

**Impact of Informal Language Learning and Social Contact on  
Integration among Migrant Newcomers**

Nantke Anne Neumann

s3000117

Department of Psychology, University of Groningen

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Group number: PSB3-BT2021-2a-55

Supervisor: MSc Eline Heikamp

Second supervisor: dr. Nina Hansen

Second evaluator: dr. Marloes Huis

In collaboration with: Andreas Eber, Verena Graage, Alice McCreary, Sara Odding, and Vera van den Bosch.

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## Abstract

Language acquisition and social contact are considered crucial for the integration of migrant newcomers. We conducted research in collaboration with a buddy program for informal language learning, called Kletsmaatjes. The program matched Dutch citizens with migrants to help them with integration in the society. We were interested in whether the match, and the quality of contact between buddies and migrants are important to the success of the program. We hypothesized that the match, as a predictor variable, relates to integrational outcomes, and the quality of contact serves as a mediating variable. We then tested this hypothesis in a cross-sectional study design by creating a questionnaire for migrant newcomers ( $N = 123$ ), partaking in the program of Kletsmaatjes. Our hypotheses were partially supported. The match variable did not relate to the other variables as expected. The quality of contact variable did. Implications of this work for our society and programs like Kletsmaatjes will be discussed in the following paper.

*Keywords:* informal language learning, integration, buddy program, migrant newcomers

## **Impact of Informal Language Learning and Social Contact on Integration among Migrant Newcomers**

We live in a world in which migration, here defined as the process of people moving from one country to another for various reasons, plays a major role. People do not only flee from wars, political suppression, but also from natural disasters and long-term climate changes. Climate change and consequential natural phenomena like droughts will undoubtedly affect more and more regions and countries, which will force more people to leave their home countries to not only seek a better future, but also simply to survive. This development will increase the future amount of asylum seekers and refugees pursuing a chance to start a new life and a possibility to survive in other countries (Lustgarten, 2020).

According to the report by the UNHCR (2020), 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide in 2019. In the Netherlands alone, the number of refugees, asylum seekers, and persons falling under the UNHCR's statelessness mandate summed up to an astonishing 112003 (UNHCR, 2020). Every individual who falls under one of these categories is in need of an environment that facilitates integration. Since integration is a complex process, it challenges both migrant newcomers, meaning everybody that is migrating to a country that is not their home country, and members of a host culture. Therefore, multiple building blocks are needed for successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). One of the first steps that need to be taken is the creation of a possibility for contact. Since, according to the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), contact between different group members can reduce prejudice and promote positive attitudes towards the other group. Another highly important building block is language acquisition (Ager and Strang, 2008). In the current thesis, we investigate how these two building blocks are intertwined by looking at an online language learning program for migrant newcomers in the Netherlands. The aim of the current

research is to assess the impact of the quality of contact between a newcomer and a Dutch volunteer on language acquisition and integrational outcomes.

### **Importance of Social Connections and language for Integration**

When talking about integration, it is important to understand which factors are included and influence the process of integration, and to define a normative understanding on what integration is. Ager and Strang (2008) propose a theoretical framework for integration, which is divided into four core domains of successful integration, thus providing such normative understanding. The first domain, the foundation, entails rights and citizenship. The second domain, the facilitators, contains language and cultural knowledge, plus safety and stability. The third domain, the social connection encompasses social bridges, social bonds, and social links. The last domain, markers and means, entails employment, housing, education, and health (Ager and Strang, 2008).

As it can be deduced from the theoretical framework of Ager and Strang (2008), acquiring language and social connections is vital to the process of integration. The link between language and social connections has also been shown in a recent study conducted by Tip et al. (2019), where the results indicate that a higher language proficiency in the majority language of the host culture leads to more positive contact with the majority population, which in turn leads to higher well-being among migrant newcomers. These findings underline the importance of learning the majority language to foster intergroup contact, so the contact between members of different groups. In turn, intergroup contact between migrant newcomers and members of the host culture is highly important for the well-being of the newcomers, since, for instance, it reduces intergroup anxiety, can provide knowledge and information which is otherwise not easily accessible, and can have positive consequences for cross-group friendship, so the friendship between an ingroup and outgroup member, formation. Moreover, isolation and scarcity of a social network can have intense negative effects on the wellbeing

and, thus, the process of integration for the newcomers (Tip et al., 2019). Furthermore, research has shown that the mere knowledge of an ingroup member maintaining a cross-group friendship with an outgroup member can already improve intergroup attitudes. Consequently, even people with highly prejudiced attitudes, leading to intergroup avoidance, can be positively influenced by an ingroup member talking to them about their cross-group friendships (Page-Gould and Mendoza-Denton, 2011). This highlights the importance of fostering intergroup contact.

Promoting intergroup contact is done in various ways. In the current research the focus lies on the impact of an informal online language learning program on integration. Informal language learning, in contrast to formal language learning, is not taught in classes and does not follow a strict schedule. The diversity of informal language learning is one of its biggest advantages. Since it can be tailored to the diverse needs, goals, skills, ambitions, and visions of successful integration of newcomers (Morrice et al., 2019). Godwin-Jones (2018) emphasizes the benefits of the individualized approach of informal language learning compared to formal language learning as well. Moreover, he states that the motivation of acquiring a new language can be positively influenced by informal language learning, compared to its more classic counterpart.

