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SENIORŮ**

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**ISSUES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SENIOR  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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*V Plzni dne 10. dubna 2014*

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Eva Zítková

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with the topic of teaching the English language to senior language learners. In the theoretical part, essential information about the ageing processes in terms of biological, psychological and social changes is provided. Next, an overview of basic English teaching methods and methodologies is presented, followed by a brief view on the senior education in the Czech Republic and summarized by suggestions for teaching seniors. The conducted research is described in the subsequent part of the thesis. The research, realized by the means of questionnaires, examined senior learners' preference in English language teaching. The results, presented in graphs, are followed by commentaries and implications for teachers. Based on the results of the research, it is concluded that the participants prefer to learn vocabulary and grammar as well as do listening and speaking by means of traditional methods. They like for instance grammar-translation exercises or working with pictures, but without any assessment of their knowledge; senior learners' motivation is the crucial aspect of their study.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, seniors have become a powerful economical group of people. They want to participate actively in their further education and it seems that language courses are among the most chosen by seniors. Consequently, teachers of English language courses indented for seniors need to be aware of their students' specific learning needs in terms of psychological and biological aspects. Senior students then may benefit more from such courses. Thus the research question of this thesis is: What language teaching preferences do senior learners of English have?

As Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has noted, researchers should not understand the seniors only as the subjects of experiments; the studies are in fact examining and preparing them for their own future (p. 170). Teaching seniors concerns all ages because everyone should have an interest in encouraging their senior relatives or friends to spend their free time well and to maintain their mental abilities.

In the first part of the Theoretical Background Chapter, the essential information regarding ageing is dealt with. The definition of ageing is outlined and then the biological, psychological and social changes in senior age are explored. The second part aims to describe the English teaching methodology, i.e. traditional approaches and particular methods of teaching basic elements and skills in English. The third part of the chapter regards the subject of teaching seniors, firstly with a brief introduction to the adult and senior education system and secondly with practical tips for teaching seniors as a synthesis of the preceding chapters.

In the next chapter, Research Methodology, the description and explanation of the research process are provided. The structure of the research tool is specified and all relevant information about the participants and technique of the research is given. The following chapter is Results and Commentaries. There the results from the questionnaires are presented in form of graphs and supported by commentaries, which tie the theory with the findings. The next chapter, Implications, provides advice based on the results of the research for teachers of senior students. In the Conclusion Chapter, the main ideas of the whole thesis are summarized.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical chapter provides necessary and relevant information about the topic of ageing, methods of teaching English and teaching of adults and seniors. First, the subject of ageing is introduced, dealing with three aspects of ageing – biological, psychological and social; with emphasis on the psychological aspect and with respect to cognitive processes that are important for learning. Next, general approaches in English language teaching and methods of teaching basic knowledge and skills in English are outlined. Lastly, a synthesis of the previous two parts, teaching seniors, is dealt with.

### **Ageing and Psychology of Ageing**

#### **Definition of Ageing**

The first concern is to briefly define ageing and to classify it in terms of age. The ageing process takes place from one's birth, but changes which arrive after the decay of sexual functions are considered as the genuine ageing (Chrástecká, 2010, p. 10). Gruss (2009) has defined the ageing process as “the change of the state in duration of chronological age”, with the three basic patterns of ageing: the degeneration, which refers to the decay; then the maintenance and lastly the growth and development (p. 71). Oxford Dictionary (2013) has defined ageing as “the process of change in the properties of a material occurring over a period, either spontaneously or through deliberate action”. Although the ageing process cannot be delimited in terms of time, there exist categorizations according to age. Gruss (2009), for example, has distinguished the so-called third age, which covers early ageing; approximately sixty to eighty years old men; and the fourth age, which denotes eighty to hundred years old (p. 12). Stuart-Hamilton (1994) uses the same terms; he has divided people over 65 years into two categories (the third and the fourth age), the criterion being the quality of people's life. According to him, “the third age signifies an active and independent life, while the fourth age refers to a period, when a person is depended on the others in the basic needs ensuring” (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 21).

Experts in gerontological studies divide human's life into three periods and examine which aim each of the period has. The first period is actually the preparation for the adult life. People in the second period should start a family, raise children and prepare them for an adult life. The aim of the third life period can be regarded differently; psychologists mention mainly cultural and personal maturing into the complete and harmonious personality, which participates in the cultural heritage (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 84).

