

LISTENING IN OLDER SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS: THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

There are various theories, strategies and techniques regarding teaching different language skills. At the same time, as practice shows listening remains the most challenging skill for the educators to teach effectively and for the learners to master. Moreover, both the learners and their teachers have their own, not infrequently rather disparate, subjective theories, as well as learning and teaching preferences. Older adult learners are a peculiar case as they are a very diverse group, aware of their needs and cognitive abilities. At the same time, their teachers are unfortunately often unaware of these needs and do not adapt the materials to suit their students. The aim of this paper is, thus, to present the opinions of the teachers of older adult students and to provide basis for future research.

Key words: SLA; top-down and bottom-up listening; geragogy; older adults; teachers' perspective

INTRODUCTION.

THE ROLE OF LISTENING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

In his recent study "Researching Listening," Larry Vandergrift (2010) stresses the importance of listening in the language classroom and claims that listening comprehension is by far the most difficult both to understand and to study. Along similar lines John Field states that, "a faddish commitment to an 'integrated skills' approach may result in listening being relegated to a hasty topic-driven session wedged between reading and writing, which tend to be regarded as more manageable skills" (Field, 2008, p. 1). In the following research, L. Vandergrift and Christine ChuenMeng add that, "the development of listening receives the least systematic attention from teachers and instructional materials" (C. M. Goh, 2010, p. 4). This causes many problems, especially for low-level beginners, who need to learn how to listen effectively not only for the sake of learning a new skill, but perhaps most importantly in order to facilitate the process of learning a new language in general. Without the knowledge of how to improve one's listening comprehension, students have to face an additional obstacle on their way to succeed in mastering a new language.

According to L. Vandergrift (2010), the instantaneousness and the general quality of real-life utterances, related to their rather unrepeatable nature, causes problems while listening. Indeed, unlike in case of classroom recordings, what can be heard in a real-life context rarely follows the rules of successful communication and therefore violates Paul Grice's (1975) conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Such floutings make the process of listening difficult for novice second language learners. However, there are also other factors which may impede the process of listening. L. Vandergrift enumerates "other learner variables that affect comprehension [which] include background knowledge of the topic of the text, proficiency level in the target language, age, metacognitive knowledge about listening, strategy use, native language listening ability, working memory capacity and sound discrimination ability" (Vandergrift, 2010, p. 161). Also anxiety can be a vital factor, especially while listening to a new language (the rules of which, at first, often remain rather unclear), which can have a negative influence on the amount of information that our brains can process simultaneously.

However, despite the fact that "recent studies have led to some new insights into the underlying cognitive processes, the teaching and the assessment of listening" (Vandergrift, 2010, p. 160) the research done into the methodology of teaching listening regarded as one of the language skills taught in the classroom remains rather scarce. Such lack of both scholarly and teachers' interest devoted to listening might result from numerous factors. Firstly, according to J. Field (2008) it was as late as in 1960s that listening begun to be singled out and taught as a language skill its role, however, was still to reinforce grammar rather than to improve students' comprehension of the oral input. Almost sixty years later, listening practice in the language classrooms often continues to be erroneously viewed as a subconscious and effortless process taking place in the learner's mind, similarly to the process of first language acquisition, and gives place to fluency practice. Training students so that they become proficient speakers, thus, not infrequently remains the sole goal of language educators worldwide.

J. Field, points out numerous rationales for teaching listening. Firstly, a "two-way traffic," which is required by successful communication and which for years has been simplified to an ability to speak. As a result, most students are able to produce language, which is often very advanced, while at the same time their listening comprehension is incomparably worse. Teachers, thus, should help their students develop listening competencies equally with other skills and not concentrate on simply achieving the given task - "(for fluency) the acquisition of patterns of listening which approximate to those of a native listener and (for accuracy) the possession of an ability to decode pieces of connected speech, word by word" (Field, 2008, p. 3). Secondly, listening is not required during any entry tests to language schools - in reality students are selected to each level based on a lengthy grammar test, which is often followed by a short interview. However, what is not taken into account in the process is the fact that for the most part students will be exposed to the foreign lan-

guage presented orally by their teacher, who quite often will be a native speaker of the given language. Such situation often leads to the learners' frustration, discomfort and undermining their self-confidence resulting simply from inability to comprehend. The learners' needs are, therefore, yet another point which should be taken into account while designing a successful syllabus for the course. Many students "if asked to rate the relative difficulty of the four language skills, cite listening as the area about which they feel most insecure" (Field, 2008, p. 4).

