

TEACHING LISTENING TO OLDER SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS: CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Listening is often listed as the most challenging language skill that the students need to learn in the language classrooms. Therefore the awareness of listening strategies and techniques, such as bottom-up and top-down processes, specific styles of listening, or various compensatory strategies, prove to facilitate the process of learning of older individuals. Indeed, older adult learners find decoding the aural input more challenging than the younger students. Therefore, both students' and teachers' subjective theories and preferences regarding listening comprehension as well as the learners' cognitive abilities should be taken into account while designing a teaching model for this age group. The aim of this paper is, thus, to draw the conclusions regarding processes, styles and strategies involved in teaching listening to older second language learners and to juxtapose them with the already existing state of research regarding age-related hearing impairments, which will serve as the basis for future research.

Key words: SLA, *glottogeragogika*, listening, older adult learners, lifelong learning in later life

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the awareness of the significance of teaching listening skill in the language classrooms has begun to increase. However, the research remains to focus solely on children, adolescents and adults, who continue to be treated as one homogenous group. As a result, the specific problems that the group of older adults may encounter while learning English tend to be overlooked and viewed as of secondary importance. Moreover, as the fields of Second Language Acquisition and geragogy have been developing as two separate disciplines, the studies devoted to the older second language learners are insufficient and tend to overlook entirely the issue of teaching listening.

The aim of this article is, therefore, firstly to try to shift the focus of research from adults, treated as one group, to the subpopulation of older adults and to point to the importance of studying the age-related differences, which might influence the process of learning languages in later life. Secondly, the objec-

tive is to present the current state of research devoted to older adults, hearing impairments related to normal ageing, teaching the listening skill in the language classroom as well as to provide a more extensive theoretical background and conclusion to the data collected as a part of a larger research (to be published in three parts)⁸. Finally, it is also an attempt at identifying the problems of the group of older adult learners and suggesting some classroom implications, which are hoped to enrich the future research and emphasize the need for creating a friendly, informed and encouraging environment for the late life language learners' growth.

OLDER ADULTS

Older adults can be defined in a variety of ways. The meaning is strongly rooted in the cultural and social understanding of the term. Most commonly, old age is seen as a chronological age, i.e. based on one's changing social role, the onset of which is usually seen as the beginning of one's retirement. Thus, the World Health Organisation and Eurostat define older adults living in developed countries as the individuals above the age of 65, the United Nations usually chooses the age of 60 and more, while Brian Findsen & Marvin Formosa (2011) note that, "national studies ... take the statutory retirement age as the onset of later life, the figure that is usually between ages of 60 and 70" (p. 9).

The descriptions differ depending on the source, thus, the Oxford English Dictionary online (2016) defines middle age as "the period after early adulthood and before old age, about 45 to 65" (n.p.) and the old age as "the period in life of active retirement, following middle age" (n.p.), Collins English Dictionary (2006) notes that middle age should be defined "the period of life between youth and old age, usually (in man) considered to occur approximately between the ages of 40 and 60" (p. 509) while old age is the time "viewed as an opportunity for travel, further education, etc." (p. 563).

All of the aforementioned examples point to the difficulty in defining the subpopulation of older adults. Along similar lines, various scholars define older adults as, among other age brackets, "those above the age of seventy" (Wilson, 2008, p. 14); "those over sixty-five years of age" (Coupland, et al. 1988, p. 3), the age of "over forty," (Homstad, 1987) or 50 and more (Jaroszewska, 2013). Others prefer to use collective terms, such as, for instance, "the ageing" (Patkowski, 1981), "elders" or "the elderly" (Christoffersen, 1974), "prime-of-life adults" (Mackey, & Sachs, 2012), or "older adults" and "older persons," which is the least discriminatory of all terms (Findsen, & Formosa, 2011).