As stated earlier, the link between language learning and social contacts is a crucial element for positive integrational outcomes. It can be seen in the fact that newcomers who have low language levels often do not have the opportunity to interact with members of the host cultures. Especially for them, interaction could facilitate language skills (Morrice et al., 2019). Moreover, intergroup contact offers the opportunity to access information that is otherwise not as easily accessible to newcomers (Tip et al. 2019). These integrational outcomes are closely connected to the theoretical framework of integration proposed by Ager and Strang (2008), as language improvement and knowledge about host society and culture

are reflected in the domain of facilitators of integration. Thus, in this thesis we focus on the impact of an informal language learning program on language use and the knowledge of Dutch society and culture within the group of migrant newcomers. Our hypothesis states that the integrational outcomes are predicted by the match variable.

### **Quality of Contact**

As previously mentioned, intergroup contact can have beneficial outcomes for the people engaging in it. However, not all intergroup contact has the same effect (Allport, 1954). The quality of the contact, so the factors mediating it, is deciding how positively or negatively intergroup contact is perceived (Hayward et al., 2017). According to research conducted by Page-Gould and Mendoza-Denton (2011), self-disclosure plays an important role within forming relationships with other people. It leads people to feel closer to each other and, thus, is an influential factor for the quality of contact of interactions. Additionally, recent research has shown that values associated with a good relationship, for instance respect, positively influence self-esteem of migrant newcomers and, thus, improve the overall quality of contact (Stock, 2019). This link between self-esteem and respect has also been shown in a study conducted by Ellemers et al. (2004). Another factor influencing the quality of contact are positive interactions, since they foster genuine interaction in intergroup contact (Davies et al., 2011, Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Based on the above-mentioned literature, we expect the quality of contact to have a mediating effect on the integrational outcomes. Hence, we are investigating the overall quality of contact, and the subdomains of self-disclosure, respect and positive interactions. Our hypothesis states that the quality of contact serves as a mediating variable between the match and integrational outcomes.

### **Buddy Programs**

One way to promote intergroup contact are buddy programs. Within a buddy program people get matched, commonly a volunteer that serves as a supporting buddy to another

person. The idea behind the matching process is that a better match is predicted to lead to better outcomes of the buddy program (Smith and Trimble, 2016). As former research has shown, buddy relationships not only make the participants more aware of the life of an otherwise unknown outgroup member, but also have transformative potential on the political consciousness of the participants and sensitize them to the overarching issues within integration policies (Stock, 2019). The buddy program studied by the current research is Kletsmaatjes. This program is not only a possibility to foster positive intergroup contact, but also an online informal language learning opportunity for newcomers. It was started in March 2020 by the foundation `Het Begint met Taal`. The program is volunteer-based. The principle of Kletsmaatjes is to connect volunteers and migrant newcomers by matching them. The process of matching within a buddy program like Kletsmaatjes is highly important. The matching process within Kletsmaatjes is done by volunteers of the program, who receive specific training. Every participant of the program has a short intake interview and is matched based on preferences, demographics, and interest.

After being matched, the volunteer and migrant newcomer have about twenty online meetings, at least once per week. If agreed by both parties these meetings can also be held offline. The overarching aims of Kletsmaatjes are to improve Dutch language skills, build a connection with Dutch people, and to decrease loneliness among newcomers. The starting point of Kletsmaatjes is not coincidental, since it was launched when Covid-19 developed into a worldwide pandemic, affecting people all over the globe and forcing isolation and reduction of social contacts. Migrant newcomers are especially vulnerable to effects of Covid-19 on social interaction (OECD, 2020). Partially because they do not necessarily have long term social contacts in close proximity, for instance family members. This causes an increased need for social contacts with members of the host society. However, the possibilities to interact with members of the host society are negatively affected by the consequences of



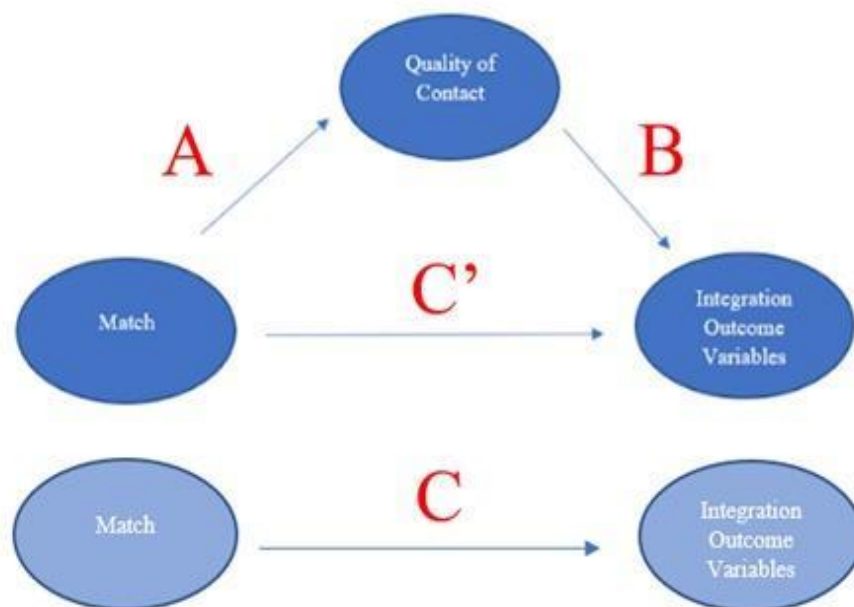
Covid-19, as well. Ergo, the opportunities for newcomers to practice the majority language are also drastically reduced. Additionally, even if a newcomer still had the possibility to physically engage in a work environment during the pandemic, recent research suggests that employment does not guarantee an ongoing improvement in language proficiency (Morrice et al., 2019).

