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The Relationship among Age-advanced Learners'* In-class Willingness to Communicate in English, Intrinsic Motivation, Classroom Environment and Teacher Immediacy—A Pilot Study

Abstract

The article aims to scrutinize third agers' in-class willingness to communicate (WTC) in English as well as to determine the relationship among WTC, intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and teacher immediacy. The instrument adapted to this study was a questionnaire comprising biodata items, the in-class WTC tool (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), intrinsic motivation (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001), classroom environment (Fraser, Fisher, & McRobbie, 1996), and the teacher immediacy scale (Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

The data revealed that senior learners' WTC was higher in meaning-focused than in form-focused activities. This finding indicates that the participants paid due attention to communicative interactions in English. Also, they were more eager to be actively involved in dyadic exercises as it might have given them a sense of security and confidence. It is noteworthy that intrinsic motivation turned out to be the strongest predictor of in-class WTC. The analysis showed that communication in English abroad and in-class was of paramount relevance for the informants. The older adults also underscored the fundamental role of the language instructor. In this respect, the students attached great importance to a non-threatening atmosphere, and the teacher's personality traits, namely patience, professionalism, and empathy.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, seniors, motivation, teacher immediacy

* Language learners aged 55 plus are defined in various sources as *age-advanced learners* (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018), *third-age learners* (Gabryś-Barker, 2018), *third agers* (Oxford, 2018), *late language learners* (Singleton, 2018), *older adults/learners* (e.g., Kliesch et al., 2018; Ramírez Gómez, 2016), *senior learners/students* (e.g., Derenowski, 2018; Niżegorodcew, 2018), and *seniors* (e.g., Pawlak, Derenowski, & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2018). I am going to use the terms interchangeably.

Without a doubt, seniors constitute one of the most autonomous language learners, and as such they have their linguistic needs and goals clearly defined (cf. Gabryś-Barker, 2018; Oxford, 2018). It has been well-established that older adults place great weight to developing communicative skills in-class, which is of practical relevance in real-life situations (e.g., Grotek, 2018; Jaroszewska, 2013; Ramírez Gómez, 2016). My numerous observations of third agers as language students have indicated that they are eager to speak English, and share their opinions during classes. Regardless of the level of proficiency, they are open to experimenting with English, and their eagerness to speak seems to be even higher in dyadic interactions. To the best of my knowledge, however, there are no publications regarding older learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) or the variables that might shape their readiness to speak English.

Therefore, the present pilot paper attempts to explore seniors' in-class WTC in English, and identify the relationship between classroom WTC, intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and teacher immediacy.

In-class WTC in a Second Language

Originally, the concept of WTC was developed with reference to the first language, and it was related to an individual's general predisposition to initiate and sustain verbal interaction with other people (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). L2 WTC, on the other hand, concerns both trait-like and situation-based factors, and is traditionally defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). The desire to communicate is of great value as it exerts a positive effect on language learners' communicative behaviors in the classroom context, and as aptly stated by MacIntyre (2020, p. 112), "choosing to communicate or not may be one of the most important decisions a person can make" in second language interactions.

It seems fundamental to note that initial and early studies were conducted without any distinction between in-class and out-of-class WTC. MacIntyre et al. (2001) examined readiness to communicate for all four skills using the same scale for both WTC inside and outside the classroom in an immersion context. A significant modification was proposed by Weaver (2005), who designed a scale that aimed at measuring eagerness to speak in typical classroom situations. Peng and Woodrow (2010) adapted Weaver's (2005) tool, and supplemented it with McCrockey and Baer's (1985) scale with a view of creating a new instrument based on WTC in meaning-focused and form-focused tasks. This scale was intended to measure L2 WTC in a variety of exercises among

three kinds of interlocutors, such as the teacher, a peer and a group of peers. It turned out that Chinese university students tended to have a higher level of WTC in form-focused activities (e.g., Peng, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). They were more likely to speak in teacher-centered situations, and meaningful communication, which is typically more risky and unpredictable, might be a source of losing face or public humiliation (cf. Simpson, 2008; Wen & Clément, 2003).

Much in a similar vein, Cao and Philp (2006) conducted a substantial study which investigated WTC in three interactional situations, namely, dyadic work, group work, and whole class. As also indicated in previous research, some students preferred group work with three or four partners as that form of learning offered multiple perspective opportunities (e.g., Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006; Riasati, 2012). In this respect, Fushino (2010) manifests that cooperation in groups may encourage learners with lower linguistic competence to involve themselves actively in a task as well as to "experience a growing degree of success" (p. 718). By contrast, pair work is deemed to be less competitive and generates less anxiety when compared to whole class activities (Cao, 2013; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Riasati, 2018). Also, students tend to express a lower level of WTC while giving a lecture in front of class as they feel less secure and confident (e.g., Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). It is worthwhile to note that Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2014) conducted a study whose main aim was to measure younger adults' WTC in a monologue and a dialogue. It was reported that the initial high WTC in monologues was likely to decrease while readiness to communicate in dialogues was lower at the onset, and it tended to boost during the task performance. The scholars write that "the initial unwillingness to talk tended to fade away as the students became more engaged in the task, perhaps in response to the points raised by the other participants" (p. 254).

What also appears critical is that interlocutors play a key role in facilitating in-class WTC. It has been manifested that students have a preference for speaking with classmates they know well since familiarity has a significant impact on L2 WTC (e.g., Kang, 2005; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). Likewise, cooperative partners are of particular significance as they motivate learners to active engagement in a task (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Nagy & Nikolov, 2007; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015). Students may also feel encouraged to discuss a topic when classmates' opinions are different (Riasati, 2018; Riasati & Rahimi, 2018).

