I. ARTICLES

ANNA BORKOWSKA

Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Nowym Targu

FL learners in late adulthood: A report of seniors' willingness to communicate in English in the classroom context

ABSTRACT. The article aims to examine older learners' points of view concerning their in-class willingness to communicate (WTC) in English and to identify their expectations regarding an English teacher. The instrument was a questionnaire that comprised – among others – of questions referring to variables that could exert an impact on third-agers' WTC in English in class. The factors which were used as options in the closed and open-ended questions in the study had been identified by the third agers as the ones that positively or negatively shaped their in-class WTC in an earlier piece of qualitative research (Borkowska 2021a). The data analysis revealed that the informants (63 older participants) reported an eagerness to communicate in English, and they perceived speaking with the teacher as the most motivating type of interaction. The most crucial components of language instruction that boosted older adults' WTC was gentle error correction, a friendly atmosphere, and teacher support that seemed to have a positive effect on their lower self-esteem. Similarly, an empathetic and patient instructor could be of great help in diminishing seniors' self-depreciating views. In contrast, negative teacher attributes (e.g., anxiety, criticism) could lead to inhibiting the older participants' WTC and active involvement during English classes.

KEYWORDS: seniors, willingness to communicate, learning English.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

Foreign language learning (FLL) in late adulthood appears to be gaining in popularity in the contemporary world mainly owing to demographic changes and the necessity to maintain older adults' quality of life, well-being, and sense

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[1] The article is based on the present author's dissertation which was originally published in Public Information Bulletin (Biuletyn Informacji Publicznej, BIP) (available at https://bip.up.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2022/01/ropzrawa-doktorska.pdf).

of achievement (e.g., Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka 2018). In this regard, learning English at an advanced age opens new doors to acquiring pragmatic skills which, in turn, enable third agers to become active and independent members of international communities (cf. Jaroszewska 2013). However, little is still known about age-advanced students' speaking behaviours in English in the classroom context and their willingness to communicate (WTC) which "represents the probability that a learner will use the language in authentic interaction with another individual, given the opportunity" (MacIntyre MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels 1998: 558).

The present paper attempts to explore third agers' perceptions about their learning English as such, and to determine the most vital variables that may foster or inhibit their WTC in English in the classroom context.

2. MACINTYRE ET AL.'S (1998) HEURISTIC MODEL OF L2 WTC

Basically, the construct of L2 WTC originated with reference to the L1 which was recognised as a trait-like notion that referred to an individual's stable predisposition towards entering into verbal communication (McCroskey & Richmond 1987). L2 WTC, on the other hand, was conceptualised at dual levels, namely as personality and situation-based variables (MacIntyre et al. 1998). The engagement in L2 communication was perceived as a state of "readiness" rather than an innate "tendency" (MacIntyre el al. 1998: 547). The theory of L2 WTC proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) is a pyramid-shaped model that illustrates factors affecting the eagerness to communicate in the L2. This multi-layered heuristic model includes "long-term stable, enduring influences" at the bottom (Layer IV, V, VI), and "shorter-term, more situation specific or time-limited processes" at the top layers (Layer I, II, III) (MacIntyre 2020: 115). The three bottom layers which comprise – among others – personality (Layer VI), communicative competence (Layer V), and motivation (Layer IV), appear to be more individually based and distal influences on L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al. 1998). The most proximal determinants of the L2 located in Layer III comprise two components: desire to communicate with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence (MacIntyre et al. 1998). Layer II is viewed as the final step before actual L2 communication, and it includes only one constituent, namely the L2 WTC defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre el al. 1998: 547). The actual L2 use is found in Layer I, and it involves communication behaviours in a variety of contexts.

It is worthwhile to mention that MacIntyre (1998) and his associates emphasise that both situational and stable components of the model are of paramount importance in the formation of one's L2 WTC. On the one hand, the highest

levels of the pyramid are claimed to be decision points where the learner "must decide either to act, or not to speak at all" (MacIntyre 2012: 16). On the other hand, the lowest levels are to prepare individuals for the interaction by creating a tendency to react orally and these "pervasive influences of distal factors cannot be neglected due to their more universal nature" (Piechurska-Kuciel 2021: 149).