Consequently, programs like Kletsmaatjes are important to promote integration and provide an environment that fosters language acquisition for newcomers, despite the effects of Covid-19. Moreover, Kletsmaatjes provides an informal language learning environment, which can be individually adapted to the needs and wishes of migrant newcomers. As earlier explained, a better match is predicted to lead to better outcomes within buddy programs. Within the context of Kletsmaatjes, we expect a better match to predict better intergenerational outcomes, mediated by the quality of contact.

## Current research

**Figure 1**

*Visualization of the Mediation Model*



*Note.* Visualization of the mediation model between match, quality of contact and integration outcome variables.

Our main research question is: how does an informal language learning buddy program influence the integration of newcomers? The current research focuses on three major variables connected to the program of Kletsmaatjes (see Figure 1). First one being the match between the volunteer and newcomer and the question of what makes a good match. Second one being the overall quality of contact, with the focus on the subdomains of self-disclosure, respect, and positive interactions. The third one being the integration outcome variables, specifically language use and knowledge of Dutch society and culture. We hypothesize the quality of contact to mediate the relationship between the match variable and integrational outcomes. Thus, the hypotheses of this research are as follows:

1. The better the match between the newcomer and volunteer, the more positive the integrational outcomes will be, in the context of language use and knowledge of Dutch society and culture.
2. The overall quality of contact and its subdomains of self-disclosure, respect, and positive interactions positively mediate the relationship between match and outcome variable. Thus, the higher the quality of contact the more positive the integrational outcome variables.

The current research is novel, since the issue was not studied in such a way before. As mentioned earlier, it is of high importance, because the numbers of refugees are expected to rise in the future (UNHCR, 2020). Thus, buddy programs like Kletsmaatjes should be investigated on their effectiveness and improved in their contribution to integration.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

From initially 167 recruited newcomers only those participants who filled out all crucial parts for the research questions and those who had met up with a volunteer at least once were included in the statistical analyses. Thus, the final sample consisted of 123 migrant newcomers who were affiliated with the Kletsmaatjes project ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36$ , range: 22 to 58), originating from over 30 different countries. The two largest groups of newcomers were from Turkey ( $n = 43$ , 35.0%) and Syria ( $n = 18$ , 14.6%), other countries of origin included Brazil, Yemen, Indonesia, Columbia, Morocco, and Poland. Just over half of the participants identified as female (50.4%), with the remaining participants identifying as male (48.8%) or non-binary (0.8%). The median length of stay in the Netherlands was 24 months, with the majority of individuals estimating their Dutch language level at either A2 (35.0%) or B1 (31.7%). The vast majority of newcomers indicated having graduated from university

(90.2%). The participating volunteers of the Kletsmaatjes project were also asked to answer a series of questions. However, their answers will not be considered in the present research project.

### **Research Material Development**

In order to develop the questionnaire, a literature review was conducted for the quality of contact variables as well as the integration outcome variables. According to this review, five subdomains were chosen to encompass the quality of contact variable, based on the expectation that these contribute to an increased level of quality of contact. The subdomains chosen were positive interaction, self-disclosure and trust, respect, reciprocity, and acknowledgement. A measure of positive interactions was included to capture the feeling of closeness and connectedness on a behavioral level and the questions were based on previous research (e.g. Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). As we were using behavioral questions, we considered the behavioral manifestation of trust to be self-disclosure, which is why the questions were based on the definition of Derlega et al. (1993): “the act of revealing personal information to other people”. Based on previous literature, respect has been defined as holding someone in esteem and respecting someone’s rights (Ellemers et al., 2004). Reciprocity can be defined as a way to form and maintain relationships because both parties are equally invested in the relationship (Coleman, 1988).

For the development of the integration outcome variables the following variables were chosen: language use, knowledge of Dutch society and culture, sense of belonging, and expansion of the social network. The items of the variable’s language use and knowledge of Dutch society and culture were created based on previous research describing relevant elements of integration (e.g. Ager & Strang, 2008). Questions relating to the sense of belonging were based on previous literature which identified feelings of participation and feeling at home as major aspects of a sense of belonging (Fuchs et al., 2021). Lastly, the

expansion of social network variable consisted of questions about both the willingness to expand one's social network and the actual expansion.

For the questionnaire itself, two to three behavioral questions per variable were initially created in English based on these subdomains. The materials were then sent to the thesis supervisor and other experts in the field, as well as two language experts (Dutch teachers) in order to adjust the phrasing to an A2 Dutch level. The questions were adapted to a language level of Dutch A2 due to the fact that questions adhering to a standardized scale were too advanced for participants with an A2 level of language proficiency. The expected proficiency of the participants also influenced the use of behavioural questions, as this creates a meaningful scale which aptly questions the experience of newcomers.

## **Measures**

Three main variables were included in this research: matching, quality of contact, and integration. The predictor variable was matching, which referred to similarities between the participant and the volunteer. The quality of contact variable and integration outcome variable consisted of several predefined subdomains. The subdomains of the quality of contact were predicted to be the mediator variable. The primary outcome measures were several aspects of integration, including language ability and knowledge of Dutch society and culture.

The variables of interest were measured by means of an online survey using Qualtrics ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com); see Appendix B for the full survey).

### ***Matching***

The matching variable was measured using four items (gender, place of residence, shared interests, age) which served as an indication of similarities between the newcomer and volunteer. Respondents were able to select an answer out of two options (“yes” or “no”) for all questions. A sum score for all four items was calculated to represent the amount of similarity: a higher score indicated more similarities between the newcomer and the volunteer.

Additionally, respondents were asked to pick two out of four characteristics they regarded as being important for the matching procedure.

### ***Quality of Contact***

The quality of contact between newcomers and volunteers was measured with 12 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The items had good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Each of the items belonged to one of five subdomains which were hypothesized to contribute to a higher quality of contact during the development of the research material. For this thesis, the subdomains of positive interactions, self-disclosure and trust, and respect were selected and used for further analysis.