In actual teaching practice, in-class WTC is facilitated by a supportive and non-threatening atmosphere (e.g., J.-M. Dewaele & L. Dewaele, 2018; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2017; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). Class climate is perceived as one of the situation cues affecting WTC. In the proposed framework of situational antecedents of state WTC, Zhang, Beckmann and Beckmann (2018) have clearly emphasized that a positive atmosphere is

an influential factor shaping WTC. In this regard, the teacher is a power-ful figure who is a capable of creating and maintaining a laid-back atmo-sphere (Dewaele, 2019; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014; Riasati, 2018; Sheybani, 2019). In a large number of studies a stress-free environment as well as teacher sup-port have been detailed as potent factors fostering in-class communication (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). The language instructor who is capable of creating a supportive classroom environment may build a good rapport with students. The teacher's verbal and non-verbal be-haviors in-class serve a beneficial purpose as they reduce potential discomfort while using a L2 at the oral level. Therefore, teacher immediacy has a positive influence on boosting in-class readiness to speak as it provides encouragement that, in consequence, prompts more open and active involvement during classes (e.g., Cao, 2011; Wen & Clément, 2003; Zarrinabadi, 2014; J. Zhang, Beckmann, & Beckmann, 2019; Q. Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Third Agers in an English Classroom

In-class WTC among third age learners, who are mainly defined as 55 years of age and older (cf. Gabryś-Barker, 2018; Ramírez Gómez, 2016; Stuart-Hamilton, 2012), has not been investigated in the literature of the sub-ject. However, there is a rich body of research which indirectly suggests that older adults ought to be eager to speak a foreign language inside a classroom environment. It seems significant at this juncture to concentrate on English as it is the most commonly learnt language at third age universities in Poland (e.g., Jaroszewska, 2013; Matusz & Rakowska, 2019; Szarota, 2009).

Basically, seniors may be viewed as unique language students in terms of their motivation to learn English. Owing to the fact that their professional paths have come to an end, extrinsic motivation is no longer a driving factor that might facilitate improvement of language skills in late adulthood (e.g., Pawlak, Derenowski, & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2018). As opposed to younger adults, they are not interested in passing exams in order to get formal quali-fications and start their careers (cf. Derenowski, 2018). For this reason, third agers typically turn to activities that give them a meaningful goal in their per-sonal life, as well as open doors to being a worthy member of the community (cf. Lawrence & Lightfoot, 2009; Wieczorkowska, 2017). Moreover, they tend to put their emotional well-being first because they are aware of the fact that they have less time left (Sigelman & Rider, 2015).

Gabryś-Barker (2018, p. xv) points out that learning a foreign language may be treated as "a lifestyle choice and a pleasurable pastime," which results

in evoking positive emotions. As evidenced in the studies by Pfenninger and Polz (2018), as well as Pot, Keizer, and de Bot (2018), second language acquisition promotes interaction and integration that, in turn, lead to fostering overall well-being and self-esteem. Additionally, seniors are conscious of the fact that language education has a positive effect on brain plasticity as it cannot only increase working memory capacity and attention, but the onset of dementia may be delayed as well (e.g., Bialystok, Craik, & Freedman, 2007; Cox, 2017; Goral, 2019; Mackey & Sachs, 2012; Wong et al., 2019). Thus, age-advanced learners' active participation during English classes seems to be mediated by their intrinsic motivation, which as the most self-determined form of motivation, is a paramount factor maintaining students' effort and engagement in the second language process of learning (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001).

In this respect, the strongest motive to learn English at a senior age is gaining the ability to communicate abroad in real-life situations (e.g., Niżegorodcew, 2016; Oxford, 2018). Interactions in a foreign language have a powerful role in establishing or maintaining relationships with seniors' friends and family, and those communicative behaviors may result in eliminating a potential feeling of isolation or age stereotyping about dependence on others (e.g., Escuder-Mollón, 2014; Świderska & Kapszewicz, 2015). Independent communication in English may become a source of self-realization, satisfaction and happiness that facilitate quality of life (Pfenninger & Polz, 2018; Wieczorkowska, 2017).

In order to become an effective English speaker, one needs to be willing to use the language verbally inside the classroom (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 1998). Students in the third age perceive learning as a social activity, and appear to attend a language course with a view of being a part of group (e.g., Grotek, 2018; Jaroszewska, 2013). My hands-on experience shows that older adults enjoy performing tasks in dyads, such as dialogues and role plays. What is significant from a methodological point of view is that meaning-focused exercises ought to be introduced from the very beginning of English learning because, as already mentioned, seniors' intention is to practice speaking skills which gets them used to natural reactions in various daily situations outside the classroom. Much prominence should also be given to learning "relatable vocabulary" that may be germane and useful in realistic contexts (Ramírez Gómez, 2016, p. 169). As learners in the third age simply wish to communicate in meaningful interactions in-class, form-focused tasks seem to be of much less importance to them (cf. Matusz-Rakowska, 2019).

At this point, it is reasonable to hypothesize that in-class WTC in English among seniors should be higher in meaning-focused activities as their main purpose is to prepare learners for natural language communication (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Also, they may be more eager to speak English in pairs because dyadic work enhances a sense of security, particularly when a partner is

familiar, cooperative, and open to share opinions (e.g., Fushino, 2010; Riasati, 2018).