Within the approach of the positive psychology, authors endeavour to point the favourable aspects of ageing. Křivohlavý (2011) has referred to Cicero, the author of the oldest book about the age, *De senectute*. One approach sees only negative things about the age; decrease of the physical power, weakening of the memory, occurrence of diseases, expulsion of the centre of the social life. The second approach looks for merits, such as the possibilities and opportunities for productive changes and a creative approach to one's life. Cicero emphasized the time for the development of the psyche, inner life and the achievement of the general harmony (Křivohlavý, 2011, pp. 54). Similarly, Gruss (2009) has also regarded the ageing from the view of positive psychology; the high level of social skills, social intelligence, developed speech, life experience, professional knowledge, culturally bounded proficiency, emotional intelligence and wisdom are emphasized (p. 13). Besides, Gruss (2009) has given an example of older writers or musicians, who are the best in their elderly age (p. 13).

### **Biological Aspects of Ageing**

Although the topic of biological changes that are related to ageing is extensive enough to be dealt with in this thesis, a brief description of specific aspects of biological ageing, which are connected to processes of learning, is given. Pacovský (1994) has distinguished three types of functional changes: the decrease of molecular, tissular, organic and systemic functions; exhaustion of the cell reserves; and the deceleration of the majority of functions (in Klevelandová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 19).

Many researchers have found that physical exercise can improve some aspects of intelligence in an older age; for example, ten weeks of training has lead to a distinctive improvement of the attention span. The healthier body functions better, uses the nerve

system better and also the person who feels fresh has a higher level of self-confidence and therefore higher motivation to perform well in mental activities (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 61).

**Ageing of Brain.** The reason for psychologists to examine developmental changes in brains is to answer the question, whether even ageing brain can learn something new. According to Křivohlavý (2011), there exists the so-called adult neurogenesis; it means that new cells and connections arise in our brain. Therefore, it is possible to learn new things even in an elderly age (p. 13). Gruss (2009) has also mentioned the notion of the brain plasticity, which refers to the mutual relationship of the mental activity and the brain structure. In other words, via physical and mental training, plasticity can contribute to the process of healthy ageing (p. 8). Similarly, Gruss (2009) has argued that ageing body needs more brain activity in order to function well and therefore the more mental activity is required for the body coordination and movement, the less mental activity remains for the activity of the psyche. It implies that the physical training is one of the best way how to keep the mental energy and productivity (pp. 16-17). Researches have proved that humans use just 5% of the brain capacity and that the training can substitute the non-functional neural connections. Gruss (2009) has summarized the Hebb principle, which examined how the process of learning work in the individual neurons' level and their synapses. Two mutually active neural cells strengthen the synapses between them; "Neurons that fire together wire together" (p. 32). Simply said it means that the brain can be trained.

**Ageing of Perception Organs.** Regarding ageing of the perception organs, Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has warned that these changes negatively influence the function of the brain; however, their decrease begins in an early adulthood (p. 27). The most visible changes that could affect the process of learning concern the sense of sight and the sense of hearing. In the case of the sight, the ability of accommodation (i.e. focus on diverse distances) worsens. Bromley (1988) has calculated that a substantial part of senior population needs to wear glasses and many of them cannot see well even with their help (as cited in Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 27). The state of the sense of hearing can be influenced by the harmful environment; but the deterioration of this sense is also the consequence of the ageing process. The most common type of hearing disability is called presbycusis, which is the partial deafness; the disabled perceives the sounds in an undertone or even painfully (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 31). For many disabled it has

become difficult to perceive the speech. Older people have difficulties with discriminating individual consonants. Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has summarized that ageing perception organs restrict the person in accepting and transforming of the information from the surrounding world; seniors are disadvantaged the most in a situation that requires several simple procedures at the same time. This can also lead to the negative change of the self-image and self-evaluation (p. 35). Besides the deteriorating of the sight and hearing, the balance control is affected too (pp. 144-145).

### **Psychological Aspects of Ageing**

The main question dealt with in this part of the thesis is whether people are able to learn even in a senior age and which changes in cognitive processes connected with learning occur most importantly.