The last decade has seen an increased interest in continuing one's lifelong education in later life, due to many social factors such as an increasing percentage of active older people in our societies. The longer life and better health

8 See the two following articles (Słowik, 2017a; Słowik, 2017b), which present and analyse the data related to teaching listening in the language classroom from the perspective of older adult students and their teachers.

care mean that aging is the phenomenon that can be observed across the world and, according to Eurostat, it is expected that the linear growth will continue till the year of 2080, when people at the age of 65 and more will increase up to 525.5 million, which means that older individuals will comprise 28.7% of the population, as compared with 18.9% in 2015 (see: Eurostat, 2010, n.p.). Moreover, due to the migratory trend and easier opportunities to travel, many older adults are forced to learn a new language in order to communicate with their family members living abroad, not infrequently in English-speaking countries, or to keep in touch with their friends. Many older individuals study the language to further exercise their brains and to make sense of the increasingly bilingual reality – while watching films, TV commercials, browsing the internet or buying products in the shops. There are, however, numerous challenges awaiting older persons who decide to learn a new language in later life.

HEARING DEFICITS IN OLDER ADULTS

The studies, as well as classroom experience, show that listening proves to be the most challenging language skill, whether it is for novice younger or older adult learners (see, Brown, 1990; Ridgway, 2000; Wilson, 2008; Field, 2009; Vandergrift, 2012). However, in case of the latter group, there are additional biological and cognitive factors which hinder the development of listening comprehension in the language classroom. Indeed, to a large degree, ageing increases the likelihood of various sensory impairments and disorders connected to vision, language, speech and cognition, and to more physical elements, such as balance, mobility, touch, etc., which, in turn, affect an individual's ability to communicate and interact with the physical environment or to use technologies related to communication (Pichora-Fuller, 2009, p. 54; see also, Lemke, 2009).

According to Kathy Pichora-Fuller (2009), the auditory processing associated with age-related changes in processing auditory input may hinder communication and social interaction of older adults. Moreover, the older the person is, the more likely it is that the effect of a hearing loss on communication may combine with effects of, for instance, vision loss. At the same time, the aural difficulties “can even exacerbate the apparent degree of other impairments, such as cognitive loss,” which, as pointed out by the author, in turn prove that there is strong a relationship between the ears and the brain in that they form a larger whole and are a part of a system governed by “the interactions between sensory and cognitive functioning” (p. 53). Such interlinked system of dependencies can either play a positive or negative role in everyday communication.

What is crucial to remember, however, is that as in characterising the subpopulation of older adults in general, they should be defined by a high level of heterogeneity also in relation to hearing loss. As a result, environmental, genetic or general factors, may influence and contribute to aural declines in

older adults, causing different types of damages (see: Pichora-Fuller, 2009). Along similar lines, Karen S. Helfer (2009) also points out that despite the source of the hearing problems, they are exacerbated by the amount of background noise, which has an influence on the quality of information. Therefore, even if "the process of segregating and attending/ignoring" background noise is undisturbed "listeners still might not be able to understand the message due to peripheral (e.g., hearing loss, the presence of background noise) and/or cognitive (e.g., working memory, attention) factors" (p. 237).

On the whole, older adults find it more difficult to process information which they hear in the presence of the background noise, than younger adults without hearing deficiencies. However, the problem arises when it comes to the background noise congested with other voices. K. S. Helfer (2009) points out that, "a body of research has determined that speech has the potential to cause two types of masking: energetic and informational. Energetic masking is when physical energy in the masker obscures information in the target. Informational masking refers to masking above and beyond that which would be produced by noise with the same acoustics as the interfering speech" (p. 237). The resulting problem for an older adult listener who experiences age-related changes associated with their cognitive functioning means that they would "have a greater contribution of the second (higher-level) informational masking component than a young, normally-hearing listener who has optimal attentional resources" (p. 237). On the whole, such problems may result in hindered communication in these environments which are polluted with a more complex background noise. According to the author, it is also possible that "the peripheral hearing loss which accompanies ageing has a negative influence on cognitive processes" (p. 238).

K. Pichora-Fuller (2009) also notes that according to the information processing theory, each person possesses a finite cognitive capacity. This core assumption denotes that when a person commits to a certain cognitive activity that particular activity may decrease the amount of resources allocated to other processes. At a young age, an individual most likely does not notice any depletion, since sensory skills such as hearing or seeing are to a large extent effortless and automatized by the brain. As the ageing process develops though, cognitive actions become more effortful and, by association, commitment to a certain action may erode other skills. Therefore, when a healthy person with no hearing disorder is exposed to ideal conditions with no background noise, the listening comprehension is undisturbed. Indeed, according to the author, when listening is easy, the connection between auditory and cognitive processing is relatively unimportant" (p. 55), which means that the loss of hearing could require an individual to focus more on the comprehension of sounds and, as a result, to compromise comprehension and memory.