The Teacher Role in Shaping Senior Learners' In-class WTC in English

It is also assumed that senior students highlight the importance of a language teacher who should provide opportunities that promote communication. What appears to be seen in other studies is that the teacher immediacy plays an unquestionable role in a seniors' language classroom (cf. Pawlak et al., 2018; Pot et al., 2018). In this regard, both instrumental immediacy (i.e., the teacher's attitude towards his or her profession), and relational immediacy (i.e., the teacher's behaviors towards his or her students) seem to shape senior learners' engagement, as well as active involvement in English classes (cf. Q. Zhang & Oetzel, 2006). Also, the educator's personality features, and classroom management have a vast influence on older learners in a holistic manner (e.g., Derenowski, 2018; Grotek, 2018; Larrotta, 2019). Patience, empathy, and professionalism are considered to be of great value when it comes to a foreign language teacher. The educator needs to be capable of understanding older students' potential physical and mental limitations (cf. Jaroszewska, 2013; Oxford, 2018). Some scholars have remarked that older language learners tend to self-stereotype and undermine their skills, which may have a detrimental effect on their active engagement in-class (Singleton, 2018; Steuden, 2011). Thus, it is essential for the teacher to have a good rapport with his or her students translated as showing them positive emotions (e.g., respect and encouragement), and paying due attention to their language learning successes as it plays a key role in maintaining older students' self-esteem (cf. Kozerska, 2016; Q. Zhang & Oetzel, 2006).

Much in a similar vein, an ability to create and sustain a relaxed atmosphere constitutes the core of teaching a foreign language to seniors since these components of language instruction help learners become more secure and confident to experiment with English (e.g., Matusz & Rakowska, 2019; Ramírez Gómez, 2019). The positive environment is an effective facilitator that encourages cooperative learning and willingness to share linguistic knowledge during task performance. Likewise, the teacher support is surmised to build or strengthen social bonds between classmates and improve group cohesiveness that, as already discussed, is of unquestionable relevance to seniors (Derenowski, 2018; Grotek, 2018). What should also be noted is that a friendly classroom climate may exert a great influence on seniors' communicative behaviors in English since "having experienced a constant pleasant classroom environment, students

may be able to develop rewarding feelings about speaking English" (Peng & Woodrow, 2010, p. 857).

This paper is an attempt to identify seniors' in-class WTC both in meaning-focused and form-focused activities in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their in-class communicative behaviors, and to confirm that older adults have a preference for performing realistic activities based on meaningful communication. The goal of this article is also to investigate variables that may foster readiness to speak English inside a classroom setting, as well as to indicate which aspects of intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and teacher immediacy are reported to be the most vital for the subjects.

Study

Research Aims and Questions

The primary objective of the current study was to scrutinize in-class WTC in English among senior learners, as well as to investigate the relationship between WTC in English, intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and teacher immediacy. It also sought to determine whether the participants found meaning-focused or form-focused activities more relevant in the classroom context. Additionally, the present research was intended to explore the older adults' standpoints in terms of internal motives to learn English at a senior age, as well as to identify their perceptions of the relationships with class members (group cohesiveness), and the teacher (teacher immediacy and support). In particular, the present study aimed to address the following questions:

To what extent are the third agers willing to communicate in English both in meaning-focused and form-focused tasks inside classroom settings?

Which aspects of intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, and teacher immediacy are the most eminent among the seniors?

What is the relationship among the third agers' WTC in English, intrinsic motivation, classroom environment, as well as teacher immediacy?

Participants

The informants were 30 students (29 females and one male) of the Third Age University in Nowy Targ and Zakopane who had been regularly attending English courses for seniors (two didactic hours a week). As regards their age, one student declared to be between 50–55, four third agers were between 56–60,

eight respondents reported to be between 61–65, 11 participants between 66–70, and six subjects were between 71–75. When it comes to the place of residence, 90% declared living in a town, and 10% in a village. Likewise, 60% admitted having tertiary education while 40% reported having graduated from a secondary school. The participants were also asked about learning English throughout their life, and including only English courses at the third age university. The analysis showed that seven students had studied English for 1–3 years, seven informants for 3–5 years, six seniors for 5–7 years, five respondents for 7–10 years, two third agers for 10–15 years, and three learners for more than 15 years. In a general sense, the students represented the A1 and A2 level of proficiency. As far as the English courses for seniors were concerned, most of the informants (60%) declared 1–3 years of attendance. Interestingly, 90% of the subjects admitted knowing other foreign languages, mainly Russian (24 informants), and German (12 learners). The knowledge of French, Italian, and Latin was also mentioned.

The subjects were taught by myself and another teacher, and our teaching styles varied considerably. We used two different approaches to teaching English. I promoted learner-centeredness, offering the seniors many communicative opportunities that were principally relevant for encouraging active involvement inside the classroom. Likewise, I paid a lot of attention to giving as much English input as possible, and the language of instructions was mainly English. My students were exposed predominantly to meaningful exercises (such as role-plays and dialogues) even at lower levels of proficiency, and I placed great emphasis on giving my seniors much talking and reaction time. The second instructor explained tasks in Polish, and his approach was more teacher-centered. His learners also had some opportunities to talk, yet in a more controlled manner. Moreover, this teacher did not provide any room for his students to be absorbed in spontaneous interaction between each other. Grammar structures were introduced and practiced mostly by means of translations.

Instruments and Procedure

The instrument adapted to this study was a questionnaire which included demographic information: gender (male; female), age (between 50–55 years old; between 56–60 years old; 61–65 years old; between 66–70 years old; between 71–75 years old; 75 years old and older), place of residence (village; town up to 50,000 residents; town/city with more than 50,000 residents), and education (tertiary; secondary; primary). In addition, the participants were asked about the duration of learning English throughout their life, and during English courses for third agers. The subjects were also to report their knowledge of foreign languages other than English. The questionnaire comprised four scales

(WTC in English, Intrinsic Motivation, Classroom Environment, and Teacher Immediacy), and responses to their items were given on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1—*I strongly disagree* to 6—*I strongly agree*.