OLDER ADULT LEARNER AND LISTENING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

The research devoted to older second language adult learners is very scarce. As of 2017 there are also no materials, course books or teacher training courses designed to teach this particular age group, except for some self-study books (see: for instance, Schleppegrell, 1987, p. 4; Wilson, 2008, p. 14). As a result teaching this age group becomes increasingly demanding for the teachers who need to bear in mind not only the physical, neurolinguistic, psychological and sociolinguistic differences between younger and older adults, but also need to design the materials so that they suit the special educational needs, abilities and learning preferences of their students. At the same time, second language teaching and learning among older adult students is the phenomenon that can be observed worldwide. Jessica Cox (2013) notes that even though this field is "still understudied in the U.S." according to David Singleton & Lisa Ryan, "in Poland, where they do track this data, foreign languages are the third most popular field of study for older adults" (Singleton, & Ryan, 2004, p. 91). There are many reasons for continuing one's lifelong education in later life. English is treated as a lingua franca, therefore both younger and older adult learners often find themselves in a Non-English Speaking Environment (NESE) and need the language simply to comprehend the world around them.

The phenomenon of ageing societies can be observed worldwide. As a result an increasing number of people at the age of 50+ or older are interested in developing their language skills. In most cases Polish learners who decide to continue their linguistic education in later life choose to study English – 53.66%, which is the second largest group following Russian – 87.69%, the language that most senior students had to learn at school, and preceding German – 46.90%, however, at the same time, only 26.9% of the learners claimed that they have been learning languages their entire lives while the majority – 37.81% and 35.29% have either only recently started developing their knowledge of a new language or have been studying it for few years, respectively (see: Jaroszewska, 2013b, p. 92).

According to J. Cox, in case of the group of older adults, intrinsic motivation seems to play the most important role in second language teaching and learning (Cox, 2010, p. 100), therefore, being able to recognise students learning preferen-

ces will help the students achieve their aims and help the teachers to plan their lessons accordingly and to respond to each individual's needs. However, older adult learners motivation can be affected if their needs, learning preferences and most importantly, cognitive abilities are not taken into account while designing a listening practice. Older adult learners find reading and writing relatively undemanding as these skills rarely require any spontaneous or immediate reactions. Listening, on the other hand, is listed as, by far, the most challenging of all skills (see: section 4 of the following paper) as it depends on a wide variety of sub-skills and, therefore, poses many potential difficulties. Almost thirty years ago, Mary Schleppegrell asserted that, "[a]n approach which stresses the development of the receptive skills (particularly listening) before the productive skills may have much to offer the older learner (Postovsky, 1974; Winitz, 1981; J. Gary and N. Gary, 1981). According to this research, effective adult language training programs are those that use materials that provide an interesting and comprehensible message, delay speaking practice and emphasise the development of listening comprehension, tolerate speech errors in the classroom, and include aspects of culture and non-verbal language use in the instructional program. This creates a classroom atmosphere which supports the learner and builds confidence" (Shleppegrell, 1987, p. 4).

In order to deal with the understanding of the message successfully students need to be aware of two directions of processing – top-down and bottom-up. The former is based on the context and learners' background knowledge, whereas the latter deals with distinguishing between phonemes, words, phrases, etc. None of these processes can occur on its own. However, as long as the top-down processing may "compensate for gaps in understanding" (Field, 2008, p. 132), without the bottom-up skill the context may not be enough and decoding, especially of fast, authentic, connected speech, may cause many problems for the learners.

