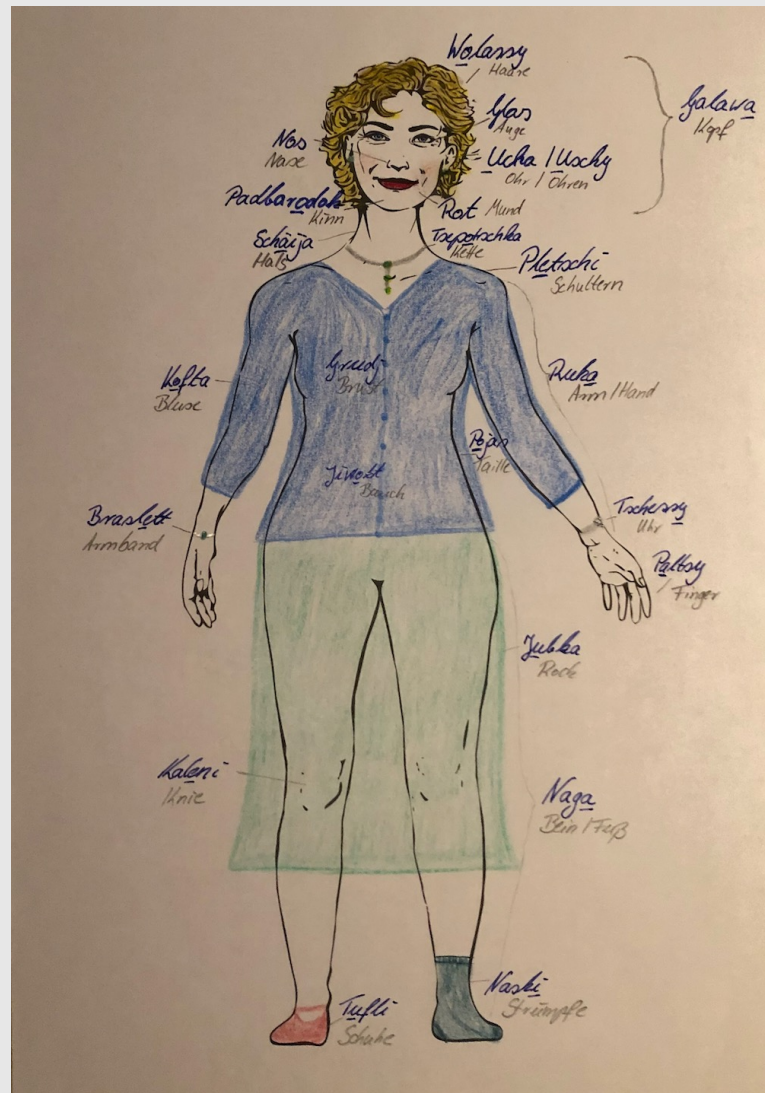
- Attrition of the languages depends on various factors (dominance of and skills in the languages, stage of disease)
- Multilingual environment enables the use of available resources and an individual and multifaceted approach to the person

Perspectives: How can we integrate multilingualism?

- Continuation of the public and political discussion on intercultural opening, dementia and multilingualism (cf. Murphy et al. 2019)
- Raising awareness in nursing education, (dealing with) multilingualism as part of the education
- Ideally: Institutionalised opportunity to use language resources by enabling a multilingual environment in everyday care
- If not: Integration of multilingualism into everyday care, even without having to actively speak the respective language:
 - Possibility 1: Development and provision of multilingual materials that can be used at low thresholds
 - Possibility 2: Extra-institutional projects carried out in nursing homes

Perspectives: How can we integrate multilingualism?

Multilingual material: Example *Sprachenkörper* [Language body] (Karl 2021)



Perspectives: How can we integrate multilingualism?

Extra-institutional projects
UnVergessen [UnForgotten]
(Karl 2021; www.un-vergessen.de)



- Multilingual students visit multilingual residents in their nursing homes
 - Weekly meetings for 9 months, spending time together
 - Benefits for students
 - Benefits for nursing homes and their residents
- UnVergessen responds to the linguistic and social isolation of multilingual residents in nursing homes

References

- Folgen 😊

Thank you for your attention!

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