**Positive Interactions.** Two questions were included in this subdomain (i.e. “I enjoy talking to my Kletsmaatje”). The two items were significantly correlated and treated as a scale ( $r_s = .32, p < .001$ ).

**Self-disclosure and Trust.** This subdomain consisted of three questions, i.e. “I talk about my problems and worries with my Kletsmaatje”. The expectation being that talking about sensitive matters would imply some level of trust. The items had weak internal consistency and were treated as a scale ( $\alpha = .56$ ).

**Respect.** One of the two questions asked for this subdomain was: “I have respect for my Kletsmaatje”. The two items were significantly correlated and treated as a scale ( $r_s = .56, p < .001$ ).

**Reciprocity.** Three questions were included for this subdomain, i.e. “My Kletsmaatje and I learn a lot about each other's lives”. The word “each other” refers to a reciprocal relationship in line with the previously mentioned definition of reciprocity. The items had acceptable internal consistency and were treated as a scale ( $\alpha = .65$ ).

**Acknowledgement.** Two questions were included for this subdomain, i.e. “My Kletsmaatje listens to what I tell them”. The two items were significantly correlated and treated as a scale ( $r_s = .30, p < .001$ ).

### ***Integration Elements***

As previously mentioned, a selection of integration elements was made based on the scope of this thesis. The integration elements looked at in this paper were language use and knowledge of Dutch society and culture.

**Language Use.** Use of the Dutch language was measured using five items. Questions were asked regarding the language use of the participants in the context of Kletsmaatjes and a real-world setting, i.e. “I dare to speak Dutch with people from the Netherlands”. The items had good internal consistency and were treated as a scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

**Knowledge of Dutch Society and Culture.** The level of knowledge of Dutch society and culture was assessed using two behavioral items. The items measured the extent to which newcomers feel that their knowledge of Dutch society and culture has increased through contact with their Kletsmaatje. Questions were based on participants’ own interpretation i.e. “I get to know aspects of Dutch culture through my Kletsmaatje”. The two items were significantly correlated and treated as a scale ( $r_s = .73, p < .001$ ).

**Expansion of Social Network.** In this domain, both the willingness to expand the social network and the actual expansion of the social network of newcomers were measured. It was taken into account that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was hard for newcomers to actually expand their social network. Therefore, it was decided to remove the two items regarding the actual expansion of one's social network and to focus merely on the willingness to expand. An example question was “I look for activities to meet Dutch people”. The items were significantly correlated and treated as a scale ( $r_s = .41, p < .001$ ).

**Sense of Belonging.** The degree of sense of belonging was assessed using four items. The questions were directed at the participants' imagined future (e.g., "I think that I can feel at home in the Netherlands"). The items had good internal consistency and were treated as a scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

### **Procedure**

Following the approval of the ethics committee to conduct the present study, the questionnaire was sent via email to both the newcomers and the volunteers, by the project leader of "Kletsmaatjes" from our collaboration partner "Het Begint met Taal". In this email, both newcomers and volunteers were invited to answer a series of questions on their experience with the Kletsmaatjes project. Additional information regarding our research was attached in the form of an information letter (Appendix B). All newcomers currently involved in Kletsmaatje were asked to fill out the questionnaire online on their own devices. Upon starting the questionnaire participants were asked to fill out an informed consent form. The informed consent form emphasized the fact that participation was anonymous, not mandatory, and that they could stop at any time if they wanted to. The length of the questionnaire was stated as being between 15 and 30 minutes, with an average length of 22 minutes. The questionnaire started with descriptive and demographic background information about the participants. It then diverged into more specific questions regarding how well the participants were matched with their Kletsmaatje, the extent of the quality of contact, and questions relating to the outcome variables, including several open questions. At the end of the questionnaire participants were thanked for their participation in filling out the questionnaire. Data collection took place during the end of March and the beginning of April 2021, during a period of 19 days.

### **Statistical Analyses and Design**



The overall design of this study was cross-sectional and correlational. A normality check was done by making a QQ-plot and a residual plot. Afterwards, it was decided that these assumptions were violated and, as a result, a non-parametric test was conducted. Since the non-parametric alternative for linear regression is beyond the scope of a bachelor thesis, we focused on correlations. Kendall's  $\tau$  correlation matrix was used to assess the relationships between the match variable, quality of contact variables, integration outcome variables, and the quantity of contact variable. Based upon our hypotheses we expected a positive relationship between the match variable and the selected integration outcome variables, mediated by the quality of contact (Figure 1). First path C, the relationship between match and the integration outcomes, was assessed. In order to assess path A, we looked into the relationship between match and total quality of contact. Next, we assessed path B, the relationship between the quality of contact and the integration outcomes. Afterwards it became clear that a mediation analysis was not possible to perform with our data. This is the reason why path C' was never assessed and compared with path C. Instead, it was decided to explore the quantity of contact variable and correlations were measured for quality of contact variables, the integration outcome variables, and the match variables. SPSS was used to analyze the data.