**Learning.** Contrary to general belief, older people can successfully learn foreign language. As stated in Schleppegrell (1987), “except for minor considerations such as hearing and vision loss, the age of the adult learner is not a major factor in language acquisition.” It is the context of learning that influences most their ability to acquire the new language (Schleppegrell, 1987). Similarly, Křivohlavý (2011) has stated that ageing people are able to learn new things by training; in this context, psychologists discuss the brain plasticity and the latent reserve (p. 41). According to Křivohlavý (2011), elderly people are able to find creative ways of problem solutions. On the other hand, elderly people have slower reaction time and limited cognitive capacity, which becomes evident upon the requirement of the maximum performance (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 43). Gruss (2009) has agreed that the ability to learn in a senior age is significant; however, the lower education has been achieved in younger age, the less people try to study in elderly age (pp. 7-8).

The personality characteristics, especially the motivational and emotional development and self-assessment processes, belong to other presumptions for learning in senior age. These factors are stable and have positive consequences in learning; elderly people are convinced about their own control over their life (Gruss, 2009, p. 157).

Psychologists have noted that elderly people do not use the formal thinking which has been learnt at school and that they return to more simple methods that were used in

childhood. This is not due to the decline of neurons, but due to a life style; people just do not use what they do not need (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 85). Besides that, Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has repeatedly notified us about the *the age vs. complexity* effect; the more complicated the task requiring mental processes is, the more problems will older people have in processing it and the bigger difference in results from the young age will appear.

It can be summarized that the changes of the psyche become evident in cognitive skills (perception, attention, memory, imagination, thinking). Apart from this, older people have a worse ability to adapt to new situations; fear and anxiety together with uncertainty in decision-making processes appear. Many seniors therefore do not want to meet other people and they become introverted and reclusive. Mental diseases are on the increase, for example dementia, memory disorders, personality disorders etc. Moreover, there is the decrease of the self-sufficiency, the lose of the social position and the increasing need of help (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 23).

**Memory.** Psychologists have agreed on results of studies of memory. There exist two subtypes of memory; the crystallized memory, which concerns information that is intentionally learnt, and the fluid memory, which relates to procedural activities. Researchers have shown that both mentioned types of memory can be improved by training; still the improvement is better noticeable in the area of the crystallized memory (e.g. Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 41). Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has likewise stated that the fluid intelligence, “ingenuity”, weakens with age whilst the crystallized intelligence, “wisdom”, remains the same (p. 54); the core of the terms nevertheless being treated differently.

Apart from this division, memory has traditionally been divided into the short-term and the long-term memory. Researchers have proved the deterioration in the short-term memory in older age, while the long-term one remains efficient as in young age; the difference concerns methods of encoding and recalling (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 94).

**Intelligence.** Studies on aging have demonstrated that learning ability does not decline with age. If older people remain healthy, their intellectual abilities and skills do not decline (Ostwald & Williams, 1987). According to Chrástková (2010) and Gruss (2009), older people have nevertheless a smaller capacity for information processing and also for organisation of notions, categorization and transition from concrete to abstract notions (p. 14; pp. 77-78). As regards individual skills important for learning language the

pronunciation skill remains untouched, for it is a part of the crystallized intelligence (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 130). Nevertheless, the skill of the right use of syntax declines; older people, regardless of their education and intelligence, tend to make more mistakes in using the appropriate tense and forget to use articles (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 133).

According to two-component model of intelligence, which divides intelligence into the mechanics and into the pragmatics of intelligence, skills, which are influenced by the mechanics – attention, deduction, speed of perception – evince the decay of their productivity from the middle adulthood. The mechanics refers to the neurophysiological structure of the brain, which is biologically determined. The cognitive pragmatics represents culturally conditioned aspects of intelligence; i.e. what is transmitted by tradition and what people acquire during the process of their socialization. However, these two components permanently co-operate (Gruss, 2009, pp. 154-155).

**Compensation Strategies.** Life knowledge, which can be referred to as the wisdom, helps older people to balance the decrease of other mental abilities. Křivohlavý (2011) has illustrated this by giving an example of older typists, who equal the younger ones in competences concerning the speed and the accuracy of typing. The difference was in the way they wrote; the older typists compensated their deficit by the ability of reading and remembering longer section than the younger typists. The way of reading of the text is an acquired ability; on the contrary the speed of keys pressing is the innate one (p. 34). Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has confirmed that elderly people are able to compensate their lower accuracy in certain skills by their experiences and knowledge of better strategies (p. 62).