In order to measure readiness to communicate in English in the classroom, an in-class WTC in English scale was used (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). The aim of this instrument was to investigate seniors' WTC in English both in meaning-focused and form-focused activities, as well as to confirm whether tasks based on meaningful communication would shape a higher level of WTC when compared to tasks based on forms. The whole 10-item instrument was utilized in the questionnaire. Sample items included: "I am willing to do a role play standing in front of the class in English (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant)," "I am willing to ask my group mates in English how to pronounce a word in English." One item was rewritten so that it could refer to the Polish context, and "Chinese" was replaced with "Polish," namely, "I am willing to translate a spoken utterance from Polish into English in my group."

Another instrument was intrinsic motivation (Noels et al., 2001). This 9-item scale was adapted to determine senior learners' intrinsic motivation to learn English, and to examine whether the subjects would be mainly encouraged and motivated by the ability to communicate in English in and outside the classroom. The tool originally referred to French, and thus this language was changed into English, as for instance in the following item: "For the pleasure that I experience on knowing more about English literature." The main question to all items was changed to "Why are you learning English in your senior age?" Six original items were used. Sample items were: "For the enjoyment I experience when I grasp a difficult construct on English," "For the satisfied feeling I get in finding out new things." Three item were excluded as they were unsuitable in the case of third agers, for example: "For the pleasure I experience when I surpass myself in English studies." In order to adapt the scale to specific seniors' motives to learn English, three new items were added: "For the pleasure I experience when I can use English abroad," "For the satisfaction I feel when I communicate in English during classes," "For the high I experience when I can use newly learnt vocabulary."

Another scale, Classroom Environment (Fraser, Fisher, & McRobbie, 1996) aimed to provide information about task orientation, group cohesiveness, and teacher support. In this study, task orientation was excluded as the main objective was to scrutinize how relationships between the older learners and their peers (group cohesiveness), as well as between the seniors and the teacher (teacher support) would influence in-class WTC. This instrument was also to indicate which statements subcategorized as group cohesion, and teacher support, would be reported to have the highest means, and to be of the greatest importance for the subjects. Four items measuring group cohesion were used, and sample items included: "I work well with other class members," "I help

other class members who are having trouble with their work." As regards teacher support, one item was eliminated, namely, "The teacher smiles at the class while talking," and two new items were constructed: "The teacher praises the students," and "The teacher creates a positive and supportive atmosphere during classes."

Teacher Immediacy Scale (Q. Zhang & Oetzel, 2006) was applied to estimate instructional immediacy, relational immediacy, and personal immediacy. As it was my intention to focus on a classroom setting, personal immediacy was excluded from the present study. This instrument was used to investigate the third agers' perceptions of the instructor's attitudes towards his or her teaching, and behaviors towards his or her students. Moreover, the scale was adapted to show the most crucial aspects of teacher immediacy in the case of senior learners. The examples of instructional immediacy were as follows: "The teacher is committed to teaching," "The teacher answers questions earnestly." Sample items of relational immediacy were: "The teacher treats students fairly and equally," "The teacher does not hurt students' self-respect."

The questionnaire was written in Polish, and all items were translated in Polish to eliminate the risk of being misunderstood by the respondents. As an initial step, it was given to one of the my colleagues who provided valuable feedback that helped to correct or paraphrase Polish translations in order to construct very clear statements. From a technical point of view, the survey was prepared to accommodate specific seniors' needs, that is, to reduce difficulties resulting from potential visual impairments. Therefore, the font size was 14 points, and in-between line space was 1.5 points (cf. Ramírez Gómez, 2016, 2019).

The study was conducted in January and February 2020. As far as the members of the Third Age University in Nowy Targ are concerned, the questionnaire was administered by Anna Borkowska who ensured the informants that all the data would be gathered and analyzed for research purposes only. The third age learners were also informed to ask questions in case they had any doubts or problems while filling out the questionnaire. When it comes to the third agers from Zakopane, the questionnaire was conducted by their teacher. The survey was completed during the seniors' regular class time, and it took the respondents approximately 15 minutes to fill out all the questions.

Once the questionnaires were collected and coded, Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the total means and standard deviations for all the items. The next step was the analysis of the scales. This was followed both by tallying Cronbach's alpha for each scale, and the Pearson correlation by means of appropriate formulas in Microsoft Excel.

Study Findings

The Analysis of Four Scales – The Internal Reliability, Means and Standard Deviations

As illustrated in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha for WTC in English, Intrinsic Motivation, and Classroom Environment were acceptable, and the internal reliability for Teacher Immediacy was good.

Table 1

The Means, Standard Deviations and Values of Cronbach's Alpha for WTC in English, Intrinsic Motivation, Classroom Environment and Teacher Immediacy

Scale	No. of items	M	SD	Cronbach's alpha
WTC in English	10	3.85	1.29	0.72
Intrinsic Motivation	9	4.57	0.76	0.76
Classroom Environment	9	5.49	0.63	0.74
Teacher Immediacy	11	5.78	0.43	0.85

The high mean was reported in Teacher Immediacy (M = 5.78), and the value of the standard deviation here was relatively low (SD = 0.43). The low standard deviation showed that the older learners' responses were rather homogenous and consistent. It seems reasonable to think that they found it enjoyable to spend their time in-class with the teacher since they accepted his or her teaching style and classroom management.