## Results

**Table 1.**

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of all Relevant Variables*

Variables	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Match	1.89 (1.03)	–	.03	.06	.03	-.01	-.07	.00	-.19*	.09	-.07	-.13	.17*
2. Quality of Contact <sup>a</sup>	4.49 (.68)		–	.57** *	.64** *	.34** *	.59** *	.62** *	.16*	.54** *	.34** *	.24** *	.17*
3. Positive Interactions <sup>a</sup>	4.48 (.77)			–	.41** *	.34** *	.26** *	.45** *	.08	.52** *	.32** *	.15*	.05
4. Personal Disclosure <sup>a</sup>	4.3 (.83)				–	.26** *	.37** *	.37** *	.17*	.47** *	.29** *	.17*	.16*
5. Respect <sup>a</sup>	4.83 (.69)					–	.3***	.36** *	.17*	.25**	.22**	.00	.03
6. Acknowledgement	4.41 (.89)						–	.42** *	.13	.41** *	.3***	.27** *	.1
7. Reciprocity	4.42 (.78)							–	.18*	.54** *	.3***	.23** *	.11
8. Language <sup>b</sup>	3.46 (.86)								–	.06	0.00	.25** *	-.02
9. Knowledge of Dutch Society and Culture <sup>b</sup>	4.31 (.93)									–	.3***	.22**	.15*
10. Social Network	3.9 (.86)										–	.33** *	.07
11. Sense of Belonging	4.1 (.09)											–	.05
12. Quantity of Contact	3.78 (1.49)												–

*Notes.* \*\*\* Correlation is significant at the .001 level, \*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level, \* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2 –tailed), a = overall quality of contact and its subdomains specifically looked at in the current study, b = integrational outcome variables specifically looked at in the current study.

The aim of this research was to determine the relationship between the expected predictor, the match variable, and the integrational outcome variables. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the quality of contact variables serve as a mediator between the match and integrational outcome variables. The planned mediation analysis could not be conducted, since the match variable did not correlated with neither the quality of contact, nor integrational outcomes. Therefore, path C' could not be assessed. Due to the scope of this research project, a regression analysis could not be conducted either.

The mean of the match index is low ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), indicating that the newcomers had less than half of the four match items in common with their Kletsmaatje. Furthermore, around 8% of the participants indicated on the questionnaire to have no similarities with the volunteer they had been partnered up with (see Table 2, Appendix A). On the other hand, around 6% of the participants indicated similarities with their Kletsmaatje on all four items of the match index.

The first hypothesis stating that the match is positively related to the integrational outcomes, precisely language use and knowledge of Dutch society and culture, which was presented in path C, was not confirmed. In fact, only two significant correlations were found between the match index and the quantity of contact, the integrational outcomes, and the quality of contact. The first one being a significant negative correlation between the match index and language use, the second being a significant positive correlation between quantity of contact and the match index (see Table 1).

Moreover, the knowledge of Dutch society and culture had an overall high mean score ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ), indicating a good improvement in this domain due to the Kletsmaatjes program. Furthermore, strong positive correlations were found for path B. More precisely, between knowledge of Dutch society and culture and the overall quality of contact, as well as with the subdomains of self-disclosure and respect. Thus, the hypothesis that the quality of contact and its subdomains are correlated to this integrational outcome was not disconfirmed. Due to the inability to conduct a regression analysis, the strength and direction of this relationship could not be further assessed.

As mentioned above, the integrational outcome variable, language use, was negatively correlated with the match index. On the other hand, it does positively correlate with the overall quality of contact, respect, and personal disclosure. The mean score of the language

use variable is the lowest among all the integrational outcome variables ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ). The negative correlation between match index and language use was not expected.

The overall quality of contact variable ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) correlated positively with all other variables, except the match index. Therefore, path A, illustrated in Figure 1, cannot be confirmed. These findings, apart from the correlations with the match index, support our hypotheses. The variable positive interaction ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) was positively correlated with the variables this paper focuses on, apart from the match index and language use. The variables of self- disclosure ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) and respect ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) were positively correlated with all the variables discussed in this paper. Additionally, respect has the highest mean score of all quality of contact variables ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ).

### **Exploratory Analysis**

After the significant positive correlation between match and quantity of contact was discovered, it was thought possible that the quantity of contact between newcomer and volunteer could have been influential. Based on that, we decided to also calculate the correlations for the quantity of contact variable (Table 1). We discovered significant positive correlations between the quantity and overall quality of contact, as well as the quantity of contact and personal disclosure. Within the integrational outcome variable, the only significant positive correlation was found between the quantity of contact and knowledge of Dutch society and culture. Furthermore, the exploratory analysis showed that nearly 50% of participants have met five to ten times, so did not have half of the planned meetings. Additionally, it showed that around 5% of participants have not met their Kletsmaatje yet (see Table 3, Appendix A).

## **Discussion**

The goal of this research was to determine the relationship between the match variable, the quality of contact variables and the integrational outcome variables (see Figure 1). This research yielded partially unexpected results. Not all of our hypotheses were supported. One of the most surprising findings was the fact that the match index was not correlated to any of the quality of contact variables, nor to the integrational outcomes, except for a negative correlation with the variable of language use (see Table 1). This finding is contradictory to our hypothesis and other research in the field of matching based on similarities (Smith and Trimble, 2016). A possible explanation, especially for the negative correlation with language use, could be that in our sample, around 50% of the newcomers have not had half of the meetings with their Kletsmaatje at the point of data collection. Around 5% did not have a single meeting during that time, thus the possibility of language improvement was lower or not present (see Table 3, Appendix A). This might also be the reason for the match index having hardly any correlations. Furthermore, the match index was assessed by four items only. Therefore, the construct validity of the items measuring the match index should be assessed more closely in future research. On the other hand, it could be deduced from this result, that the match index is not as important and influential as thought of in the past (Smith and Trimble, 2016). And thus, could imply that buddy programs should pay more attention to the quality of contact of their couples than to the match index.

The results of this research emphasize strong correlations between the quality of contact variables and the integrational outcomes (see Table 1). These findings are in line with our hypothesis and earlier research in this field. For instance, with the work of Page-Gould and Mendoza Denton (2011), who state the importance of self-disclosure in intergroup contact, which is clearly reflected in our results. The positive correlation between knowledge of Dutch society and culture and the quantity of contact is logical, since the more time the

Kletsmaatjes spend together, the more information can be shared, and thus knowledge can be gained.