Gruss (2009) has introduced the theory of the selective optimalization with compensation as one of the effective methods of preparation for the old age. Eighty-year old pianist was asked how it was possible that he remained such a great artist even in his respected age. The pianist stated three reasons: “He interpreted just few compositions (an example of selection), he trained these compositions more often (an example of optimalization) and he made use of the great contrasts in the rate of playing, so the performance seemed to be more fresh (an example of compensation)” (Gruss, 2009, p.15). Gruss (2009) has therefore explained the mechanism of selection, as the choice of one of the type of behaviour; the mechanism of optimalization, which is the increased effort; and

the mechanism of compensation, which refers to the maintaining an appropriate level of a performance (p. 141).

Nevertheless, selective attention, the ability to concentrate on a task in a presence of disturbing stimuli, deteriorates with age (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 75). Therefore, the effective cognitive strategies used in elderly age, apart from the optimization and compensation, can be “the Method of Loci”, which uses visualization to recall required information, and other mnemonic devices (Gruss, 2009, p. 149). Finally, Gruss (2009) has suggested that the learning and optimization in older age can be helped by technologies, with the preservation of the high level of individualization (p. 142-143).

**Personality Characteristic.** Personality characteristics may play a key role in terms of senior teaching, as they can be very firmly connected to the learning style and motivation. Křivohlavý (2011) has presented an overview of the good aspects of the character, divided into six categories: wisdom and experience (e.g. creativity, originality, love for learning, critical thinking, curiosity), courage (endurance, diligence, honesty, vitality), humanity (love, kindness, altruism, sympathy), justice (politeness, team cooperation), moderation and self-control (humility, forgive, self-management) and transcendence (gratefulness, evaluation of beauty, optimism, humour and playfulness, spirituality) (pp. 86-87). These aspects of character are acquired during life. In addition, both genders are more and more introverted as people age; researches have showed that men in their sixties are more introverted than women of the same age (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 151).

Regarding the development of the five basic personality factors (the so-called “Big Five”) – emotional stability, extroversion, openness, kindness and dutifulness – at first there is a decay of the emotional stability and at the same time there is the improvement of the kindness and dutifulness; this can be referred to as a social maturity. On the other hand, the openness to new experience has worsen (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 158).

**Creativity.** Stuart-Hamilton (1994) has observed the creativity in older age, which is worse than in young age; seniors can miss the sufficient amount of the mental freshness (p. 81). According to Gruss (2009), the creation of association is damaged and similarly, the connection between particular aspects of events (i.e. place, time and content of the event) is less reliable (p. 144). Other researchers, though, do not agree with this opinion. They have argued that many masterpieces have been created in an elderly age and



sometimes even in spite of the author's disability. For example Beethoven was deaf; nevertheless, this may have been the reason of "his innovation of world of sounds" (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, p. 82). Lastly, experts warn about the practical reason of lower level of creativity in older age and this is the necessity to earn a living wage (Stuart-Hamilton, 1994, pp. 83-84).

In conclusion, learning and subsequently language learning in senior age is undoubtedly different from learning in childhood. Walsh and Diller (1978) have summarized:

The advantage for adults is that the neural cells responsible for higher-order linguistic processes such as understanding semantic relations and grammatical sensitivity develop with age. Especially in the areas of vocabulary and language structure, adults are actually better language learners than children. Older learners have more highly developed cognitive systems, are able to make higher order associations and generalizations, and can integrate new language input with their already substantial learning experience. They also rely on long-term memory rather than the short-term memory function used by children and younger learners for rote learning.

The core of these advantages is preserved also in senior age, however with occurring functional and biological deceleration.

### **Social Aspects of Ageing**

The last part of the first section provides a brief description of particular social aspects of ageing, two main topics being seniors in society and the lifestyle of seniors. According to Gruss (2009), contemporary society emphasizes the younger population, although the structure of a society is changing due to lengthening lifetime, low birth-rate and migration (p. 39); it is therefore necessary that elderly people are provided with more opportunities to their next development and active social life. The changes should cover practically all areas of life: family politics, employment, the system of universities, transporting infrastructure, the presentation of old age in the media and many others (Gruss, 2009, p. 14).