A relatively high mean was also declared in Classroom Environment (*M* = 5.49) which was intended to measure group cohesion and teacher support in the present study. The standard deviation was low amounting to 0.63. It transpires that the informants put an emphasis on interaction with peers and mutual help during English lessons. The third agers' process of learning strongly hinged upon teacher support.

As far as Intrinsic Motivation is concerned, the mean was 4.57, and the standard deviation was quite high (SD = 0.76). In essence, the students' answers were rather diverse, and each individual admitted to be motivated by different aspects of English learning. The most prominent motives will be analyzed in a further part of the article.

A relatively low mean (3.85) was found in WTC in English. Also, the value of standard deviation was rather high in this scale revealing the fact that the third agers' responses were very heterogeneous.

The Seniors' Classroom WTC in English

Table 2 indicates the means and the standard deviations for all individual items of the In-class WTC in English scale. As previously mentioned, the relatively low mean for all the scale was reported (M = 3.85). However, bearing in mind the fact that the instrument was subcategorized into meaning-focused and form-focused exercises, a more positive picture is brought to light.

Table 2

The Means and the Standard Deviations for in-class WTC in English (n = 30)

	No.	Item	M	SD
meaning-focused tasks	1.	I am willing to do a role play standing in front of the class in English (e.g. ordering food in a restaurant).	3.50	1.31
	2.	I am willing to give a short self-introduction without notes in English to the class.	4.10	1.11
	3.	I am willing to give a short speech in English to the class about my hometown with notes.	4.33	1.01
	4.	I am willing to translate a spoken utterance from Polish into English in my group.	4.93	0.73
	5.	I am willing to ask the teacher in English to repeat what he/she just said in English because I didn't understand.	3.87	1.48
	6.	I am willing to do a role play at my desk, with a peer (e.g. ordering food in a restaurant).	4.60	0.92
form-focused tasks	7.	I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English the meaning of an English word.	3.67	1.64
	8.	I am willing to ask my group mates in English the meaning of word I do not know.	3.03	1.51
	9.	I am willing to ask my group mates in English how to pronounce a word in English.	3.00	1.51
	10.	I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English how to say an English phrase to express the thoughts in English.	3.47	1.63
		Total	**3.85**	**1.29**

As presented in Table 3, WTC in meaning-focused activities was at a much higher level than in activities concentrated on form (Table 4).

Table 3

The Means and the Standard Deviations for Meaning-focused Exercises

Meaning-focused activities		
Item	M	SD
1	3.50	1.31
2	4.10	1.11
3	4.33	1.01
4	4.93	0.73
5	3.87	1.48
6	4.60	0.92
Total	**4.22**	**1.09**

Table 4

The Means and the Standard Deviations for Form-focused Exercises

Form-focused activities		
Item	M	SD
7	3.67	1.64
8	3.03	1.51
9	3.00	1.51
10	3.47	1.63
Total	**3.29**	**1.57**

The total mean in meaning-focused tasks was 4.22, and the standard deviation was reported to be 1.09. The highest mean was declared in item 4 concerning translation of a spoken utterance from Polish into English (Table 2). The next highest mean was obtained in item 6 "I am willing to do a role play at my desk, with a peer (e.g., ordering food in a restaurant)." It is worthwhile to note that the same role play performed in front of the class turned out to have the lowest mean (item 1, M = 3.50).

As far as form-focused tasks are concerned, the total mean was much lower ($M = 3.29$) than in meaning-focused activities. Also, as illustrated in Table 4, the value of the standard deviation was very high (SD = 1.57) which suggests a substantial difference between the subjects' responses. The highest mean in exercises based on grammar was declared in item seven "I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English the meaning of an English word" (Table 2). The standard deviation was also the highest in this item (SD = 1.64).

The analysis presented in Table 2 revealed that the lowest means were reported in items 8 and 9 concerning asking groupmates in English about the pronunciation and meaning of an English word. It may be surmised that the

respondents were more likely to seek a desk partner's assistance regarding both the meaning of an English word and a phrase they needed to express (item 10).

The Most Prominent Aspects of Intrinsic Motivation, Classroom Environment and Teacher Immediacy among the Third Agers

It seems vital at this point to take a closer look at the respondents' motives to learn English at an advancing age. As shown in Table 5, the highest mean was obtained in item 4 "For the pleasure I experience when I can use English abroad." The seniors' answers were the most homogenous here ($SD = 0.80$).

Table 5

The Means and the Standard Deviations for Intrinsic Motivation (n = 30)

No.	Item	M	SD
1.	Because I enjoy the feeling of acquiring knowledge about the English community and their way of life.	3.50	1.34
2.	For the pleasure that I experience in knowing more about English literature.	3.47	1.50
3.	For the satisfied feeling I get in finding out new things.	4.97	0.84
4.	For the pleasure I experience when I can use English abroad.	5.23	0.80
5.	For the satisfaction I feel when I communicate in English during classes.	5.13	0.88
6.	For pleasure I get from hearing English spoken by English people/ foreigners.	4.63	1.25
7.	For the high I experience when I can use newly learnt vocabulary.	5.03	1.02
8.	For the enjoyment I experience when I grasp a difficult construct in English.	4.70	1.07
9.	For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult exercises in English.	4.50	1.23
	Total	**4.57**	**1.10**

Another noteworthy item was item 5 "For the satisfaction I feel when I communicate in English during classes" (M = 5.13). Apparently, the participants realized that using newly learnt vocabulary (item 7, M = 5.03) was at the heart of real-life communicative behaviors. What is also not to be neglected is that the subjects had a genuine interest in finding out new things (item 3, $M = 4.97$). It may be deduced that they were open to taking full advantage of English classes with regard to acquiring new knowledge.