In general, the cross-sectional design of this study, due to the realm of the project, was not ideal, since with this design we cannot assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables. Future research should focus on a longitudinal study, with the possibility of pre- and post-testing, to allow for the possibility of assessment of the language improvement properly. Furthermore, within the questionnaire, we asked the participants to assess language improvement themselves. This can lead to response biases, as participants, for example, could think that their language has not improved as much as it actually did. Moreover, the improvement of other intergenerational outcome variables, such as knowledge of Dutch society and culture, could be even better assessed in a pre- and post-testing. Additionally, with a longitudinal study it could be assured that the participants met their Kletsmaatje regularly, to draw better conclusions.

A strength and a weakness of this study was its novelty. It does provide a starting point in a highly important field of research, since we will face more and more migration in the upcoming years (UNHCR, 2020). Its novelty also meant that we had to design our own unstandardized questions due to the expected lower language level, which might have influenced the results. For future research, it would be suggested to design standardized questions not only for B and C levels, but to start from an A2 level.

### **Practical implications**

Based on the results of our research we can advise Kletsmaatjes and similar buddy programs to pay closer attention to the quality of contact between their buddied up participants. For instance, our results underline the importance of self-disclosure within the quality of contact (Page-Gould and Mendoza Denton, 2011). Kletsmaatje could implement a training program for their volunteers, in which they train them to actively engage in self-

disclosure to foster the quality of contact. This, in turn, would lead to better integrational outcomes. Since our results within the variable of matching are contradictory to earlier research (Smith and Trimble, 2016), and the mean of the match index was low, and a proportion of the newcomers indicated to not have similarities with their Kletsmaatje, the program could revise their matching process.

## **Conclusion**

Despite not all of the hypotheses being confirmed, we could say that the outcome showing the positive correlations between the quality of contact variables and the integrational outcomes is an important finding of this research. It emphasizes the importance of quality of contact in intergroup contacts. This study mainly made a starting point, and the questions arising from it, for instance the contradictory finding with the match index, and the direction and strengths of the relationships discovered need further investigation. One of the biggest limitations of this study was its scope, hence it made certain analyses and pre- and post-testing impossible.

Programs like Kletsmaatjes are highly important for the integration of newcomers and more research should be conducted on the exact interaction between the match, quality of contact, and integrational outcomes. Because the better we understand the relationship between these variables, the easier we can detect parts to improve, so that the complex process of integration becomes easier for the members of the host culture and migrant newcomers. In general, more research is highly needed in this field, since we can make significant changes in society if we facilitate the integration of newcomers as much as possible.

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## Appendix A

**Table 2**

*Match index based on the questionnaire between volunteer and newcomer*

Match index	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0	10	7.9	8.1	8.1
1	37	29.1	29.8	37.9
2	41	32.3	33.1	71.0
3	29	22.8	23.4	94.4
4	7	5.5	5.6	100
Valid answers combined	124	97.6	100	.38
Missing answers	3	2.4		
Total	127	100		

*Note: 0 indicates no similarities based on the questionnaire, 4 indicates highest possible number of similarities based on questionnaire*

**Table 3***Amount of times newcomers and volunteers met at the point of data collection*

Times met	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not yet	7	5.5	5.5
Less than 5 times	23	18.1	23.6
5 – 10 times	28	22	45.7
10-15 times	31	24.4	70.1
15 – 20 times	15	11.8	81.9
More than 20 times	22	17.3	99.2
Sessions with the Kletsmaatje have ended	1	0.8	100
Total	127	100	

## Appendix B

### *English Version of the questionnaire*

#### Information about the study

You are participating in Kletsmaatjes.

This research is about the experiences with Kletsmaatjes: what do you think of Kletsmaatjes?

You get questions about:

- Your participation in Kletsmaatje;
- Your buddy;
- The contact with your buddy.

You can choose the answer that suits you best.

Your answers are important. The answers help to improve the project.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and anonymous.

**Voluntary:** You can choose whether you want to participate or not. You can also stop participating. You do not have to explain why. Stopping has no consequences.

**Anonymous:** Your name and other personal information are not asked. We do not know who gives the answers.

Your answers therefore have no influence on your participation in Kletsmaatjes.

Completing the questionnaire takes 15 to 30 minutes.

If you have questions about the study, you can send an email to [e.m.heikamp@rug.nl](mailto:e.m.heikamp@rug.nl).

Think carefully now if you want to participate. Then give your permission.

Informed consent

I understand the information about the study.

My participation in the study is voluntary and anonymous.

I can stop participating at any time.

My participation in the study will not affect my participation in Kletsmaatjes.

- Yes, I consent.

- No, I do not agree.

Are you a participant or volunteer at Kletsmaatjes?

Participant: I want to practice Dutch. I talk with a Dutch Kletsmaatje.

Volunteer: I talk with a foreign language buddy.

- I am a participant.

- I am a volunteer.

These questions are about you and your participation in Kletsmaatjes.

1. How old are you? I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old

2. Gender. I am...

woman

man

other, namely: \_\_\_\_\_

2. I am from...

Turkey

Syria

Yemen

Iraq

Other, namely \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long have you been in the Netherlands? \_\_\_\_\_ years

4. I am...

- single
- in a relationship
- married
- widowed
- divorced

5. I live...

- alone
- with my family
- with other people

6. I have children.

- Yes
- No

7. My highest education is

- elementary school
- vocational training (such as hairdresser, painter, car mechanic, nurse, etc.)
- university degree

8. What is your current Dutch language level (you think)?

<input type="checkbox"/> A1	<input type="checkbox"/> B1 – Staatsexamen I	<input type="checkbox"/> C1 or higher
<input type="checkbox"/> A2 - Inburgeringsexamen	<input type="checkbox"/> B2 – Staatsexamen II	<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know

9. You participate in Kletsmaatjes. What else do you do to speak Dutch? You may choose multiple answers.

- I follow language lessons at school.