Our current knowledge regarding the human perception, enables us to assert that hearing and the brain are a part of a complex system and any impairment of the former has an impact on the latter. Age related loss of hearing may increase the difficulty in communicating and maintaining everyday

social interactions. As some studies show, hearing impairment can also sometimes be accompanied by a loss of other sensory skills, vision for example, and have an impact on the cognition of an individual. K. Pichora-Fuller (2009) further argues that, "with increasing age, the deleterious effects of hearing loss on communication are increasingly likely to combine with the deleterious effects of other impairments, such as vision loss. Hearing loss can even exacerbate the apparent degree of other impairments, such as cognitive loss. Importantly, the interactions between sensory and cognitive functioning suggest that the ears and the brain operate as parts of a system. This integrated system can either undermine or support the achievement of everyday goals by older communicators." (p. 53).

It has been observed that human beings utilize two types of intelligence - fluid and crystallized. Crystallized intelligence is associated with a common notion of knowledge acquired through experiences and education. Fluid intelligence, on the other hand, denotes human capacity to reason and declines steadily with age. Hence, as pointed out by Timothy A. Salthouse (2004) and K. Pichora-Fuller (2009), even though vocabulary and our collected knowledge grows throughout our lives to reach a plateau at the age of 60, the process of decline of human working memory is steady and linear, beginning at the age of 20 and lasting to about the age of 80. Effects of both of these processes on the behaviour and learning have a profound implications on the classroom environment. As pointed out by, K. Pichora-Fuller (2009), "the differential effects of age on these dimensions of intelligence are highly relevant to compensation during spoken language comprehension (Kemper, 1992). Relating these factors to spoken language comprehension in older adults, declines are more pronounced in fluid abilities or the moment-to-moment cognitive operations involved in information processing, including the ability to find meaning and understand the relationships between concepts, resolve ambiguities, draw inferences, and formulate responses (i.e. working memory and reasoning), whereas crystallized abilities or the use of skills, knowledge, and expertise remain largely intact (West, Stanovich & Cunningham, 1995, p. 55)". In other words, all of the abovementioned factors such as, the spoken language comprehension, finding relations between concepts, resolution of ambiguities, drawing inferences and formulation of responses are greatly reduced among older adult learners, even though their knowledge and expertise remain unaffected.

On the whole, according to Jean-Pierre Gagne & Walter Wittich (2009), both in case of people with hearing loss and the groups of healthy individuals who are exposed to speech "under poor acoustical conditions," despite the age, understanding of speech improves when the visual signals support the auditory ones (p. 165). At the same time, the authors stress that there are more than 20% of individuals above the age of 70 who have a dual sensory impairment, i.e. an impairment related both to hearing and vision. This is especially problematic, as most exposure to spoken language takes place in natural environments, which are polluted with many sounds occurring simultaneously,

such as other people's conversations, noise related to vehicles, machines, loud music, etc. At the same time, however, both interlocutors can rely on such compensation strategies as making up for the lost sounds by looking at the person speaking, which improves the communication. The authors note that in such situations, "[f]or normally sighted younger adults with hearing loss, as well as those with normal hearing, speech recognition performance is improved when the task is administered audiovisually (AV) rather than only auditorily (A-alone) or visually (V-alone)" (p. 165).

The authors also point out that according to various studies, the group of older individuals had worse results in lipreading tasks than the younger adults, and on the whole their performance was age-dependent – the older the subjects of the study, the worse the results. The age of 50 may be treated as the beginning of the decline in the ability to speech- or lipread individual words and whole sentences but the problems become more pronounced between the ages of 65-70. However, J. P. Gagne, & W. Wittich (2009) also note that, "based on the fact that younger and older adults have the same patterns of confusions, it would appear that the perceptual and cognitive processes used to perceive speech in the V-alone modality may be similar for younger and older adults" (p. 167). This means that even though older adults might have more problems with listening comprehension and understanding, aural input can be facilitated by visual cues, in case of visual only situations, involving lipreading, both groups perform in like manner and "the evidence available suggests that both younger and older adults use similar perceptual and cognitive processes in speech understanding tasks that require the integration of auditory and visual speech cues" (p. 167).