When it comes to the Classroom Environment scale, as can be seen in Table 6, it was subcategorized into group cohesion and teacher support. The highest mean in the first category was reported in item 2 "I am friendly to members of this class."

Table 6

The Means and the Standard Deviations for Classroom Environment (n = 30)

	No.	Item	M	SD
group cohesiveness	1.	I work well with other class members.	5.30	0.64
	2.	I am friendly to members of this class.	5.50	0.62
	3.	I make friends among students in this class.	4.97	0.84
	4.	I help other class members who are having trouble with their work.	5.07	1.06
teacher support	5.	The teacher is patient in teaching.	5.83	0.37
	6.	The teacher provides a timely response to students' concerns.	5.70	0.53
	7.	The teacher praises the students.	5.60	0.61
	8.	The teacher creates a positive and supportive atmosphere during classes.	5.90	0.30
	9.	The teacher asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions.	5.53	0.63
		Total	**5.49**	**0.63**

One of the most significant items was statement 1 "I work well with other class members." As regards teacher support, creating a friendly atmosphere was perceived as being crucial (item 8, M = 5.90). The seniors' answers here were the most unanimous (SD = 0.30). It should also be noted that the students placed emphasis on the instructor's patience (item 5, M = 5.83). Closely tied to this is the issue of quick reactions to potential learners' concerns (item 6, M = 5.70). It also turned out that the informants gave priority to being praised during classes (item 7, M = 5.60).

The last scale, Teacher Immediacy, was also divided into two categories, namely, instructional and relational immediacy. Table 7 illustrates the means and standard deviations for all items.

Table 7

The Means and the Standard Deviations for Teacher Immediacy (n = 30)

	No.	Item	M	SD
instructional immediacy	1.	The teacher is committed to teaching.	5.83	0.37
	2.	The teacher is well-prepared in teaching.	5.90	0.30
	3.	The teacher is passionate about teaching.	5.80	0.40
	4.	The teacher answers questions earnestly.	5.80	0.40
	5.	The teacher is patient in teaching.	5.83	0.37
relational immediacy	6.	The teacher understands students.	5.73	0.44
	7.	The teacher treats students fairly and equally.	5.77	0.42
	8.	The teacher respects students.	5.67	0.54
	9.	The teacher does not hurt students' self-esteem.	5.80	0.40
	10.	The teacher encourages students.	5.70	0.53
	11.	The teacher provides timely response to students' concerns.	5.70	0.53
		Total	**5.78**	**0.43**

What needs to be noted here is that there were only slight discrepancies between the items. This essentially means that the older learners demonstrated explicit and consistent views about their educators. The highest mean (5.90) was obtained in item 2 "The teacher is well-prepared in teaching" in the first category. As mentioned earlier, patience was of great value, and the data revealed that commitment and passion to teaching played key roles (item 1 and 3). The respondents admitted that the teacher should answer questions earnestly (M = 5.80). Taking a rapport between the teacher and the learners into account, the strongest item was associated with students' self-esteem (item 9, M = 5.80), and the teacher's ability to be understanding (item 6, M = 5.73). One of the most eminent statements was also item 7 "The teacher treats students fairly and equally." To a large degree, a sense of fairness indicates the teacher's professionalism, empathy, and a positive approach to the students.

Correlations among Four Factors

As shown in Table 8, only positive corrections between In-WTC in English (WTC), Intrinsic Motivation (IM), Classroom Environment (CE), and Teacher Immediacy (TI) were revealed.

Table 8

Correlations among the Four Factors—Values of Pearson's r

	WTC	IM	CE	TI
WTC	1	0.63	0.55	0.27
IM	0.63	1	0.50	0.38
CE	0.55	0.50	1	0.71
TI	0.27	0.38	0.71	1

The strongest correlation was found between CE and TI ($r = 0.71$). Another positive and strong correlation was reported between WTC and IM ($r = 0.63$). Also, CE and WTC indicated a high-degree of positive correlation ($r = 0.55$).

Similarly, the data revealed a relatively strong correlation between CE and IM ($r = 0.50$) which may suggest that a classroom environment had a potent influence on IM. The moderate correlation coefficient was obtained between IM and TI ($r = 0.38$), and the weakest relationship was reported between WTC and TI ($r = 0.27$).

Discussion

The pilot study presented in this paper sheds some light on the seniors' in-class WTC in English. As shown by the results, the subjects' readiness to speak English in the classroom setting was relatively low, and their responses were very heterogeneous. A possible reason for this could be a discrepancy between their educators' teaching style, and the amount of student talking time provided. The data analysis also indicated that the third agers were more eager to communicate in meaning-focused exercises, which confirms the fact that they are primarily interested in improving communicative skills, and less so in working on grammar-based tasks (e.g., Gabryś-Barker, 2018; Jaroszewska, 2013; Singleton, 2018). The present finding is not in line with Peng and Woodrow's (2010) study. The scholars manifested that Chinese university students were more actively involved in form-focused activities as they are generally exam-oriented students. Additionally, from a cultural perspective, they tend to avoid spontaneous interaction because it may generate fear of losing face or a risk of humiliation (cf. Peng, 2014; Simpson, 2008; Wen & Clément, 2003).