There exists a new term - ageism. According to Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008), it refers to the age discrimination and at the same time, it includes the negative notions of ageing (p. 13). On the other hand, a number of organisations, helping groups and civil associations that are concerned with the senior issues have arisen in the last few years. Similarly, this area is also dealt with in international documents, for example the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing that was accepted in 2002. The document dictates the objectives for the present as well as the near future (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, pp. 14-15). In the Czech Republic, the National Programme to Prepare for Ageing (*Národní program přípravy na stárnutí*) was approved in 2002 and its main aim is change people's attitudes to senior population. In 1990, The United Nations declared October 1<sup>st</sup> to be the International Day of Older Persons (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 16).

As regards seniors' lifestyles, Křivohlavý (2011) has illustrated the main events or life changes after retiring. He has emphasized the sufficiency of spare time, repose, maturation of personality, self-recognition, subjective notion of slower time passing and inner enrichment (pp. 23-24). Researchers have showed that social activities contribute to feelings of the happiness (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 113).

According to Stuart-Hamilton (1994), the quality of spare time may descend in senior age. For example, older people read less than younger and they select undemanding texts, such as magazines, newspapers or entertaining fiction in more than 90 percent. Older people are handicapped by poorer vision and as for loud reading, it is negatively influenced by their poorer hearing (pp. 127-128). On the other hand, Gruss (2009) has suggested that elderly people have a quite high level of self-confidence as well as an overall feeling of satisfaction. They can therefore deal with uncomfortable situations mainly because of their experiences (pp. 13-14).

The first part of the theoretical background has described the phenomenon of ageing from three aspects: biological, psychological and social with emphasis on cognitive processes that are connected with learning. With respect to the research question of this thesis, it may be summarized that seniors are able to learn a foreign language, yet using different strategies than in younger age. The following part outlines general English teaching methodology.

## English Teaching Methodology

This chapter briefly describes the basic methods of teaching English in general. First, traditional language teaching methodologies are introduced and then the topic of teaching individual language items, i.e. vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, speaking and writing, is covered.

### Teaching Methodologies

As defined in Ur (2012): “A methodology is a collection of teaching procedures that accord with and apply a particular approach” (p. 7). According to Scrivener (2011), it is a “way of teaching” and the choice of the method depends on teachers’ beliefs about what language is, how people learn and how teaching helps people learn (p. 31). Except for teaching techniques and activity types, teaching method covers also the aims of the course, curriculum, ways of relating with students and ways of assessing (Scrivener, 2011, p. 31).

**The Grammar-Translation Method.** This method is based on the explanation of grammatical rules and translation of texts from and to target language (Ur, 2012, p. 7). Students work with the written form of the language and more formal registers; they mainly read texts, do exercises and tests and write essays. Teachers use the students’ L1 almost exclusively (Scrivener, 2011, p. 31; Ur, 2012, p. 7).

**The Audio-Lingual Method.** Here the aim is to “form good habits through students listening to model dialogues with repetition and drilling but with little or no teacher explanation” (Scrivener, 2011, p. 31). According to Ur (2012), it is based on the idea “that language is a set of habits” and, except for drilling and learning by heart, it involves a lot of repetition (p. 8). It focuses primarily on grammar and on accuracy rather than fluency. Richards and Rodgers (2001) have emphasized the role of instructional materials, which assist teachers to develop “language mastery in the learner” (p. 63).

**The Communicative Approach.** This method is based on beliefs that learners learn best through naturalistic acquisition processes and meaningful communication. Ur (2012) has noted that conveying meaning is more important than accuracy and that the

classroom is more learner-centred (p. 8). Communicative tasks that learners perform are for instance problem-solving, conveying information or filling in information on a map from instructions. Scrivener (2011) has distinguished two versions of communicative approach: the stronger, where students learn by communication tasks “with a limited role for explicit teaching and traditional practice exercises”, and the weaker, where students learn through “a wide variety of teaching, exercises, activities and study, with a bias towards speaking and listening work” (p. 32).

**Total Physical Response.** This is useful mainly for beginners and students of lower level; learners listen to instructions from the teacher, understand and do things in response; they have the primary roles of listeners and performers. They are not required to speak until they are ready (Scrivener, 2011, p. 32; Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 75). As noted in Richards and Rodgers (2011), grammar is taught inductively as the method requires students’ attention to meaning rather than to the forms of the items (p. 76).