At the same time, there are numerous harmful stereotypes in relation to older adults in general, which have an influence on our perception of this age group and which have an influence on older adults' listening comprehension. Ryan Bouchard (2009) notes, for instance, that older adults are viewed as the ones who are in worse health than the younger groups, more incompetent, dependent on others, less physically able. At the same time despite being often seen as wiser, more experienced, reliable and friendly, older persons are discriminated against by young adults. Not infrequently, these stereotypes depend on age and physical condition – healthy older adults are thus seen as more positive, friendly and well-disposed, while less healthy older individuals are thought to be sulky and uncooperative loners (see also: Hummert, Garstka, Ryan, & Bonnesen, 2004; Jaroszewska 2013). Older adults also tend to be a part of the self-stereotyping process, which results in their overall performance being affected by their attitudes (see: Levy, 2003; Bouchard, 2009).

Such categorising older adults leads to an unfavourable treatment and even discriminating against older individuals. Indeed, age-related discrimination is a common problem in the language classroom, both on the part of the teachers but also younger course participants. Whether during the lesson or while enrolling on a course, the practice shows that older adult learners interested in participating in a language course are often not offered the same learning opportunities or as welcoming a learning environment as other age groups.

The process of signing up for a course does not take various cognitive disabilities and health problems into account, which means that older individuals are often put in the same groups with much younger lower level students, which is the result not of poor language knowledge, but inappropriate entry tests. In fact, such tests are usually administered in the same way despite the age (except, perhaps, for very young learners as they would be unable to answer specific language questions in writing, due to their lack of knowledge related to abstract concepts, metalanguage, or to their inability to read and write, etc.). All of the adult students, however, are divided into groups based on the same test, usually followed by an oral assessment. Thus, entry tests often do not take into account the needs and problems of older adults regarding, for instance, their impaired verbal ability, verbal memory, slower and more-error prone retrieval of information from long-term memory, or such factors as auditory and visual problems (see: Mast, Zimmerman & Rowe, 2009).

LISTENING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

According to John Field (2008), the approach to teaching English based on developing all language skills leads to treating listening as the least important skill, as “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” (p. 1). Moreover, teachers often avoid teaching listening as it is more difficult to measure the students’ progress and it is often regarded as a rather passive skill, which can be learnt by itself, by being exposed to the language and absorbing it, similarly to the way the mother tongue is acquired. As a result, teachers devote less time and attention to the systematic development of listening comprehension than in case of other language skills, which are easier to teach and test, i.e. the level of one’s ability to read and write in a foreign language, or even the level of fluency in speaking.

Checking the outcomes of exercises devoted to testing students’ listening comprehension is, thus, a common practice in the language classrooms. As a result many such activities end up testing the students’ ability to listen (see: Vandergrift, 2012). What they do not teach the students is how to listen successfully, how to avoid certain problems or how to overcome them once they arise. There is hardly any time in the lesson devoted to developing listening techniques and strategies, which are so popular in teaching other skills, such as reading. This approach results in students becoming frustrated with their inability to comprehend and not infrequently, especially in case of poorer novice listeners, anxious and uncertain about continuing their language course. At the same time, listening proves to be particularly important in developing one’s knowledge of a new language as it enables the learners to communicate successfully, understand the interlocutors, or even the given instructions during a language course.

There are, however, different cognitive processes which take place while listening and should be highlighted to raise students' awareness of how to deal with an incoming information: "(1) top-down and bottom-up processing; (2) controlled and automatic processing; (3) perception, parsing, and utilization; and (4) metacognition" (Vandergrift, 2012, p. 17). The first pair, i.e. bottom-up and top-down processing are the basic concepts related to listening comprehension. The former is a mechanical process based on understanding through building on one's knowledge of phonemes, syllables, words, etc., and the latter is based on activating one's schemata and building on the already existing knowledge in order to understand the given information. Both of these processes take place at the same time and enable the listener to decode the incoming information (see: Ridgway, 2000; Field, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Vandergrift, 2012). However, as pointed out by J.J. Wilson (2008), "recent research suggests that it is often top-down approaches that cause mistakes in listening tasks" and yet "until fairly recently it was assumed that most errors in listening comprehension were caused by students mishearing individual words – a failure of the bottom-up process" (p. 15). This means that teachers should pay more attention to developing these skills in order to facilitate the process of listening.