The present study also depicts that translation played an eminent role in fostering in-class eagerness to speak English since translation of a spoken utterance from Polish into English was reported to have the highest mean in

meaning-focused items. One plausible explanation for this is that the third agers found translating an effective language learning technique. This might derive from the fact that the participants were accustomed to this technique as it was commonly used in a classical method when the seniors attended formal education (cf. Grotek, 2018; Ramírez Gómez, 2016). In didactic practice, when an older adult representing A1 or A2 level is asked a question in English, he or she tends to translate the question. They are also most likely to say the beginning of their answer in Polish out loud before actually responding in English. This observation is of great importance since it helps to understand seniors' language learning process in a broader dimension.

Noteworthy is also the fact that the third age learners' WTC was at a higher level in dyads than in whole-class tasks both in meaning-focused and form-focused exercises. Such a view is supported by previous studies (e.g., Fushino, 2010; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Riasati, 2018) which suggest that working in pairs gives a sense of security, particularly when a partner is familiar, cooperative, and open to share opinions. The interlocutors' in-class behaviors have a significant impact on shaping WTC, and in the case of older learners, this form of communication provides space to build good relationships among peers who principally seek company during classes (cf. Niżegorodcew, 2016; Pawlak et al., 2018; Szarota, 2014). In a general sense, older students are prone to treat learning as a social activity, and working with a peer is beneficial both on a personal and at an educational level. As outlined by Matusz and Rakowska (2019), older adults experience a feeling of discomfort while speaking English. Therefore, it seems essential to offer them communicative opportunities to interact in pairs since older learners are typically eager to work with a partner they like and sit with at one desk (e.g., Grotek, 2018).

When it comes to intrinsic motivation, the third agers were mainly motivated by the fact the they could use English abroad. They also felt satisfied to communicate in English during classes. The results lent some support to the fact that authentic communication and real-life communicative exercises performed in-class play a pivotal role in English learning in the case of senior students (e.g., Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka, 2018; Niżegorodcew, 2018). It may be concluded at this juncture that the core motivation to learn English at a senior age is closely related to oral interaction in English. The participants seemed to be aware of the fact that before actual communication outside the classroom occurs, one needs to practice speaking in-class and have opportunities to use newly learnt vocabulary (cf. Oxford, 2018).

This research also indicated that the seniors found group cohesion fundamental, particularly with respect to a good cooperation with class members. This is inconsistent with a study by Pawlak et al. (2018) in which the third agers tended to have a difficulty in interacting with others. One reason for this discrepancy may be that much attention was placed on a friendly attitude

towards groupmates which may have resulted in positive views of peer coop-eration inside the classroom. Furthermore, the role of the language instructor was of unquestionable relevance. The students appreciated encouragement and support manifested through praise, and by addressing their linguistic problems. As a matter of fact, the most paramount factor regarding teacher support was creating a relaxed atmosphere during English classes because it served as an anchor to develop and practice conversation skills (cf. Derenowski, 2018; Pot et al., 2018; Ramírez Gómez, 2016).

Similarly, the subjects underscored the significance of the teacher's profes-sionalism and patience which, as stressed in this study, were declared to be the most substantial aspects of instructional teacher immediacy. This seems to support the standpoint held by Jaroszewska (2013) and Grotek (2018), who demonstrate that the most desirable characteristics of educators working with older adults are patience and professional commitment. As far as relational teacher immediacy is concerned, the teacher ought not to hurt the seniors' self-esteem. He or she should also be capable of treating the students fairly and understanding their needs. Fairness as such, however, was not considered to be an imperative in Derenowski's (2018) study as the teacher is an authority for seniors, and his or her judgment ought not to be questioned in-class.

It should be stated explicitly here that the awareness of potential mental limitations is of great value for the teacher who may flexibly adapt his or her verbal and non-verbal in-class behaviors as to facilitate older learners' process of learning (e.g., Grotek, 2018; Larrotta, 2019). Third agers experience a de-cline in general cognitive functioning which may result in the slowing down of mental processes and a struggle to acquire new skills (e.g., Pfenninger & Polz, 2018; Stuart-Hamilton, 2012). In consequence, it seems clear that they should be assured regularly about their ability to be a successful English speaker as they are likely to undermine their linguistic abilities and memory (e.g., Oxford, 2018; Singleton, 2018).

Rather unsurprisingly, the strongest positive correlation was found between the older adults' in-class WTC in English and intrinsic motivation. As already outlined, the major motive to learn English at a senior age was to improve communicative skills, and this may be the reason why a high-degree of positive correlation was reported between WTC and intrinsic motivation in the present study. Clearly, intrinsic motivation had a potent effect on WTC in the class-room because it involves learners' behaviors that are enjoyable, and they may challenge an individual's language competence (cf. Noels, 2001). In a similar manner, Hashimoto (2002) and Riasati (2018) emphasize that students' eager-ness to speak increases as their motivation to learn a foreign language rises.

What can also be seen from the data analysis is a moderate uphill relation-ship between in-class WTC and classroom environment. These results are con-sistent with the idea that a good rapport between peers, as well as the teacher

and students is viewed to be a beneficial factor fostering WTC inside the classroom (e.g., Cao, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Familiarity with groupmates and peers' active engagement in task performance may boost learners' WTC since it reduces fear of speaking a second language (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005). Interestingly, an individual's readiness to communicate may also be underpinned by groupmates' positive perceptions of interlocutors' participation. This effective cooperation leads to successful completion of an activity (J. Zhang et al., 2018). When it comes to the teacher, he or she plays a pivotal role in creating a safe classroom climate which pushes in-class WTC (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015; Riasati, 2012). As evidenced in the previous studies, educator support appears to reduce the distance and enhance close relationships between and with students. This is especially vital in the seniors' language classroom because this age group is susceptible to feelings of insecurity and a fear of losing face (e.g., Cao, 2011; Derenowski, 2018; Grotek, 2018; Riasati & Rahimi, 2018). More meaningful and trustworthy relationships established during a language course for senior learners have a great potential to increase the quality of life, and learning a second language as such may be recognized as a positive ageing strategy targeted towards seniors' linguistic accomplishments and positive emotions (cf. Konieczna-Woźniak, 2013; Oxford, 2018; Sigelman & Rider, 2015).