3. FACTORS AFFECTING WTC IN AN FL CONTEXT

Importantly, early research on L2 WTC made no distinction between in-class and out-of-class WTC, and it was Weaver (2005) who introduced the most significant modification. The scholar developed a scale that measured WTC in both speaking and writing tasks, and in situations that typically occur in a FL context (e.g., role-plays). However, this scale was criticised as some items contained the unspecified word "someone" which could be interpreted as "the teacher" or "classmates", and the lack of clear reference might have a strong effect on the measurement of WTC (cf. Cao 2011). Weaver's (2005) tool was adapted by Peng and Woodrow (2010) who created a new instrument based on WTC in meaning-focused and form-focused tasks. The authors intended to gauge students' WTC in a variety of exercises between three kinds of interlocutors: the teacher, a peer, and a group of classmates. More recent qualitative and mixed-methods studies carried out – among others – by Kang (2005), Cao (2011), Peng (2014), as well as Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) attempted to identify situation-based variables linked to the dynamic nature of in-class WTC in an FL context. MacIntyre and Wang (2021: 882) underscore that due to the fact that "communication processes are so fluid, highly adaptive, and change rapidly, the most relevant factors and the signature dynamics underlying WTC also can change rapidly".

According to Zhang, Beckmann and Beckmann (2018), framework of situational antecedents of state WTC, a learner's readiness to communicate heavily hinges on negativity and positivity. The authors highlight the fact that negativity viewed as "any sort of negative feeling caused by the situation" may hinder one's WTC (Zhang et al. 2018: 233). It involves the lack of self-confidence, anxiety, fear of losing face, or fear of making mistakes (cf. Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2015). In contrast, positivity that represents "the elation" prompted by a certain situation refers to interest and excitement (Zhang et al. 2018: 234). In a general sense, emotions play a powerful role in shaping WTC (Khajavy, MacIntyre & Barabadi 2017). Cao (2011) mentions a range of negative emotions (anxiety, boredom, frustration, embarrassment, and anger) that have a debilitating effect on WTC whereas positive ones (enjoyment and satisfaction) could significantly enhance the level of WTC. Additionally, Khajavy (2021: 173) and his colleagues

state that "positive emotion motivates students to discover and play, two crucial activities to promote social cohesion".

In a similar vein, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) have posited that various teacher-related and student-related factors have the potential to influence learners' levels of WTC. For instance, the scholars emphasise the importance of the teacher's involvement and supervision that may be recognised as a motiving factor while involved in dyadic work. Also, as stressed by Zarrinabadi (2014), the most prominent factors shaping the learners' readiness to speak are the teacher's wait time, error correction, teacher support, and the teacher's decision on the topic. Significantly, the attractiveness and easiness of topics promote active involvement in communicative interactions whereas students feel reluctant to talk about topics they find uninteresting (Cao 2011). Likewise, background knowledge and topical vocabulary might enhance an individual's WTC while the lack of familiarity with the topic can hinder one's linguistic self-confidence and inhibit communication (e.g., Zhang et al. 2018). Kang (2005) points out that interesting topics may lead to one's feeling of excitement, and students who are knowledgeable about a certain topic appear to be more responsive and cooperative. The teacher's extended wait-time, on the other hand, is viewed as patience whereas decreased time for reflection is prone to evoke embarrassment and leads to an unwillingness to communicate (Zarrinabadi 2014).

Much prominence is given to the instructor's ability to create a pleasant class and a relaxed atmosphere which seem to be critical for boosting students' cooperation while preparing tasks in a variety of classroom interactions, for instance pair work (Eddy-U 2015). Such an approach may generate a high WTC because dyads as such appear to be less anxiety-provoking than whole-class activities and they provide communicative opportunities for both interlocutors (Cao 2011). What is more, dyadic work may increase students' familiarity and group cohesion that, in turn, lead to positive classroom dynamics (cf. Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak 2017). Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2021) underlines that students tend to be more engaged in a task when they feel more secure among peers. Gałajda (2017: 109) remarks that learners "who feel safe in their learning groups are not only less anxious about communicating in a foreign language but also their self-perception changes and becomes more positive".

What needs not to be ignored at this point is the fact that WTC studies have been intensively conducted among teenagers and younger adults, and the literature lacks empirical data concerning older adults' eagerness to communicate in an FL context. However, many studies have identified third-agers' motives to learn an FL in late adulthood showing a strong tendency to gain pragmatic language skills, particularly the ability to communicate (e.g., Jaroszewska 2013; Oxford 2018; Ramírez Gómez 2016).