DEFINING OLDER ADULT LEARNER

The problem related to a recent development of the field of geragogy is also the definition of what constitutes the subpopulation of older persons. In fact, there is still no coherent system which could be followed while defining an older adult learner. The entries related to age distinctions provided by some of the main dictionaries prove to be rather inconsistent. For instance, the definition of "middle age" varies from "the period after early adulthood and before old age, about 45 to 65" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016), "the period of your life, usually considered to be from about 45 to 60 years old, when you are no longer young, but are not yet old" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2016), "the period of life from about 45 to about 64" (Merriam Webster), to "the period of life between youth and old age, usually (in man) considered to occur approximately between the ages of 40 and 60" (Collins English Dictionary, 2016). This incongruity of terms poses a long-standing problem in viewing the categories

of the so called “old age” or “third age,” which is often defined in relation to “middle age,” e.g. “the period in life of active retirement, following middle age” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016), or characterised even more vaguely in terms of people’s age-related interests or activities, e.g. “old age, esp. when viewed as an opportunity for travel, further education, etc.” (Collins English Dictionary, 2016).

The group of older adults is, however, defined in a variety of ways by different scholars. Some researchers choose to highlight different age bands to categorise the group of older adults. Alice Homstad (1987), for instance, claims that later life begins at the age of “over forty,” Catherine E. Snow & Marian Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978), Mark Patkowski (1982), Mary Alice Wolf & E. M. Brady (2010) and Anna Jaroszewska (2013) include in this group learners over the age of 50; Gillian Brown (1985) concentrates on the age of 55 and more; Gail Weinstein-Shr contends that an older adult is defined as a person from “40 to 65 years old” and more (1993, p. 1), Justine Coupland, et al. (1988, p. 3) treat the group of the elderly as “those over sixty-five years of age” whereas in a more recent study by J. J. Wilson (2008, p. 14) older learners are classified as “those above the age of seventy”. Other scholars avoid using particular categories and prefer collective terms, such as “the ageing” (see: Peterson, 1981), “elders” or “the elderly” (see: Christoffersen, 1974; Jarvis, 1983; Ostwald, & Williams, 1985, Mautner, 2007), “seniors” (see: Cusack, & Thompson, 1996), or more recently “older adults” or “older persons” (see: Fuller & Unwin, 2005; Findsen & Formosa, 2011) and “prime-of-life adults” (see: Mackey & Sachs, 2012). In the following paper the group of older adult learners will be defined as 50+. The distinction is based on the age division suggested by language schools as the courses are financed by EU, as that is where and how the subjects of this study learn English.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The following project incorporates a mixed method of obtaining the data – quantitative and qualitative research. The qualitative method represents an inductive way of reasoning and its major aim is to provide a thorough analysis, thus it concentrates on detailed and multi-contextual perspective of the subpopulation of older adult learners’ teachers and their students. As such it gives careful attention to facts and processes, which are otherwise immeasurable, for instance learning needs and abilities, strategies of self-fulfilment as well as the learners’ learning background. This part of the analysis is done mainly from the perspective of the research subjects, in order to show their point of view, thoughts, opinions and beliefs regarding teaching and learning listening comprehension in the language classroom. At the same time, it includes the subjective opinion of the researcher, who while simultaneously being an observer and a participant, frequently takes part in the already mentioned processes.

The second method of collecting the data – the quantitative research – is based on an objective description and an analysis of facts and processes and a deductive way of reasoning in order to quantify the problem by generating statistical data. This part of research is done based on finding answers to the research questions, which are to follow in part 4.1 of the paper. Its purpose is to present a correlation either based on measurable variables with standardised methods, techniques and research tools, such as a questionnaire, in order to uncover the existing trends and regularities within the group of teachers and their older second language adult learners. Thus, the subjects of the project – the teachers of older adult learners and their students – who represent different learning theories and experiences, and the resulting disparate needs and expectations, conditioned by such a choice of methodology.

Research aims

This study aims to observe the problems which the teachers of older adult learners believe might be problematic during listening practice in the language classroom. The research also concentrates on teachers' subjective theories and attitudes towards listening activities, as well as, to some extent, on their understanding of older learners' learning abilities and preferences. The following research questions are investigated to address the above mentioned issues:

1. Which language skills are, according to the teachers, the most challenging for the learners?
2. What are the listening comprehension procedures used in the language classroom?
3. Do the teachers introduce any listening strategies to facilitate the process of listening?
4. Do the teachers adapt the listening materials to suit older adult learners' needs and cognitive abilities?

