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L2 Learning Programs for Seniors : Maximizing Life Experience, Knowledge, and Motivation through a Training Course on Tour Guiding in a Foreign Language

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the role of lifelong learning leading towards gaining skills among older adults, especially in the area of second language acquisition. In such context, the research tries to discover the best practices through which seniors can be more successful in language learning, by maximizing their experience and the knowledge acquired throughout their life (Shibuya, 2018, 2019, 2020).

For this project, we carried out both a volunteer tour guide course in Spanish targeting Japanese older learners (which started in the spring of 2018 and took place again in the spring of 2019), and a French volunteer tour guide course launched in the spring of 2019, which was repeated in the autumn of the same year. The dissertation focuses on some data gathered from the participants in those courses and on teachers' feedback. The literature on the relevant issues was reviewed in order to identify older learners' features and both internal and external factors that might influence their learning process, such as emotional, social, cultural, and gender issues, as well as educational and social policies.

Feedback from our teachers in both Spanish and French courses suggests that this approach is promising in developing an optimal method for the older learners' language classroom. The communicative and task-based class setting without too much focus on grammar provides leverage for their output and communication skills, even in a class including a mix of low-intermediate, intermediate and advanced levels among the learners.

In this study, we had the impression that both younger teachers and their older learners seem to pay attention and respect to each other's needs. As a result, they created an excellent relationship in class. The teachers tried to draw the learners' attention through role-play or communicative activities as one of the possibilities to make them awake and alert, both physically and mentally, and to create a dynamic atmosphere

among the students. Also, setting timelines and objectives for their language learning, made them aware of working with motivation.

A content-based course taking into consideration practical occasions to use the language such as a volunteer tour guide one proved not always easy to carry out smoothly; therefore, some learners felt that the course and class contents were not clear enough (Shibuya, 2020). However, different from other usual senior language classes, they seemed proactive to work and share their knowledge with their peers. They paid attention not only to their own work, but also to their peers' work, preparation, and performance in class, as teachers observed. This led them to a change in their learning strategies: the learners did not focus only on translating or memorizing the sentences, but on communicating or interacting with classmates. Therefore, it can be said that they tried to find out their best practice of lifelong language learning.