4. MAJOR MOTIVES TO LEARN AN FL IN LATER LIFE

It is worth noting at this point that older adults, as FL learners, by all means constitute a unique language learning group due to the fact that, in most cases, their professional careers have ended, which, on the one hand, is related to a huge lifestyle change, and on the other, it "provides the opportunity to explore learning goals that people at earlier stages of the life course are often too busy to pursue" (Formosa 2014: 11). Importantly, a number of studies have indicated that older citizens value learning an FL since they are conscious of the advantages it may bring (cf. Oxford 2018). The benefits refer mainly to the increase in mental acuity and memory capacity which is frequently one of the most vital motives to study an FL in later years (e.g., Gabryś-Barker 2020; Ramírez Gómez 2016). It is well-established that "foreign language learning could be an especially beneficial safeguard for ensuring healthy cognitive function in older adults" (Antoniou, Gunasekera & Wong 2013: 2690). In fact, FL training, which involves cognitively challenging tasks, ought to be viewed as cognitive therapy that contributes to promoting neural plasticity (Park & Reuter-Lorenz 2009). However, apart from the health benefits, third agers' main objectives are precisely associated with self-directed, as well as understanding and appreciating the value of practical knowledge (cf. Derenowski 2021). Similarly to all adult learners who "become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations", students in late adulthood seek skills and competences that are linked to their needs and interests (Knowles, Holton III, Swanson & Robinson 2020: 45).

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that another substantial motive to learn an FL at an advanced age is communication with foreigners (e.g., Pfenninger & Polz 2018; Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka 2018). Singleton and Ryan (2004: 219) claim that when older adults are likely to learn an FL with a view of travelling and communicating abroad, "one can expect not a few foreign language students to become involved in face-to-face communication with native speakers of the target language, indeed to be principally motivated by a desire to be able to engage in precisely this kind of communication". Likewise, third agers have the need to be in contact with their family and friends living abroad (Pawlak, Derenowski & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2018). Derenowski (2021) highlights the fact that age-advanced students learn an FL because they wish to communicate with their grandchildren who are frequently unable to speak their mother tongues.

In-class communication in an FL is also of much relevance since as aptly stated by Werbińska (2015: 169) "communication leads to learning" and one needs to talk in order to learn a target language. For this reason, FL speaking

as such should be promoted in older learners' language classroom on a regular basis as it is not only communicative practice but it is also congruent with older adults' principal motivation to learn an FL (cf. Oxford 2018). Therefore, it is critical for the teacher to offer numerous communicative opportunities that might provide room for interactions and they, in turn, may help to establish or maintain interpersonal relationships between groupmates which are highly appreciated by older adults (cf. Gabryś-Barker 2020). Likewise, dyads or small groups increase student talking time and reduce the potential fear of speaking in front of the whole class, Derenowski (2021: 90) notes that they foster "the development of soft competences such as negotiation and co-operation skills" that play a paramount role in authentic communication.

What should also be underscored is that speaking in an FL may affect older adults' self-esteem and confidence, which are already lowered because of self-stereotyping and self-depreciating views, and as acknowledged by Singleton (2018: 22), they "often seem to believe that the changes experienced by them in the course of ageing will inevitably have a negative impact on their L2 learning capacity and progress". Thus, it is advised to create and maintain a stress-free atmosphere, as well as the use of positive reinforcement (cf. Olszewski 2018). A teacher's constant support and encouragement constitute the core of good classroom dynamics that enhances the process of learning and helps to evoke positive emotions, such as enjoyment, pride and satisfaction (cf. MacIntyre & Mercer 2014). Dewaele and Dewaele (2020: 48) highlight that positive emotions "enhance learners' ability to notice things in a classroom environment and strengthen their awareness of language input". Therefore, what learners value most is an educator's emotional contribution to classroom interactions and the learning process (Gałajda 2017). The language instructor, as the key figure in the classroom, needs to be aware of the fact that "positive emotions tend to be seen as correlating not only with well-being, but also with success in performance" (Komorowska 2016: 45). In the case of older students, language success is not strictly associated with "measuring progress in foreign language learning in terms of the number of acquired structures and vocabulary items", but it ought to "focus on the senior students' sense of developing purposeful intellectual activity and agreeable social contacts" (Niżegorodcew 2018: 174–175). Interestingly, socioemotional selectivity theory posits that "perceived limitations on time lead to a motivational shift that direct attention to emotionally meaningful goals" (Carstensen, Fung & Charles 2003: 104). In essence, giving a high priority to positivity might exert a great influence on FLL in late adulthood as even small linguistic successes should be viewed as the driving factors that have the potential to broaden active involvement in language classes, as well as enhance their willingness to communicate (cf. Grotek 2018: 136).