- I participate in (online) language cafés.
- I have a language coach from another organization.
- I do volunteer work.
- I have a job.
- I follow an education.
- I participate in (social) activities (for example sports, cooking, art, etc.)

10. How many times have you talked to your Kletsmaatje?

- Not yet
- Less than 5 times
- 5 –10 times
- 10 – 15 times
- 15 – 20 times
- More than 20 times
- The sessions with my Kletsmaatje are over

11. I talk to my Kletsmaatje

- only online
- online and offline (in a house or outside)
- only offline (in a house or outside)

12. I participate in Kletsmaatjes because... You may choose multiple answers.

- I want to improve my Dutch
- I want to pass the civic integration exam
- I want to get into contact with Dutch people

13. How happy are you with your Kletsmaatje? Choose a number from 1 to 10.

Questions about your Kletsmaatje

Match



These questions are about your Kletsmaatje.

14. My Kletsmaatje is also a man/woman like me.

- Yes
- No

15. My Kletsmaatje is about the same age as me.

- Yes
- No

16. My Kletsmaatje lives in my town or city, or close to my town or city.

- Yes
- No

17. My Kletsmaatje has the same interests as me. For example, family, sports, cooking and other activities.

- Yes
- No

18. If you could choose your Kletsmaatje, who would you choose? What do you think is important? Choose two.

- A Kletsmaatje who is also a man/woman like me.
- A Kletsmaatje with about the same age as me.
- A Kletsmaatje who lives in my village or town, or close to my village or town.
- A Kletsmaatje with the same interest (like family, sports, cooking) as me.

Now there are two questions about your Kletsmaatje.

You can answer in Dutch or in your native language.

19. What (online) activities do you like to do with your Kletsmaatje? For example, which topics do you talk about together? [Open question]
20. What did you learn from / about the other? For example, what did you learn about the culture of your Kletsmaatje? [Open question]
21. Your own culture may differ from the Dutch culture of your Kletsmaatje. How big is that difference?

You can express this by moving the bar.

No difference at all -----X----- Very large difference

#### CONTACT WITH YOUR KLETSMAATJE

We ask a number of questions about the contact with your Kletsmaatje. Can you respond to the following questions?

There are no right or wrong answers. We are curious about your experience with your Kletsmaatje.

		I totally disagree with this statement	I somewhat disagree with this statement	I neither disagree nor agree / I am neutral	I somewhat agree with this statement	I totally agree with this statement
Positive Interactions	22. I enjoy talking to my Kletsmaatje.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	23. I laugh a lot with my Kletsmaatje.	O	O	O	O	O
Self-Disclosure/ Trust	24. I talk about my problems and worries with my Kletsmaatje.	O	O	O	O	O
	25. I talk about my daily life with my Kletsmaatje.	O	O	O	O	O
	26. I feel comfortable around my	O	O	O	O	O

	Kletsm aatje.					
Respect	27. I have respect for my Kletsm aatje.	O	O	O	O	O
	28. My Kletsm aatje has respect for me.	O	O	O	O	O
Aknowledgem ent	29. My Kletsm aatje listens to me well.	O	O	O	O	O
	30. My Kletsm aatje asks questio ns about me (and	O	O	O	O	O

	my family).					
Reciprocity	31. My Kletsmaatje and I learn about each other's lives.	O	O	O	O	O
	32. My Kletsmaatje and I understand each other.	O	O	O	O	O
	33. My Kletsmaatje and I both suggest topics of conversation.	O	O	O	O	O
Response bias check	34. My Kletsmaatje always comes late.	O	O	O	O	O

Knowledge of Dutch society and culture	35. I learn a lot from my Kletsmaatje about the Dutch culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	36. I learn a lot from my Kletsmaatje about life in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Expansion of social network	37. My Kletsmaatje is like a friend to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## LIVING IN THE NETHERLANDS

## Integration Outcomes

The following questions are about life in the Netherlands. Can you respond to the following questions?

There are no right or wrong answers.

		I totally Disagree with this statement	I somewhat disagree with this statement	I neither disagree Nor agree / I am neutral	I somewhat agree with this statement	I totally agree with this statement
--	--	--	---	---	--------------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Language learning	38. I dare to speak Dutch with Dutch people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	39. I easily start a conversation with Dutch people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	40. I speak Dutch in my daily life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	42. I speak Dutch well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	43. I understand Dutch well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Expansion of social network	41. I look for activities to get to know Dutch people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	42. I want to meet Dutch people more often.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	43. I have Dutch friends besides my Kletsmaatje.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following questions are about the future.

I think that ...

Sense of belonging	44. I can feel at home in the Netherlands.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	45. I can feel good when I am with Dutch people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	46. I can make Dutch friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	47. I belong to Dutch society.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Finally, we have two more questions.

Think for example of the intake, the match or the (online) contact with your Kletsmaatje.