The older adult learners' teachers were asked to answer the research questions connected to the learning experiences and preferences of their students as well as their own teaching practice. The results of the survey are presented below.

PARTICIPANTS

There were 36 subjects that altogether took part in the experiment – 16 teachers and 20 students. The group of teachers consisted of 6 men and 10 women, and the group of students comprised 3 men and 17 women. The youngest student was 50 and the oldest 83. The observation data were collected in a language school, during regular classes, from February to June 2015, while the teachers work in a private language school, private Senior Centres and the University of the Third Age in Wrocław. Throughout the term, the students and their teachers were observed during their classes, with a focus on listening activities. At the end of the term all of the subjects were asked to fill in the questionnaire and were invited to participate in an interview. The subjects

were informed about the character of the survey and some of the results were discussed with them. The same interview was conducted with both groups of older adults – the beginners (CEFR A1) and pre-intermediate (CEFR A2+).

TEACHERS

The group of experienced teachers consisted of 16 subjects – 6 men and 10 women. All of the teachers had previous experience in teaching English to older adult learners as part of the EU project for students 50+, at the University of the Third Age in Wrocław or in private Senior Centres. The teachers were 25-44 years old. The subjects either have international teaching qualifications – Cambridge certificates and diplomas in teaching English to adults (CELTA and Delta, respectively), or have graduated from the Department of English Studies at the University of Wrocław and are experienced in teaching English to older adult learners.

OLDER ADULT STUDENTS (50+)

The group of older adults was rather diverse as their professions varied from accountants (3) and language teachers (2) to building contractors (1), journalists (1) and writers (1). There was also a nurse, a cashier, a lawyer, an architect, a manager, a secretary, as well as 4 pensioners and 3 people who decided not to reveal their professional backgrounds.

The majority of older adult students (7) found it necessary to learn English in order to communicate with their children and grandchildren who had left the country and often live in ESE (English Speaking Environment) with their English-speaking partners, as well as to get to know the culture of the countries in which they live (3). Therefore, learning the language in order to communicate with their families has become a crucial element of their motivation, which can be classified as integrative. Another reason for learning was the willingness to socialise (3), to keep in touch with their English speaking friends (1), to participate in activities similar to the ones enjoyed by the younger members of their families (3) and to make sure that they still exercise their brains and are exposed to challenging and useful activities (1). Moreover, older adults found it difficult to use computers and browse the Internet (2) without a knowledge of English, which they also found useful to communicate at work (1).

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The questions of the survey were divided into four groups: the importance and level of difficulty related to various language skills, listening procedures, strategies and materials used in the language classrooms. The first two questions helped to establish what is the teachers' opinion regarding four

language skills in the light of older adult learners' problems. Secondly, the teachers were asked to describe the procedures they follow while practising listening comprehension. Thirdly, the teachers were to answer the questions regarding the use of different listening strategies which they introduce to their learners and which should facilitate the process of learning of older adults (and of students in general). Finally, the teachers were asked to comment on the quality of teaching materials used in teaching English to those who are continuing their lifelong education in later life.

The teachers almost unanimously agreed that reading is for older adult learners by far the easiest of all of the language skills (94% of the answers). However, in the case of the most difficult skills the answers differed markedly. 56% of the teachers believe that listening is the most demanding skill to be learnt, 13% of the subjects were undecided and chose both answers - speaking and listening, while 13% and 19% chose speaking and listening, respectively. (The rationale for such choice is crucial in determining teachers' subjective theories regarding language skills taught in the language classrooms. One teacher, for example, pointed out that "While reading [the students] have time to process the text and while speaking [they] often use only the words they know very well. Writing is more difficult because of the spelling and listening is the most unpredictable one to tackle." Along similar lines another subject noted that, "[d]uring classes, listening and speaking exercises require significantly more time than writing and reading ones. They are also most likely to cause resistance; students claim that they are the most difficult and discouraging. Furthermore, listening and speaking cause more troubles even if they are on a lower level than writing and speaking exercises which are perceived by students as easy ones.").