At this juncture, it appears justifiable to hypothesise that third agers ought to be willing to communicate in English since in-class speaking is a prerequisite for encouraging and enhancing out-of-class communication. Therefore, the present study intends to gain a better understanding of their readiness to speak, as well as to identify which variables are likely to facilitate or hamper their in-class WTC in English the most.

5. STUDY[2]

5.1. Research aims and questions

The study sought to determine which English language skills were the most fundamental for older adults, as well as to examine their points of view regarding their in-class WTC in English. More precisely, it set out to investigate the following questions:
1. Which language skills are deemed to be the most important, the easiest, and the most difficult for third agers?
2. Which form of interaction motivates older adults to communicate in class the most?
3. What are the respondents' expectations regarding an English instructor and what teacher characteristics may discourage them from active communication in English?
4. Which components of classroom instruction facilitate the in-class WTC in English the most?
5. Which factors hamper WTC in English in a classroom setting the most?

5.2. Participants

The informants were 63 members of the Third Age University (TAU) in Nowy Targ and Zakopane who had been regularly attending English courses for seniors (Table 1).

As regards age, the largest number of the students in late adulthood were between 66-70 years old (40%) and between 61-65 years of age (30%). The analysis showed that 35% of the participants had been learning English between 1-3 years whereas 19% between 3-5 years throughout their life. Likewise, 65% reported 1-3 years of attendance in English courses for seniors. Likewise, 84% of

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[2] The present study was the first out of five individual studies included in my unpublished doctoral research project.

the learners admitted to knowing other foreign language(s), mainly Russian (68%) and German (38%).

Table 1. The participants' gender, place of residence, and education

Gender		Place of residence			Education	
male	female	village	town up to 50,000 residents	town / city with more than 50,000 residents	tertiary	secondary
5 (8%)	58 (92%)	6 (10%)	57 (90%)	———	38 (60%)	25 (40%)

Source: current study.

When it comes to the older students' motives for learning English at an advanced age, they are depicted in Figure 1.
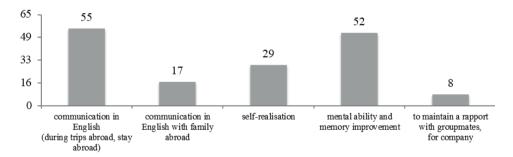

Figure 1. The participants' motives for learning English in late adulthood

The participants mainly represented intrinsic reasons for learning English (i.e., mental ability and memory improvement – 53 students, self-realisation – 29 students), as well as instrumental motives (i.e., communication in English during trips – 55 learners, and with family abroad – 17 learners).

5.3. Research instrument and procedure

The instrument adapted to this study was a questionnaire[3] comprising biodata items, two open-ended questions referring to learning English throughout the participants' life and exclusively during English courses for seniors at the

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[3] The survey was written in Polish and was prepared to accommodate specific seniors' needs, that is to reduce difficulties from potential age-related impairments (the font size – 14 points, in-between line space – 1.5 points) (see Ramírez Gómez 2016).

TAU. There was a closed-ended question related to the most vital reasons for learning English. The informants were also asked about their knowledge of other foreign languages. Additionally, the subjects were to indicate which language skills they found the most important, the easiest and the most difficult to learn. The further part of the survey included two closed-ended questions associated with communication and in-class WTC in English (*Are you willing to communicate in English during class?*; *Which form of interaction motivates you to communicate in English during classes most?*). Similarly, two multiple choice questions regarding variables influencing the in-class WTC were asked (*What, according to you, increases in-class WTC in English?*; *What, according to you, inhibits in-class WTC in English?*). Importantly, multiple choice options for these last two questions were adapted from the study conducted by Borkowska (2021a), where the participants identified the components of classroom instruction that were considered to foster in-class WTC, as well as the factors that were deemed to hinder WTC in English. Additionally, the questionnaire included two open-ended questions concerning the English teacher (*What are your expectations when it comes to an English teacher?*; *What teacher characteristics, according to you, may discourage from communication in English during classes?*).

