

**Danuta Gabryś-Barker (ed.): Third Age Learners of Foreign Languages**

(Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 2017. 248 p.)

The 120<sup>th</sup> volume of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) series is one of the first attempts to bring together what one knows about the seniors and their profiles as foreign language learners (Knowles et al, 2005; Cohen and Li, 2013; Van der Hoeven and de Bot, 2007). The initial inspiration of the book is to present ideas about third age learners who are trying to find a new purpose in their life. It is crucial that the lay-out of the volume is logical and well-structured and the letter types (**bold** and *italics*) adapted to the organization of the chapters and subchapters. The outer form of the book is in accordance with the contents of the chapters. Compiling the chapter of the book does not only derive from professional but from personal motivation, as well. This book shines new light upon the challenges and difficulties of third age learners “so the book was also edited from a strong personal attachment and enthusiasm for the subject matter”<sup>1</sup> (Danuta Gabryś-Barker, 2017).

According to the introductory thoughts, foreign language learning can be an apprehensive and useful pastime activity. Gabryś-Barker cited Groen (2014/16:151) about the aging process because elderly people are often worried about the future. The elderly generation feel neglected and redundant and they sometimes excuse without goals at that particular station of their lives:

When you are young, you want to grow up quickly. When you are adult and reach your sixties, you strive to be young. And when you are an old dog, you do not want anything anymore. (Groen in Gabryś-Barker, xiii)

The possible key to the success is to find a new activity for example acquiring an additional language which can broaden one’s horizon. The Introduction of the book gives a brief overview about the reasons for learning a foreign language which seniors consider as a motivating activity. Moreover, it shows the opportunities for seniors related to foreign language learning, especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> age universities. Adult learning does not have a long history, as the idea was only realized in the middle of 21<sup>th</sup> century at Malcolm University, US. After that, various institutions made the decision of creating learning opportunities for third age learners who were also accommodated by the educational institutions. Third age universities are one of the options for seniors who would like to learn foreign languages in the frame of instructed language teaching.

The volume draws up a collection of researchers who are willing to share their gained experience about the third age phenomena. One group of researchers are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://books.telegraph.co.uk/Product/Danuta-Gabryś-Barker/Third-Age-Learners-of-Foreign-Languages/21091705>

far from the so called third age but they started to carry out investigations in that particular field. The other group of researchers reached the autumn of their life, however they still take part in the life of academia. The researchers look into the matter of “the third age” issue - because they have higher mental activity and better brain functions reaching the old age - so they are personally involved in that question.

People approach a senior’s age and they are searching for new challenges in life: all of them look for new options and more fulfilment from different areas of life. Most people explore new interests and they can choose from various pastime activities. Seniors are often making new friendships and they begin to socialize in the circle of their families or neighbours after retirement. Furthermore, professional friendships can be one of the opportunities between elderly people. Learning a foreign language can be an appropriate hobby because ageing population often occupy great amount of free time in the autumn of their lives.

The book consists of two major parts: Part 1. *Foreign Language (FL) Learning in the Third Age* and Part 2. *Foreign Language Pedagogy in The Third Age*. The first part of the volume is concerned with the connection between FL learning and third age. *Rebecca Oxford* offers various techniques for teaching FL to older adults in her subchapter. She highlights the need for creativity in pedagogy and she puts forward the positive effect of utilizing cooperative activities related to senior learners. Oxford supports the idea of organizing practical workshops which focuses on strategy learning.

*David Singleton* points out the necessity for further research in the field of FL learning and teaching of third age learners which is still counted as a neglected area:

(...)we are in need of more research on third age learning in general and of more research which specifically focuses on older adults’ capacity for and benefits from additional language learning. (Gabrys-Barker, 2017, p.27)

Additionally, Singleton supports the benefits of FL learning with regard to the retention of cognitive abilities in his subchapter. Training seniors’ cognitive abilities may have a positive impact on their brain mechanisms which can lead to the delay of the appearance of certain mental diseases (like Alzheimer disease, dementia).

*David Green*’s research is about the interactional fluency in second language (L2) from a neurolinguistics view. He concentrates on the decline in these abilities related to the age factor. He tested brain markers of the participants and he assessed the decay with various memory- and behavioural control tests. Green advocates that one should exploit the advantage of virtual world of computers. Furthermore, he believes in the multimodality of computer-based technology which can develop the interactional ability of senior learners.

In the centre of *Maria Kliesch, Nathalie Giroud, Simone E. Pfenninger and Martin Meyer's* disputation stands the effect of FL learning on the third age learners. They investigate the question from linguistic, socio-affective, neurobiological and cognitive perspectives in their longitudinal study. In addition, no research has been found that surveying the complexity of cognitive functioning in relation to EEG or ERG so far. Further research is needed in neuro studies to observe brain mechanisms for a given time period. These future observations may show us the occurring changes in the procedure of FL learning.