At the same time, one subject pointed to the fact that as both reading and listening are receptive skills, they are equally difficult for the students to manage in the classroom and noted that, "Reading and listening are receptive skills which are easier to master for this very reason. When reading, we have more thinking time to activate our schemata and use some of the word attack techniques to deal with unknown lexis. Listening seems to be more of a challenge as we can talk of many Englishes (dialects, accents etc.) Productive skills are even more difficult as they require production of a certain number of words, chunks, and formulaic language to sound natural and so that communication is effective."

One other teacher, claimed that refrains from teaching listening because "the students were extremely unhappy about it, they complained a lot that the recordings are too difficult, too fast and they can't understand anything, therefore I decided to give up on these exercises and now concentrate mainly on speaking. The most important thing for my students is to have fun and spend time in a nice atmosphere, they don't need to pass any exams so I do whatever they want, I don't mind." This comment, although a single one which is that honest and straightforward in its treatment of listening comprehension, in the following study shows a common practice among many teachers - in spite

of helping their students understand better and teach them how to become efficient listeners, they tend to avoid the seemingly less pleasant or more challenging activities and replace them with practising fluency.

Listening procedures in question are, according to the teachers, followed usually or always. In fact, out of 14 questions regarding the listening procedures followed in the language classrooms, nearly 70% of all of the answers pointed to the highest option available. Based on two-month observations of ten of the teachers in a language school, however, this seems to be a rather surprising and, at the same time, an incredibly high result especially while taking into account the teachers' usual reluctance to teach this skill. What is also interesting, the answers related to students' enjoyment of listening exercises were one of the most negative - ranging from never (13% of the subjects), through rarely (31%), often (38%) to usually (19%).

The teachers also claimed that "[i]f many students make the same mistake, we listen to the part one more time and then they are asked to describe what is happening in their own words" but another subject claimed that it "[d]epends on what the task requires. Usually open class [discussion] is the way to deal with mistakes which occurred while listening". One teacher also concentrates on pronunciation in order to explain some possible difficulties ("We often discuss the pronunciation features and why the words students heard were different from the recording"). In case of some follow-up examples related to the in-class recordings, the answers were rather diverse. One teacher claimed that, "the students are always provided the recordings from the lessons," while another stated that, "I usually provide similar practice on the following lessons" in different forms, for instance by "[l]istening to and repeating whole phrases trying to maintain the original intonation; recording themselves, etc." In general, the teachers' answers varied from always (56% of the answers), to usually (25%) and often (19%).

The questions related to listening strategies used in the classroom showed, however, that even though the teachers claim to follow many listening strategies at all times during their lessons to facilitate the process of learning of their older adult learners, they find it more challenging to give more specific examples of actual teaching practice that takes place during their lessons. Hence, the answers to the first question related to the students' awareness of some strategies, included, for instance, comments that the learners are told to "attempt to predict the text before the listening, they are encouraged to make notes while listening and later they try to summarise the text in their own words" or to distinguish between "listening for detail, listening for specific information." One of the teachers clearly understands listening practice in terms of receptive skills and wrote that the main strategy is "reading only the beginnings of each paragraph to get the grasp of the text."

One of the main difficulties that older adult students may encounter while listening, which was pointed out in the survey, was the connected speech or "[t]op-down processing (not being familiar with the topic, different cultural background, lack of paralinguistic features to help students understand); bot-

tom-up processing (simply unknown lexis, too fast pace).” Students’ listening for comprehension is tested solely by the use of “tests provided by course books” or “during regular classes while doing various listening exercises” and the students’ improvement is tested “every other month by doing listening tests” or while “practising micro-listening skills, and, e.g., I used two sets of exercises designed by myself.”