The tool underwent an analysis of content validity, which was conducted by four competent judges, namely independent English language instructors who had been working with older learners on a regular basis. Each of the questions was evaluated on a 3-point scale (1 – the item should not be included in the test, 2 – the item is useful but not essential, 3 – the item is essential). The content validity ratio (CVR) (Lawshe 1975) was 1.0 (high validity) for most questions, it was 0.5 (not very good validity) only for one question (*How long have you been learning English only at the Third Age University?*). The mean score for all questions indicated that the judges found the items essential ($M = 2.99$; $SD = 0.12$).

Before conducting the study, all the informants were asked to sign the consent and they were ensured that all the data would be gathered and analysed only for scientific purposes. The researcher (the present author) informed the third age students to feel free to ask questions in case they had any doubts or problems while filling out the questionnaire. The survey was completed during the students' regular class time, and it took the respondents approximately 15 minutes to answer all the questions.

Once the study was completed, the questionnaires were collected and coded. The data was computed by means of IBM SPSS Statistic 26 software. In order to answer the closed-ended questions, a chi-squared goodness-of-fit test series was performed, and a qualitative analysis was conducted for the open-ended questions.

5.4. Study findings

5.4.1. Language skills

As far as language skills are concerned, Table 2 illustrates the most crucial, the easiest, and the most difficult ones in the learners' points of view.

Table 2. The participants' views about the language skills

Skills / subskills	Speaking	Writing	Reading	Listening	Grammar	Vocabulary
The most important	**59 (93%)**	4 (6%)	9 (14%)	12 (19%)	3 (5%)	12 (19%)
The easiest	16 (25%)	23 (37%)	**41 (65%)**	14 (22%)	8 (13%)	16 (25%)
The most difficult	**37 (59%)**	17 (27%)	4 (6%)	**33 (52%)**	20 (31%)	8 (13%)

Source: current study.

The data revealed that 59 students acknowledged that speaking was the most important skill ($\chi^2(1) = 48.02$; $p < 0.001$[4]), whereas the least weight was given to grammar ($\chi^2(1) = 51.57$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, 41 respondents perceived reading to be the easiest skill ($\chi^2(1) = 5.73$; $p = 0.017$). In contrast, speaking turned out to be the most difficult for about half of the informants ($\chi^2(1) = 1.92$; $p = 0.166$). Listening ($\chi^2(1) = 0.14$; $p = 0.705$) was considered to be the most difficult skill by more than 50% of the older adults. When it comes to the most difficult skill, the difference between speaking and listening was not statistically significant.

5.4.2. Communication and in-class WTC in English

What the data suggested was that the older students were basically willing to communicate in English during classes, and only one person reported an unwillingness to communicate (Figure 2).

The analysis showed a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(2) = 40.10$; $p < 0.001$) in the type of interaction that motivated them to speak English during classes most. 62% of the informants reported that answering the teacher's questions turned out to be the strongest encouragement to interact while 30% found dyadic work to be the most beneficial in terms of their readiness to communicate in class.

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[4] p < 0.001 denotes a significant difference.

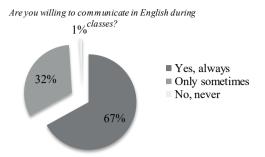Are you willing to communicate in English during classes?

Figure 2. The older adults' WTC during English classes

5.4.3. The components of classroom instruction fostering and hindering in-class WTC in English

When it comes to in-class WTC in English, the participants indicated that gentle error correction is the most fundamental component of language instruction which facilitated the eagerness to speak (Figure 3).
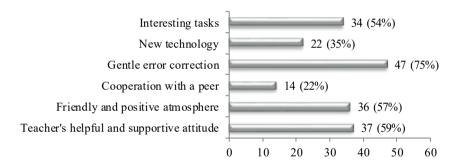

Figure 3. The components of classroom instruction increasing WTC in English

The teacher's gentle error correction seemed to exert a significant influence on WTC in English ($\chi^2(1) = 15.25$; $p < 0.001$). The instructor's helpful and supportive attitude ($\chi^2(1) = 1.92$; $p = 0.166$), as well as a friendly and positive atmosphere ($\chi^2(1) = 1.29$; $p = 0.257$), were vital for over half of the students. Interesting tasks ($\chi^2(1) = 0.40$; $p = 0.529$) were reported to play a key role in boosting in-class readiness to speak for over about half of the respondents as well.