**The Direct Method.** According to Ur (2012), this method is based on a reaction against the grammar-translation method. It requires to use just the target language in the classroom and bans to use of the students’ L1 (p. 7). Except for this, Richards and Rodgers (2001) have emphasized other basic principles and procedures: only everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught; grammar is taught inductively; new teaching points are introduced orally; concrete words are taught through demonstration, object and pictures and abstract words are taught by association of ideas; both speech and listening comprehension are taught and correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized (p. 12).

**The Silent Way.** Scrivener (2011) has noted that this method requires learners to take active ownership of their language learning together with paying great attention to what they say. The role of the teacher is restricted and specially designed wallcharts are used (p. 32). Richards and Rodgers (2001) have argued that learners are expected to develop responsibility, autonomy and independence, which is based on the absence of correction, explanations and repeated modeling by the teacher (p. 85). The teacher uses gestures and charts in order to elicit and shape student responses and so must be both facile and creative (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 86).

**Community Language Learning.** According to Scrivener (2011), it is a method based “around use of the learners’ first language and with teacher help in mediating. It

aims to lower anxiety and allows students to communicate in a more genuine way than is typically possible in classrooms” (p. 32).

Among other teaching methods we find for example The natural approach, Task-Based Learning, Lexical approaches, Person-centred approaches, Dogme and The post-communicative approach (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 32-33; Ur, 2012, p. 8). In fact, however, there are very few teachers who have chosen just a single method in their teaching. They rather aim to discover what is effective in their classrooms and slowly build their personal methodology.

### **Teaching Individual Items**

**Teaching Vocabulary.** The necessity of learning vocabulary is unquestionable in the case of English language learning. According to Scrivener (2011), vocabulary needs to be taught systematically and through the four stages: meeting a new lexical item and understanding it and its use – practising using it – memorising it – recalling and using it (p. 188). Next, it is useful to present lexical items which are connected in some way (words connected with the same location or event; words that have the same grammar and similar use; words that can be used to achieve success in a specific task) and to systematically teach students the meaning of prefixes, suffixes and root words (Scrivener, 2011, p. 189; Pikulski & Templeton, 2007, p. 4).

Ur (2012) and Pikulski and Templeton (2007) have suggested some basic tips in presenting new vocabulary, first of them being presenting written as well as spoken form in both receptive and productive way<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, the meaning and application of words must be clear for students and the ensuring that students really understand it can be done by pictures, real objects, gesture and mime, translation, definition or description, giving examples and sample uses of the item in context. Thirdly, for optimizing impact teachers can use mnemonic devices, link words together when teaching and reviewing them (e.g. fat + pig), give words personal significance or emotional connection and put the most important ones earlier (p. 65; p. 7). Scrivener (2011) has added some techniques for

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. that the teacher writes the word on the board and says it and at the same time students are required to write it down and to pronounce it

presentation of lexis: offering some cues (pictures, information, miming, pointing at the object, explanation of the meaning, tell a short story; check students' understanding); seeing and hearing words in specific contexts and practising items (repeat them and use them in short dialogues) (p. 189). Ur (2012) has also suggested that students should use vocabulary notebooks and think up their own mnemonic devices for remembering words (pp. 66-69).

Practice and review are also very necessary parts of vocabulary teaching. Possible methods of reviewing single-item could be simple reminding students of words meaning, giving them an opportunity to look at words in lesson time, writing items on the board and invite students to identify those that they do not remember, dictations, brainstorming new words, quick bingo and guessing (Ur, 2012, p. 70). Scrivener (2011) has suggested some lexical practice activities and games, for instance discussions, communicative activities and role plays, making use of the lexis in written tasks; matching tasks (pictures to words, parts of items together), using prefixes and suffixes to built new lexical items, classifying them into a list, filling crosswords or gaps in sentences, memory games, making stories from the pictures and offered words, answering questions, making up own questions, demonstrating the conversation, writing a letter (a complaint,...) (pp. 191-193). Methods of reviewing items in the context are for example composing sentences, that contextualize words (preferably personalized or clearly false sentences), composing a story and finding collocations (Ur, 2012, pp. 70-71). Other practical tips suggested by Ur (2012) and Pikulski and Templeton (2007) are getting students to review new vocabulary on their own, using word cards, listing new items on mobile electronic devices, displaying the new vocabulary permanently, recalling at the end of the lesson, teaching students to use dictionaries, thesauruses and other reference works, encouraging extensive reading and going back to earlier items (p. 71; pp. 7,9).