Listening materials used during the lessons prove to be the most challenging for the teachers, as shown in the last part of the survey. On the whole, the teachers claim that they often use other forms of listening than the course book and enumerate mainly, videos, bbc podcasts, sketches from the tv shows (with higher level students) or even self-made materials recorded with the help of native speakers. One subject notes that the learners “usually find the authentic recordings more challenging than the course book recordings. Among the most common issues are pace (too fast), volume (too low) and accent (almost any accent other than American seems to be problematic).” However, at the same time the teachers rather rarely try to adapt the materials to suit the needs and cognitive abilities of the older adult learners – they try to enhance the volume so that it is easier to hear. Despite the obvious problems encountered by the students, the teachers recommend their older adult learners to listen to various recordings outside the classroom “to get used to different accents and different pace of talking” and note that, “they are encouraged to think about the topic before the listening, to write down some vocabulary and always to listen as much as possible, whenever they can.” In conclusion, the teachers’ believe that “practice makes perfect” and “exposure [to the authentic texts] works wonders.”

CONCLUSIONS

According to J. J. Wilson (2008), there are many different purposes for listening in the classroom, for instance, listening for gist, listening for detail, listening for specific information or listening to be able to participate in a conversation. However, what is crucial to stress, these types of listening are not strategies, as suggested in some of the answers. Moreover, as shown by the responses, listening exercises in the classrooms are often aimed at achieving certain goals and focus rather on the outcome of the activity itself. According to L. Vandergrift and Christine C. M. Goh (2012) such practice leads to simply testing the students on how well they can listen rather than to improving their listening abilities. Another problem arising from such practice is the high level of anxiety resulting not only from the inability to comprehend but also from the necessity to perform certain tasks, which are related to the recordings.

As stressed out by the teachers, pre-teaching and introducing context before the listening practice is done at all times, however, L. Vandergrift and Ch. C. M. Goh note that, “although pre-listening activities are a common feature in some classrooms, these activities mainly provide learners with the background

knowledge they need to make listening easier (...) but they are seldom taught how to listen once the audio or video begins. For example, many learners need time to get used to the speaker's voice or 'tune into' the message. They often miss the first parts of an aural text and they struggle to construct the context and the meaning for the rest of the message" (Vandergrift, & C. M. Goh, p. 4). In other words, even though the learners are informed about the context of the listening, this does not necessarily help them to understand the text itself as they lack the knowledge on how to approach it.

Finally, a serious problem arises with the use of authentic materials in the classrooms, which is one of the favourite alternatives, used by the teachers, to regular course books. However, such choice does not necessarily prove to be the best for older adults who need more scaffolding and help in approaching the tasks, especially as demanding as listening. Moreover, Tony Ridgway poses an important question regarding authenticity of the situation for an FL learner and claims that, "native speakers all attempt to adjust their speech for the benefit of foreigners whose level of understanding may be limited, yet according to some criteria which are currently applied this would be considered inauthentic. If we revert to the principle of automatization, and the concept that reading or listening are good things in themselves, then reading or listening to a text with a high degree of comprehension will be more profitable than reading or listening to a text of which one understands little. In other words, one is practising comprehension, not incomprehension" (Ridgway, 2000, p. 181). The so called "authentic" materials are, thus, frequently far too difficult for the learners, however the teachers tend to believe that this is the most effective way of learning the language.

Along similar lines, L. Vandergrift and Ch. C. M. Goh note that many learners put a lot of effort into listening exercises introduced in the classroom as they truly believe that it will help them becoming successful language users and listeners in the future. The authors comment on such suggestions and argue that, "[u]sually, the advice is to listen to songs more, watch more movies, listen to the radio or watch the news on TV, and find native speakers as conversation partners. Most of these activities, when planned by the teacher, are accompanied by 'homework' that requires learners to demonstrate some outcome of their listening. These outcomes might include writing a summary of a movie or TV news report they have watched or giving a response to something they have heard. Efforts to improve, however, are sometimes not sufficiently monitored or supported. Learners may try their best to engage in listening on their own outside class time, but they may not know how to take advantage of these opportunities to improve their listening proficiency (Vandergrift, & C. M. Goh, 2012, p. 5). Indeed, this is precisely what happens in the classrooms. The lessons are not entirely learner oriented, but rather follow teachers' subjective theories regarding listening, at the same time ignoring older adult learners' special needs, abilities and learning preferences. Also the attempts to create own-materials, unfortunately, often prove to be rather futile as the suggestions for further practice are impossible for the learners to act on and the materials

themselves tend to be even more challenging than the one's found in the regular course books.