On the other hand, the factor that could generate low WTC in English was an anxious classroom atmosphere ($\chi^2(1) = 2.68$; $p = 0.101$) (Figure 4).
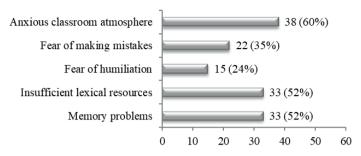
Figure 4. The factors hampering in-class WTC in English

The same number of participants, namely 33 learners indicated that insufficient lexical resources ($\chi^2(1) = 0.14$; $p = 0.705$) and memory problems ($\chi^2(1) = 0.14$; $p = 0.705$) might have a negative influence on WTC in class. A fear of making mistakes had an insignificant impact on WTC ($\chi^2(1) = 5.73$; $p = 0.017$). A fear of humiliation ($\chi^2(1) = 17.29$; $p < 0.001$) was deemed to have a significantly less detrimental effect on the older learners' openness to speak.

5.4.4. The teacher

When it comes to the third agers' expectations about the language instructor, the most vital characteristics of an English teacher mentioned by the subjects are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The most crucial teacher characteristics named by the third agers

No.	The most salient teacher's characteristics	No. of students
1.	understanding, empathetic	13
2.	patient	12
3.	cheerful, friendly	9
4.	helpful and supportive	8
5.	professional	7

Source: current study.

The data showed that the instructor needed to be understanding, empathetic and patient. One of the participants reported: "[the teacher] should be patient because a senior often has an unreliable memory"[5] (S34). Friendliness and cheerfulness were also indicated as one of the most preferable teacher's traits.

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[5] All the older adults' views were translated into English by the present author.

Table 4 shows that 15 students viewed a positive atmosphere as a substantial element of both the teaching and learning processes.

Table 4. The most fundamental components of English classroom instruction
for the older students

No.	The participants' expectations from an English teacher	No. of students
1.	create a nice and friendly atmosphere	15
2.	prepare interesting lessons	9
3.	correct students' pronunciation	8
4.	prepare conversation tasks and dialogues	6
5.	prepare frequent revision exercises	6

Source: current study.

As outlined by some older adults: "Professionalism, engagement, the ability to create a friendly atmosphere which gives students courage" (S57); "[the teacher should be] understanding, likeable with a great sense of humour with reference to an imperfect language group, the atmosphere in the group should be friendly" (S17). The age-advanced learners highlighted the importance of the teacher's professionalism and methodological knowledge. They placed an emphasis on pronunciation correction and interesting tasks, mainly in the form of conversation tasks, dialogues, and revision exercises: "An English teacher for seniors should be understanding when it comes to our bad memory. Teaching material should be introduced in small amounts, frequent revision tasks and a lot of dialogues" (S47).

As regards the teacher characteristics discouraging the older students from active communication, it turned out that an anxious teacher had a debilitating effect on in-class WTC among the third-age learners as he or she was deemed to create and maintain a stressful classroom climate (Table 5).

Table 5. The most demotivating teacher characteristics

No.	Teacher characteristics that discouraged students from communicating in English during classes	No. of students
1.	anxious	11
2.	impatient	8
3.	critical	6
4.	unsupportive	4
5.	chaotic	4

Source: current study.

The mindful teacher, who wishes to work with age-advanced learners, should bear in mind that impatience and criticism may exert a negative influence on older citizens' eagerness to interact. In a general sense, an impatient teacher may have undue expectations and conduct a lesson in a fast manner: "[…] an anxious atmosphere, fast-paced lessons, an anxious teacher, a lack of understanding when it comes to students' age and abilities" (S43).

Moreover, a lack of methodological knowledge may inhibit in-class WTC (Table 6).

Table 6. The affective factors influencing in-class WTC in English

No.	Detrimental factors affecting in-class communication in English mentioned by the older learners	No. of students
1.	anxious classroom atmosphere	9
2.	undue expectations	9
3.	fast pace of a lesson	7
4.	lack of methodological knowledge	5
5.	infrequent revision	2

Source: current study.

It might be assumed that the negative teacher attributes could result in an inability to conduct a well-organised and interesting lesson, as well as an indifference towards the seniors: "[…] a stressful attitude towards students, a chaotic teaching style and an inability to maintain discipline" (S41); "[…] an unwilling attitude, too brutal remarks about mistakes and an arrogant attitude" (S17) were mentioned as having a detrimental effect on in-class WTC.