48. You do or did participate in Kletsmaatjes. What goes or went less well? For example, think about the intake, the match of the (online) contact with your Kletsmaatje. [Open question]

49. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Kletsmaatjes or this study? [Open question]

*Information letter for the participants of the Kletsmaatje project*

### **INFORMATIE OVER HET ONDERZOEK**

VERSIE VOOR DEELNEMERS

### **“SOCIAAL-PSYCHOLOGISCHE IMPACTANALYSE VAN KLEETSMAATJES“**

PSY-2021-S-0361

#### **➤ Waarom krijg ik deze informatie?**

- We nodigen u uit om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek over Kletsmaatjes, een online taalcoachingsproject van stichting Het Begint met Taal ([www.hetbegintmettaal.nl/kletsmaatjes](http://www.hetbegintmettaal.nl/kletsmaatjes)).



- Via dit onderzoek willen we meer te weten komen over de ervaringen van deelnemers met Kletsmaatjes.
- U wordt uitgenodigd voor dit onderzoek, omdat u op dit moment actief deelneemt aan Kletsmaatjes.
- Het project loopt van april 2021 tot september 2021.
- De Ethische Commissie Psychologie van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen heeft dit onderzoeksplan beoordeeld en goedgekeurd.
- Het onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd onder leiding van dr. Nina Hansen en Eline Heikamp (projectcoördinator), in samenwerking met stichting Het Begint met Taal.

➤ **Moet ik meedoen aan dit onderzoek?**

- Meedoen aan dit onderzoek is vrijwillig en anoniem. Wel is uw toestemming nodig.
- Lees deze informatiebrief goed door. Stel alle vragen die u misschien heeft aan de projectcoördinator ([e.m.heikamp@rug.nl](mailto:e.m.heikamp@rug.nl)).
- Pas daarna besluit u of u wilt meedoen. Als u besluit om niet mee te doen, hoeft u niet uit te leggen waarom. Dit zal geen negatieve gevolgen voor u hebben.
- Dit recht geldt op elk moment, dus ook nadat u hebt toegestemd in deelname aan het onderzoek.

➤ **Waarom dit onderzoek?**

- In samenwerking met stichting Het Begint met Taal onderzoeken wij de ervaringen van deelnemers van Kletsmaatjes, de sociale relatie tussen migranten en vrijwilligers, en mogelijke effecten van deelname.
- We hopen te leren wat een goede match maakt tussen migranten en vrijwilligers, hoe deelnemers de relatie met hun Kletsmaatje ervaren en wat gevolgen van deelname zijn op de integratie van migranten in Nederland.
- De inzichten worden gebruikt om het project te verbeteren.

➤ **Wat vragen we van u tijdens het onderzoek?**

- U wordt gevraagd om toestemming voor deelname aan dit onderzoek.

- Als u toestemt, dan vult u een online vragenlijst in. Er worden vragen gesteld over uw achtergrond, uw deelname aan Kletsmaatjes en een aantal mogelijke effecten, uw gesprekspartner (Kletsmaatje) en de relatie tussen u en uw gesprekspartner.
- Het invullen van de vragenlijst duurt 15 tot 30 minuten.
- U wordt gevraagd of u toestemming geeft voor het verwerken van uw antwoorden. Er zijn geen gevolgen, indien u geen toestemming geeft.

➤ **Welke gevolgen kan deelname hebben?**

- De resultaten van het onderzoek geven inzicht welke (sociale) factoren belangrijk zijn bij contact tussen migranten en vrijwilligers. Daarnaast laten de resultaten op een systematische manier zien wat de impact is van Kletsmaatjes.
- De inzichten helpen Het Begint met Taal om Kletsmaatjes en andere taalmaatjesprojecten te verbeteren.
- Het risico op negatieve emoties (verdrietig, boos, eenzaam) bij vragen over uw deelname aan Kletsmaatjes en uw gesprekspartner is minimaal. Wanneer dit toch gebeurt, kunt u contact opnemen met de hoofdonderzoeker ([n.hansen@rug.nl](mailto:n.hansen@rug.nl)) of de projectcoördinator ([e.m.heikamp@rug.nl](mailto:e.m.heikamp@rug.nl)).
- Deelname heeft op geen enkele manier invloed op uw huidige betrokkenheid bij Kletsmaatjes.

➤ **Hoe gaan we met uw gegevens om?**

- U vult zelf de vragenlijst in. De vragenlijst is in het Nederlands.
- Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden. Het gaat om uw eigen ervaring.
- We verwerken de onderzoeksgegevens anoniem. Er wordt niet gevraagd naar uw naam of andere persoonlijke gegevens. Antwoorden kunnen niet herleid worden tot een individu.
- Ook de vragen over uw gesprekspartner zijn anoniem. We kunnen u niet identificeren aan de hand van de vragen over uw gesprekspartner.
- Dit onderzoek is onderdeel van een bachelortheseproject. Studenten van de bachelor Psychologie schrijven een wetenschappelijk verslag over het onderzoek voor onderwijsdoeleinden.
- Uw antwoorden worden opgeslagen volgens de richtlijnen van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (minimaal 10 jaar).

- Individuele antwoorden worden niet gedeeld met andere organisaties of onderzoeksinstellingen.
- We zullen de algemene resultaten van het onderzoek publiceren en delen met Het Begint met Taal en andere relevante organisaties. De resultaten zijn niet terug te leiden naar antwoorden van individuen.

➤ **Wat moet u nog meer weten?**

- U kunt altijd vragen stellen over het onderzoek, nu, tijdens het onderzoek, en na afloop. Stel uw vragen via mail aan de hoofdonderzoeker en/of projectcoördinator.
- Heeft u vragen of zorgen over uw rechten als onderzoeksdeelnemer? Hiervoor kunt u ook contact opnemen met de Ethische Commissie Psychologie van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: [ecp@rug.nl](mailto:ecp@rug.nl)

Als onderzoeksdeelnemer heeft u recht op een kopie van deze onderzoeksinformatie.