**Teaching Grammar.** As for teaching grammar, at first decision about which grammatical features should be taught must be made. This will depend mainly on the aim of the course. Ur (2012) has noticed that grammatical accuracy matters in some situations more, in some situations it matters less. However, for the purpose of this thesis, methods of teaching of grammar are more relevant. The methods can be implicit, which means that students are provided with plenty of opportunities to hear, read and use the correct forms, but without any explanation; explicit, which cover explanations of rules as well, or a

combination of both (Ur, 2012, p. 78). According to Krashen (1999), “the grammar is best acquired implicitly, through plenty of comprehensible input” (as cited in Ur, 2012, p. 78). Contrary to that, Norris and Ortega (2001) have discovered that explicit instructions in grammar help to better results (as cited in Ur, 2012, p. 79). Students therefore need both procedures for learning and teaching to be effective.

Ur (2012) has presented basic tips in presenting grammar, which can be covered either as a part of the course syllabus or as a respond to repeated mistakes in a particular feature that are made by students. Firstly, providing students with examples of the target feature in meaningful contexts before explaining it is suggested, together with the tip that teachers should both say and write examples of the target form. Secondly, teaching both form and meaning and using grammatical terminology with more advanced students is advised. Ur (2012) has suggested to explain the grammar in L1 unless students are proficient enough to understand it and similarly she has suggested to compare English structures with those similar in L1 if it is possible. Thirdly, it is often useful to provide an explicit rule, a simple generalization, with noting obvious exceptions. Lastly, students can devise the rule themselves, which is inductive process, in contrast to deductive, where the rule is given by the teacher and later work on examples. Again, a compromise can be “to provide very obvious examples, and then lead the students towards the formulation of a rule by guiding questions and hints” (Ur, 2012, p. 81). Scrivener (2011) has proposed to establish the context (e.g. by drawing a picture), to establish the meaning of the item, to practice the target language by drill, to generate more sentences from the context and to record a substitution table in notebooks (pp. 161-162).

Among other practical tips there are using pictures and real objects to help with the explanation, asking students to demonstrate their understanding by giving examples or explaining the rule in their own words, getting feedback from students about how much they understood and remember and teaching early in the lesson, when students are fresher, talking slowly and in non-complicated language (Ur, 2012, p. 83; Scrivener, 2011, p. 165).

Next, there are several methods of grammar practice, which range from the most controlled and accuracy-oriented to the fluency activities giving opportunities for the free use of the grammar in the context. The first ones are awareness tasks, where students are to look at the text and mark all the examples of a particular grammatical point. Then there are controlled drills, i.e. students produce examples of the structure according to very clear,

closed-ended cues. Next, controlled responses through sentence completion, rewriting or translation follow; here, in order to respond correctly, students already need to understand the text. Subsequent methods are meaningful drills, where the responses are again very controlled, but students have a limited choice and need to understand, and guided, meaningful practice, where students form sentences according to a set pattern, but use their own vocabulary. Among the last types of methods belong (structure-based) free sentence composition; in this case students are provided with a stimulus (e.g. a picture) and invited to compose their own sentences, having been directed to use the particular structure; (structure-based) discourse composition, where they are directed to use at least some examples of the structure within the discourse, and free discourse. In the case of the last type, students are given no specific direction to use the structure; the task is however designed in that way that examples of a particular grammar feature are likely to appear (Ur, 2012, pp. 82-84). According to Scrivener (2011), drills are very useful at this stage and can be varied in several ways (for example substitution drills, transformation drills etc.) (pp. 170-173).

**Teaching Listening.** Elizabeth and Bhaskara (2007) have noted that listening and speaking skills should be taught first, before reading and writing (p. 277). Ur (2012) and Scrivener (2011) have warned that listening tasks that are done at schools do not prepare for the real-life listening, whose features are brevity, less careful pronunciation, informal vocabulary, unfinished sentences, noise, redundancy, varied accents and facial expression and body language. It is therefore suggested that teachers do not use just recordings but also real people, including teacher talk; that they should develop their reading-aloud skills and vary samples of listening texts in terms of style or English varieties (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 250-251; Ur, 2012, pp. 103-108). Moreover, students should know in advance some basic facts about the topic of the listening text and about the purpose of the listening exercise, i.e. they should be given a clear task before they listen. Students should also learn selective listening, which means to ignore irrelevant parts, and finally, they should respond to the information during the listening, not at the end. Ur (2012) has proposed that sometimes listening practice can be done without any task, but simply for the amusement of the listening text. Teachers can tell stories, anecdotes, jokes or fairy tales; students may enjoy watching a movie or listening to a poem. Similarly, there can occasionally be no



preparation for the listening activity, with the task being to determine the type of the text (p. 107-108).