6. DISCUSSION

The present study shed some light on the third agers' opinions about learning English in later life, and the role the teacher played with reference to shaping their eagerness to speak. It should be emphasised that the vast majority of the students declared that speaking was the most substantial skill, yet it was also viewed as the most difficult language skill by over half of the respondents. Older students generally realise that speaking English is quite complex, and it requires a knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, not to mention, appropriate timely reactions to the interaction due to reduced working memory and potentially longer retrieval (cf. Stuart-Hamilton 2012). An interesting fact is that although speaking was found the most demanding, the present study indicated that the

great majority of the participants were still willing to communicate in English during classes (cf. Derenowski 2021). This finding is directly related to the older adults' main motivation to learn English in later life, namely communication (e.g., Oxford 2018). Owing to their learning experiences, they realise that in order to speak out-of-class, in-class regular communication practice is required.

Importantly, more than half of the students found listening problematic. This may be associated with older people's potential auditory issues (cf. Singleton 2018). Most language textbooks are not specifically designed for seniors who require clear articulation. Therefore, in order to ease third agers' process of learning, it is advised to make a careful selection of listening tasks including no background sounds as they have a detrimental effect on hearing capacity (cf. Ramírez Gómez 2016). When it comes to reading, the analysis showed that it was the easiest skill for the majority of the students. One possible corollary for this situation is that older adults are used to being taught English in a traditional method in the past which was popular when they learnt a language in a formal class (Gabryś-Barker 2020). Therefore, reading, as one of the most fundamental techniques in the grammar translation method seems to be "effective in developing their [older adults'] competence in English" (Grotek 2018: 135).

Interaction with the teacher was reported to be the most motivating, and it had the potential to generate a high level of in-class WTC in English among the learners in late adulthood. This result stands in contrast to previous studies in which communication in dyads was deemed to be less anxiety-provoking and more engaging than teacher-led tasks (e.g., Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2015). It is also worth noting that older students view the teacher as the authority figure in the classroom, and thus, they appear to be more willing to speak English with him or her (cf. Pawlak et al. 2018).

It is fairly evident that the respondents placed utmost importance on the language instructors, their personality features, as well as their classroom management and teaching style (Grotek 2018). The teacher as such ought to be able to build interpersonal relationships with students, provide support and patiently correct mistakes in a gentle manner as his or her positive attitudes towards older learners may enhance their eagerness to use English orally. It should be noted that "when the conditions foster enjoyment of the learning process, anxiety may be manageable, and can recede into the background" (Khajavy et al. 2021: 186). Instructors ought to draw students' attention to even small linguistic successes which evoke positive emotions, give a sense of self-achievement, and indicate the ability to acquire new knowledge (cf. Niżegorodcew 2018). Typically, third agers also give priority to the instructor's professionalism and didactic skills (e.g., Jaroszewska 2013). In teaching practice, FL teachers ought to pay due attention to older adults' learning experience since "any situation in which the participants'

experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience, but rejecting themselves as persons" (Knowles et al. 2020: 45).

In this study, the respondents acknowledged that a laid-back classroom climate where the fundamental element was the teacher's support might broaden and facilitate their communicative behaviours (Gałajda 2017). It seems to be rather clear that a friendly classroom environment and teacher immediacy exert an influence on students' WTC regardless of their age (e.g., Mystkowska--Wiertelak & Pawlak 2017; Peng & Woodrow 2010). Conversely, a negative and stressful atmosphere leads to lower levels of in-class WTC, and an anxious and negative teacher, according to the older participants, discouraged them from active involvement most (cf. Cao 2011).

In this respect, it needs to be stated that the age-advanced students' well-being in the classroom environment should be of great value, both for the teacher and students themselves because "students with positive and high self-esteem tend to be more cooperative, which may add to [a] positive classroom climate and rapport among the students" (Gałajda 2017: 27). This study finding indicated that a fear of humiliation had a significantly less negative effect on WTC than other factors. This might suggest that the learners were supported by cheerful peers and a supportive instructor that provided "a positive emotional climate" (Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2021: 107). Positive attitudes among peers play a beneficial role in learning an FL more effective as positive emotions tend to "help counteract the damage caused by negative emotions" (Dewaele & Dewaele 2020: 48–49). Komorowska (2021: 38) underlines that "when group interaction produces strong emotions" students could become more attentive in the learning process. A good classroom atmosphere as such may be perceived as one of the most substantial variables which may foster or halt students' WTC because it "pulls learners to speak by increasing their desire to participate and also pushes them to speak by naturally reducing self-consciousness" (Eddy-U 2015: 51). On the negative side, a stressful climate inside a language classroom appeared to generate a more powerful fear of humiliation or making mistakes, which may result in older learners' passivity, discouragement and negative emotions. Komorowska (2016: 45) remarks that negativity may lead to lower WTC "less interpersonal contact, less intercultural competence and lower fluency levels together with a tendency to ignore one's problems and avoid difficulty connected with direct face-to-face communication". Needless to say, adults at an advanced age are more prone to losing their state confidence and self-esteem since there is a high probability that anxiety and stress might block or decrease their memory capacity which has already been affected by ageing (cf. Oxford, 2018). As a consequence, it seems substantial to build the positive image of older learners during FL teaching process as focus on a "positive evaluation may