Listening is usually enumerated as one of the most challenging skills that students need to deal with not only in the language classroom, but also in real life situations. At the same time, students' experience in the language classroom often fails to equip them with knowledge of strategies and procedures which would help them to overcome possible listening problems in the future. Moreover, due to some degree of age related decline of cognitive abilities, older adult students seem to find listening comprehension particularly demanding. In order to facilitate the process of learning of this age group, teachers should become aware of the needs and abilities as well as learning preferences of older people. Thus, trying to incorporate into the listening lesson some of the strategies or aiming at improving the procedures so that the students can feel more secure, by, for instance, having additional stages devoted to pre-teaching of difficult lexis and grammar, practising different elements of connected speech, allowing the learners to discover the relationships between particular sounds, word chunks and their position in the sentence as well as devoting some of the lesson to controlled practice and post-listening activities would facilitate the process of learning not only of adult learners, but students in general. Finally, trying to anticipate the reasons behind failures in decoding the speech and suggesting additional practice, but one that is manageable, would certainly improve students' learning competences and might make the future learning experience easier and more pleasant.

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APPENDIX 1

PART I – ABOUT YOU (AN INTERVIEW)

1. Your sex:
 Man Woman
2. Type of school in which you teach English:
 private public other (please specify)
3. How long have you been teaching English for?
4. In which country do you teach English?
5. What is your mother tongue?
6. Which level(s) of older adult learners have you taught:
 beginner pre-intermediate intermediate upper-intermediate
 advanced

PART II – ABOUT YOUR LISTENING CLASSES

1. Which language skills are the most/ the least difficult for your students? Can you order the following language skills on the scale from 4 – the most difficult, to 1 – the least difficult:

speaking, reading, listening, writing

2. Can you explain why you decided to order the skills in such a way?

.....

Listening procedures:

1. Do you often do listening exercises in the classroom?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
2. Are they an important part of your lesson?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
3. Do your students enjoy them?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
4. Do you give clear instructions before the listening?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
5. Do you give a clear reason/ goal for doing the listening task?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
6. Do you pre-teach difficult lexis (before listening tasks)?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
7. Do you pre-teach unknown or difficult grammar (before listening tasks)?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
8. Do you introduce the context before the listening tasks?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
9. Do you focus your students' attention on some difficult parts while your students are listening?
 always/ usually/ often/ rarely/ never
10. Do you re-play important parts so that your students notice some elements?

always/usually/often/rarely/never

11. Do you post-teach difficult lexis?

always/usually/often/rarely/never

12. Do you post-teach unknown or difficult grammar?

always/usually/often/rarely/never

13. Do you give feedback on the mistakes your students make while listening? If so, in what form?

always/usually/often/rarely/never

.....

14. Do you give your students explanations and suggestions for further practice to help them avoid their mistakes in the future? If yes, can you give some examples?

always/usually/often/rarely/never

.....

Listening strategies:

1. Are your students aware of the existence of listening strategies? Please name or describe some of them.

.....

2. Do you introduce any listening strategies to help your students understand the text? Can you name them?

.....

3. Do you provide some pronunciation practice? What kind of practice?

.....

4. Are your students aware of some difficulties they may encounter while listening? Please name or describe them.

.....

5. Do your students know how to overcome these difficulties? If so, how?

.....

6. Do your students think that listening practice in the language classroom could improve their listening comprehension? Yes/no? Why?

.....

7. Do you often test your students' listening comprehension? If so, how?

.....

8. Have you ever tested your students to check the improvement of their listening abilities? How?

.....

Listening materials:

1. Do you use other forms of listening than the course book recordings? If so, what are they?

.....

2. Do your students find the recordings useful in real life context? Why/why not?

.....

3. Do your students the recordings interesting? Why/why not?

.....

- 4. Do your students find the recordings challenging? Why/why not?
.....
- 5. Do you adapt the listening materials so that the exercises are easier for your students to do? (think about the pace, volume, etc.). If so, how?
.....
- 6. Do you recommend trying to listen to any materials of your students' own choice outside the classroom? Why/why not?
.....