The final comment concerns teacher immediacy, and its weak positive correlation with in-class eagerness to speak in English. It may be hypothesized at this point that seniors were experienced enough to realize that learning starts with a learner, and a desire to speak English comes mainly from a sense of duty (cf. Pawlak et al., 2018; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014; Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka, 2018). In the case of older learners, attending an English course basically means setting their heart on real-life communication which starts in-class, and is of practical relevance outside the classroom. Therefore, each communicative opportunity ought to be treated as a step towards achieving older adults' linguistic goals (cf. MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Limitations of the Study

The present pilot study was limited in terms of the relatively small sample size, as well as the location of the third age universities. Nowy Targ and Zakopane are towns in the south of Poland. Their residents frequently emigrate to English-speaking countries or they are likely to visit their friends and families abroad. Moreover, Zakopane as a ski resort and a popular destination among foreigners is typically visited by large numbers of English-speaking tourists.

Thus, senior citizens from Zakopane have a lot of communicative opportunities to speak English outside the classroom on a regular basis.

Taking these limitations into account, I aim to extend the scope of the research and to investigate older adults' in-class WTC in English in other third age universities in Poland both in towns and cities. Hopefully, such an approach will not only help to determine readiness to speak English in classroom settings among third agers, but it will also provide sufficient data to analyze and compare WTC between members of the third age university in towns and cities in Poland.

Conclusions and Implications

In spite of its limitations, this small-scale study has yielded vital insights into the nature of senior learners' classroom WTC, and substantial factors that might shape an individual's eagerness to speak in English. The older students' in-class WTC mostly hinged upon their intrinsic motivation that strongly correlated with their oral involvement. As also demonstrated throughout the present paper, a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere was deemed to have a great effect on readiness to speak English. Significantly, a language instructor's teaching style needs to be based on a supportive attitude towards third age learners. As an initial step, the teacher is required to build and maintain a stress-free environment that enhances active in-class engagement. Another remarkable factor is boosting student talking time by offering opportunities to communicate and providing room for dyadic exercises that additionally promote cooperative behaviors. What this basically means is combining learner-centered and communicative approaches. Equally important is a patient and emphatic teacher who is capable of understanding third agers' specific needs with regards to their slower pace of learning, as well as adjustment to potentially new communicative techniques. Teacher support, which may be viewed as praising and constant encouragement, is also of unquestionable value as it leads to developing a positive view about the student's own linguistic abilities. In effect, age-advanced learners are likely to become not only more willing to communicate in-class in a second language, but also develop pragmatic skills they will be able to use outside the classroom in authentic interactions.

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Zur Beziehung zwischen Kommunikationsbereitschaft in Englisch bei den Senioren und intrinsischer Motivation, Klassenklima und Nähe des Lehrers. Eine Pilotstudie

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des vorliegenden Beitrags ist es, die Ergebnisse der Studie über den Willen zur Kommunikation in englischer Sprache bei den Senioren darzustellen sowie die Beziehung zwischen Kommunikationsbereitschaft und intrinsischer Motivation, Klassenklima und Nähe des Lehrers unter die Lupe zu nehmen. Das Hauptinstrument der Untersuchung war ein

Fragebogen zur Erhebung von biografischen Angaben und mit vier Skalen zur Messung von Bereitschaft, im Klassenraum in Englisch zu kommunizieren (Peng und Woodrow, 2010), der intrinsischen Motivation (Noels, Clément und Pelletier, 2001), Klassenlima (Fraser, Fisher und McRobbie, 1996) und Nähe des Lehrers (Zhang und Oetzel, 2006).

Die Analyse ergab, dass die Lernenden im dritten Alter bei sinnbasierten Kommunikationsaufgaben eine höhere Kommunikationsbereitschaft gezeigt hatten als bei grammatischen Übungen. Das Ergebnis deutet darauf hin, dass die kommunikative Interaktion während des Lernprozesses bei älteren Erwachsenen von großer Wichtigkeit ist. Dementsprechend waren die Probanden offener für Gespräche in Zweiergruppen als für eine direkte Kommunikation mit der Lehrkraft. Daher kann davon ausgegangen werden, dass die Partnerarbeit ihr Selbstbewusstsein und Selbstvertrauen bei der Kommunikation in der Fremdsprache gestärkt hat. Erwähnenswert ist auch, dass intrinsische Motivation einen erheblichen Einfluss auf die Kommunikationsbereitschaft im Sprachunterricht hatte. Die Tatsache ist auf die grundlegenden Motive für das Englischlernen im Seniorenalter zurückzuführen. Dabei handelt es sich in erster Linie um die Kommunikation im Ausland und im Klassenraum. Darüber hinaus betonten die Studienteilnehmer die fundamentale Rolle des Lehrers, die im Wesentlichen darin besteht, die Lernenden im Prozess des Spracherwerbs zu fördern und für ein gutes Klassenklima zu sorgen.

Schlüsselwörter: Kommunikationsbereitschaft, Senioren, Motivation, Nähe des Lehrers