increase the level of self-esteem and help in overcoming negative stereotyping" (Derenowski 2021: 81).

In addition, the data analysis showed that, statistically, gentle error correction constituted a significant factor that boosted WTC in English. Feedback ought to be given in a stress-free manner, as it has a positive impact on shaping a higher level of WTC (e.g., Zarrinabadi 2014). One needs to bear in mind that non-threatening correction helps third agers to become more open to experimenting with a foreign language on a regular basis, and consequently, their low self-esteem might be enhanced.

It is also noteworthy that over half of the older learners placed an emphasis on interesting tasks. This resonates with the previous research conducted by Zhang et al. (2018) in which task interest was found to serve as a facilitator of state WTC. Kang (2005) stresses that interesting topics have the potential to generate learners' feeling of excitement that, in turn, may boost their involvement in the task. In the case of age-advanced learners, one ought to remember about the variety of revision tasks, topics which present positive images of retirement and ageing, as well as modern teaching devices which may inspire students to explore the language, not only in-class but also at home (e.g., Piechurska-Kuciel & Szyszka 2018).

Although this study provides some insights into older adults' in-class WTC in English, it is not without limitations. It included only members of the TAU located in the south of Poland, and its residents frequently immigrate to English-speaking countries or they are likely to have friends and families abroad. This basically means that those senior citizens might have homogenous backgrounds, and thus, they represented the profile of an older person in the south of Poland. Extending the scope of this study could indicate how third agers' opinions in different parts of Poland vary and it might show more significant discrepancies between certain factors that influence in-class WTC in English. In addition, it would be beneficial to perform a test-retest reliability in future studies. This approach could verify the consistency of students' opinions and indicate whether the responses remain unchanged over time.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence from this study suggests that in order to enhance older learners' communicative behaviors in the classroom context, teacher support and their positive personality traits are of unquestionable importance. What needs to be remembered is that third agers attend FL classes mainly because they wish to spend time together in a comfortable atmosphere that boosts their well-being

and self-confidence. The principal implication is that the teacher is expected to establish and maintain a pleasant environment that may be a source of positive emotions and motivation to communicate in English. Furthermore, a supportive instructor is of great value for building social bonds and good group dynamics that give older adults the courage to speak English despite a certain level of insecurity and anxiety. Future research should surely be undertaken to examine the links between older students' in-class WTC in English more closely and the various factors that may shape the readiness to speak both in a positive and negative manner.

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Studenci w późnej dorosłości: gotowość komunikacyjna starszych dorosłych w języku angielskim

Abstrakt. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badania ilościowego dotyczącego gotowości komunikacyjnej (GK) osób w późnej dorosłości w języku angielskim w klasie językowej. Narzędziem badawczym była ankieta zawierająca m.in. pytania odnoszące się do czynników mogących mieć wpływ na kształtowanie GK w języku angielskim. Zmienne użyte do pytań zamkniętych opracowane zostały na podstawie wcześniejszego badania jakościowego (Borkowska 2021). Analiza danych pokazała, iż respondenci (63 starszych dorosłych) byli chętni do komunikacji w języku angielskim, a najbardziej motywującą formą interakcji była rozmowa z nauczycielem. Fundamentalnym czynnikiem, który pozytywnie wpływał na GK, była delikatna poprawa błędów, przyjacielska atmosfera oraz wsparcie nauczyciela. Cierpliwość i empatia ze strony nauczyciela to cechy, który pomagały obniżyć poziom samokrytycznych poglądów seniorów. Natomiast, negatywne cechy instruktora (tj. niepokój, krytyka) prowadziły do zmniejszenia angażowania starszych dorosłych w komunikację podczas zajęć.

ANNA BORKOWSKA
Akademia Nauk Stosowanych w Nowym Targu
anna.borkowska@ans-nt.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-3900-3554