*Mirosław Pawlak, Marek Derenowski, Anna M.-Wiertelak* concentrate on the use of indirect strategies by third age learners. They emphasize the importance of more extensive and longitudinal studies which make distinctions between character and capacity. Visible deficiencies related to 3<sup>rd</sup> age learners to FL learning were investigated in their small sample study. The results indicate that minimal strategic awareness is perceptible in terms of planning and monitoring. The learners do not hold the affective coping strategies and they cannot be cooperative in the learning environment. Teachers need to be trained in order to cope with the emerging problems of older adult learners, so well-designed training programmes can be the resolution to the issue.

*Monika Grotek and Agnieszka Ślęzak Świat* present ideas about the learning difficulties of senior learners. Their research is based on motion sickness (proprioceptive disorder) and its effect on reading tasks in case of learning a FL. The study brings into focus the importance of movement and physical activity in maintaining and reinforcing the mental alertness of the seniors. Introducing balance training programmes can be one of the most reasoned solutions for the elderly suffering from the above mentioned symptoms.

*Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel and Magdalena Szyszka* handle the connection between elderly people and their compensatory strategies in acquiring a FL. They apply a model of successful aging and they attest that senior's usage of compensatory strategies can serve as a helping hand for learning absences. These compensatory strategies can be adopted in other areas of seniors' life which has a positive outcome:

'foreign lge learning can be treated as a vital experience in the life of the elderly, contributing their process to s-ageing' (Oxford in this volume) and cognitive fitness (Kliesch et al, Singleton both in this volume) (Gabrys-Barker, 2017, p.121).

The first part of the book has concentrated on learning processes in the senior population. The first three chapters focus on theoretical perspectives and the other three handle with the problems of the practical field.

Furthermore, the second big part deals with the emergent problem of the pedagogical hints and solutions of third age learners. A new discipline has come to life which engages in foreign language pedagogy for seniors. The so called

Third Age Universities give a special solution for that problem because these institutions create learning possibility for elderly people.

The main objective of *Monika Grotek's* study is to map the expectations of older adults in case of their FL instructors. She investigated the issue with using several personal narratives from the participants involved in her study. The results show that the needs of senior learners overpass the purely instrumental factors. They reported in their narratives that they would like to belong to a group or community and they feel the need of a strong bond between teacher and learner. Grotek proposes that teachers should be aware of certain deficiency because of the age factor and they should be more emphatic towards their adult learners. To resolve this issue, more special teacher trainings are needed and special teaching methodology should be processed. Moreover, one has to pay more attention to the organisation of the courses and more extensive research is needed being involved population in great strength.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from *Marek Derenowski's* study. His research involves the discovery of the differences between senior and young adult learners. Special treatments, specific characteristics and limitations of the older generation needs to be taken into account related to methodology. As far as the specific characteristics are concerned, teacher and trainers should command of good social skills, enthusiasm and sensitivity. Being provided with good social skills is inevitable in the teacher training programmes, as well. Teachers should be trained to be socially sensitive because their task is also to create a social environment to their students.

*Anna Nizgorodcew* raises the question of modules which are strongly related to the teacher training programmes respecting the third age learners. Her research action project explores the trainee's assessment of an MA course on teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The goal of this course was to develop the trainees' sensitivity to the needs and expectations of the adult learners. The success of the course lies in the fact that it addresses the trainees' affective dimension and equally the seniors', as well. This memoir shows the value of the training courses for future EFL teachers because they make progress with the help of promoting their teaching competencies in an innovative way.

Last but not least, *Anna Pot, Merel Keijzer and Kees De Bot* address the topic of migration issues in Europe respecting FL learning. Their aim is to adopt language policies and to develop the social skills and the integration process in the educational context. Their study calls the attention to the group of senior learners who come from various social and educational background. The role of an FL teacher may expand with additional challenges because teachers' task is to create an appropriate learning environment through Group Dynamics besides they choose the appropriate material for the courses.

To conclude, collaborators of the book talk about the matter of third age learners from various psychological, neurological and pedagogical viewpoints. Every chapter of the book attempts to give a theoretical outline and it supports the reader with clear-cut conclusions from the basis of empirical studies carried out. After reading through the chapters, one becomes familiar with the various preconceptions and assumptions about senior learners. What is more, the different chapters provide the reader with an outlook for the future in this under-studied field of research. The reader is supported by applying the proposals and solutions in real language classroom context. So the aim of the volume is to raise awareness of the previous knowledge on third language learner in order to see what is missing or what is to be developed in that particular field. To be honest, the volume is highly impressive and it is a highly recommended reading at every age and for every group of interest. It is especially beneficial for students, language teachers, university professors and researchers who are in contact with third age learners. One can reckon this book as a suppletory work in this research field because it has not been held in favour formerly. It is highly recommended for professors, researchers, doctorate candidates and students who are interested in the domain of third age learners. Last but not least, this reading can be a supplementary material for language teachers and instructors with regard to the practical pieces of advice.

## References

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