As pointed out by Larry Vandergrift (2008), in case of not very fluent listeners the process of listening is more controlled, which means that it is based on devoting more attention to processing the information. With time, as in the case of other language skills, listening becomes more automatic and requires less conscious processing. However, there are also certain difficulties related to that process, especially in the case of older adult listeners, as memory is one of the most important factors related to comprehension processing. Indeed, long term-memory plays a crucial role in top-down processing, while working memory is rather limited when it comes to the amount of information it can hold. Both of these processes are, according to L. Vandergrift (2008), intimately linked to the students' level of proficiency as, "listeners hold the retained units of information in a phonological loop for a few seconds until the sounds can be segmented into words or larger chunks of meaningful speech through links with long-term memory. How much information a listener can hold in working memory will depend on their level of language proficiency. As their level of language proficiency increases, listeners are able to retain and process increasingly larger chunks of meaningful speech" (p. 20). The problem, thus, arises with older second language learners whose cognitive abilities are often impaired to various degrees, which means that they might experience problems with retrieving information from a long-term memory and have a slower processing speed (see, for instance, Mast, Zimmerman & Rowe, 2009).

Perception, parsing and utilization are yet another three processes taking place in the listener's mind and are related to the bottom-up and top-down processing. The listeners use the former to decode incoming information by recognizing sounds, phonemes, etc. during perception phase. They first,

according to L. Vandergrift (2008), need to concentrate on “(1) attention to the text, to the exclusion of other sounds in the environment; (2) noting similarities, pauses, and acoustic emphases relevant to a particular language; and then (3) grouping these according to the categories of the identified language” (p. 21), which poses many difficulties for the learners and should, therefore, be given much more attention in the language classrooms. During the first phase, i.e. parsing, the learners “parse the phonetic representation of what was retained in memory and begin to activate potential word candidates. Listeners use the parsed speech to retrieve potential word candidates from long-term memory, based on cues such as word onset, perceptual salience, or phonotactic conventions (rules that apply to the sequencing of phonemes). Using any one or more of these cues, listeners create propositions (abstract representations of an idea) in order to hold a meaning-based representation of these words in working memory as new input is processed. Meaning is often the principal clue in segmentation” (p. 22).

Such retrieval of information in older adult listeners tends to be error-prone and causes many problems. As a result the learners become acutely more self-aware of the mistakes they make, which could be avoided by developing their listening comprehension and concentrating on such problems as misunderstandings while listening to the fast and often inaudible connected speech and the related typical for English language changes such as: redistribution, resyllabification, weak forms, assimilation, elision or speakers various accents (see: Underhill, 2005; Field, 2008). All of these problems affect the final element – the utilization phase – in which the learners link their prior knowledge to the utterance they hear and “generate a conceptual framework against which to match their emerging interpretation” (Vandergrift, p. 22) in order to try to interpret the meaning of the whole utterance not only of its parts, which again leads to many problems as the learners need to understand the entire information and not only its particular elements (see: Goh, 2008).

Finally, metacognition, which refers to the learners awareness of cognitive processes taking place in their brains while listening is, according to Larry Vandergrift (2008) and Christine Goh (2008), the factor differentiating successful listeners from weak listeners, as according to the recent study nearly “13 percent of variance in listening achievement could be explained by metacognition, which means that listeners who can apply metacognitive knowledge about listening during the cognitive processes of comprehension are better able to regulate these processes and draw on the relevant knowledge sources in an efficient manner to build text comprehension” (Vandergrift, 2008, p. 23). In other words, awareness of processes taking place while listening might facilitate the process of learning and improve learners’ general listening comprehension.

CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

On the whole, the common belief is that individuals who experience certain age-related hearing difficulties are a homogenous group exhibiting the same characteristics, such as high level of dependence, incapability, etc. The stereotypical attitudes and beliefs are not infrequently heightened by our perception of sensory impairments related to old age. This causes many problems connected with the right code of behaviour that should be followed while dealing with aurally impaired individuals, not only in everyday lives, but also in the language classrooms. Whether it is a minimal deficit or a more serious hearing loss that needs to be addressed while designing a lesson, there are, according to Ryan Bouchard (2009), "particular communication challenges experienced by individuals with disability [which] include the social pressure and risks of disclosing information about one's impairments, managing help (avoiding overhelp while recruiting needed help), and gaining access to required information" (p. 81).

The author also points out that older adults dealing with cognitive problems might feel stigmatised in the groups with individuals who have less problems with hearing impairments. At the same time, R. Bouchard (2009) stresses that while in some cases it might be helpful to slow down one's pace of speech and to speak more clearly, it is certainly unnecessary in all cases and can be treated as rather humiliating. However, although such authors as J.J. Wilson (2008) point that "[t]eachers of older learners may need to proceed more slowly with instructions" as they "may also find that their students' ability to cope with fast connected speech lags behind the students' cognitive abilities" (p. 14). R. Bouchard (2009) offers an additional piece of advice in approaching older adults which should also facilitate the process of improving their listening comprehension in the language classroom, and notes that "lists for talking with older adults include some demeaning behaviour that might be needed in an individual situation but certainly not for the majority of older adults – e.g. speak simply and slowly. When asked for such a list, I have offered one word – listen. If the professional focuses on the older individual, listening and observing, then a natural appropriate conversational style is likely to follow" (p. 84).

The problem arises, however, when older adult learners are exposed to recordings which are often part of language course books or are chosen as "authentic" examples of spoken English. Most of such recordings are designed in a way to be as real as possible, which means that there is usually some background noise, such as, for instance, loud traffic noise, other people talking at a party or in the shop, different voices talking over one another, etc. In such situations, there are not only no visual cues to support one's understanding of the given message, but the information is made more difficult on purpose. As a result, older adult learners often become disheartened by their own inability to hear properly and to answer the following questions or to do the assigned tasks.

As shown in several studies, teachers often avoid introducing their learners to listening techniques and strategies, which could improve the skill of lis-

tening comprehension and result in creating a more friendly classroom environment. All students, and older adult learners in particular, who are aware of possible problems which might occur while listening to a semi-authentic recording will find it easier to compensate for their aural impairments and lack of visual cues. Robert W. Sweetow (2009) notes that when exposed to more complex tasks with higher background noise, older adults might prove to have more problems in dealing with them than the younger individuals and points out that "it is reasonable to assume that the perceptual and cognitive declines (resource limitations) that occur with aging, including slower speed of processing, reduced working memory, and increased attentional difficulties (characterized by difficulty in noise, with distractions and poorer executive control) contribute to this problem. Even in the absence of hearing loss, older subjects require 3–5 dB higher SNR than young listeners" (p. 113).

What it implies for the classroom management is that even though some older persons might not exhibit any particular problems with listening, on the whole their ability to listen is slightly worse than that of younger listeners. This is an additional problem for the teachers, who need to bear this issue in mind while playing the recordings and adjusting the volume (sometimes the CD players available in the classroom have limited sound range and the maximum option tends to be too quiet, especially in larger rooms).

If, however, the aforementioned needs and cognitive abilities of older adult learners are not taken into account while designing a listening lesson, it might result in discouraging the learners from continuing their late-life education and developing the feeling of depression and despondency. R. W. Sweetow (2009) also stresses out that, in fact "elderly hearing impaired patients are certainly no less susceptible than young hearing impaired patients to developing maladaptive compensatory behaviour and loss of confidence that may translate into social isolation, depression, and apathy" (p. 113). Therefore, language teachers should be made aware of these issues and try to introduce their learners to various listening strategies and techniques, which might improve their listening competences, and try to adjust the materials used in the classrooms to fit older adult learners' preferences and compensate for age-related cognitive impairments.

CONCLUSIONS

Although listed as the most challenging of all skills, listening comprehension also seems to be the most important element ensuring successful language development for all novice language learners, especially, however, for older individuals, as age-related cognitive changes make it more difficult for this age group to compensate for the lost sounds. Hearing impairment related to normal ageing can be, thus, problematic for many reasons. First, it is an obvious obstacle which makes successful communication more challenging for both interlocutors. Second, it may lead to older people being prej-

udiced against by other students or even their teachers. Older learners with hearing impairments may also feel patronized by overeager teachers whose intentions are good but who are not trained to deal with such problems in a less straightforward and obtrusive way. Finally, teachers should make sure that their students are aware of the existence of listening strategies, which make listening to a new language easier and which, especially in case of older second language listeners, can make the process of learning more successful and by far less stressful.

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