As for the particular activities, Ur (2012) has divided them into four groups according to the complexity and amount of the required response. The first type is no overt response, which includes stories, songs and entertainment – films, theatre, video. The second type has activities with short responses; examples being obeying instructions, ticking off items, true/ false exercises, detecting mistakes by raising hands or calling out, cloze, guessing definitions from the teacher's description, skimming and scanning. The third type includes longer responses, with activities such as answering questions, note-taking, paraphrasing and translating, summarizing and long gapfilling. The last type has extended responses activities, for example problem-solving, interpretation and dicto-gloss, where students try to reconstruct the original text by sharing their notes from the listening practice (pp. 108-110). Scrivener (2011) has suggested also home recording of teachers' talk (p. 262) and Elizabeth and Bhaskara (2007) have proposed to recite poetry to practice listening skills (p. 188). Finally, it is sometimes good to adapt the activities in order to help the students, for instance by checking comprehension, redefining instructions or by reducing the amount of required items (Ur, 2012, pp. 114-115).

**Teaching Reading.** When speaking about teaching reading, several stages have to be considered. First, some learners need to learn a new writing system, then to decode single words and finally to read and understand meaningful text, using their world knowledge and common sense (Scrivener, 2011, p. 264; Ur, 2012, p. 136). Ur (2012) has next suggested that reading aloud is usually useful only at the early stages of learning the letters, but for more advanced reading it is better to use silent reading, as it allows learners to study the text at their own pace, to focus on the meaning, to skip unimportant words and to construct the meanings. Ur (2012) has noted that it is better for the students to begin reading only after acquiring some basic knowledge of the spoken language, which also means that more interesting tasks for reading practice can be given. Next, it is more useful when students know the most common sound of the letter; the name of the letter is used only for explaining spelling, which is more appropriate for more advanced beginners. Another point is at what stage the conventional order of the alphabet should be taught. It is usually taught very early, but there is not much justification for this. However, the order of

the alphabet is needed when looking up words in paper dictionaries; it is therefore useful to teach it, but not necessarily at the early stages of learning (Ur, 2012, pp. 139-140).

There is a great amount of reading tasks; from these examining recognizing individuals letters and connecting them to pictures, identifying cognates in L1, identifying the meaning of words and doing tasks to demonstrate comprehension (e.g. circle the words that denote the animals, draw a line between words that are connected etc.), to understanding whole sense-units, for example drawing according to description, connecting sentences to pictures etc. (Ur, 2012. pp. 141-142). Scrivener (2011) has suggested that the text should be used for real life reading tasks (p. 265). Students usually need a clear purpose for reading a text, exceptions being reading a story or a very entertaining text. The purpose can be for instance to find out a piece of information, to summarize the main points, to respond to the author's point of view etc. (Ur, 2012, p. 145).

In the first stage, students learn to be fluent readers, which means "to access the meaning of the text successfully and rapidly, with minimum hesitations" (Ur, 2012, p. 143). Ur (2012) has listed the characteristics of fluent reading, which are: comprehensible language level, content that involves students' background knowledge, speed, selective attention that includes also scanning, skimming and skipping less important parts and unknown vocabulary, prediction, motivation, awareness of purpose and using different strategies to different kinds of reading (p. 143). Grabe (2009) has introduced procedures that combine a series of strategies when reading. One of them is KWL, which means Know – Want to know – Learnt, where readers, according to the title of the text, make notes about what they already known and what they would like to learn, then read the text and again make notes what they have learnt. Another technique can be SQ3R, which stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Review (as cited in Ur, 2012, p. 146).

Lastly, extensive reading is the final stage of teaching reading, which refers to silent reading of self-chosen long texts for pleasure. The teachers' role is to encourage students to read books, to help them choose and to be a role model as a reader. Extensive reading contributes greatly on the increase of the reading fluency and confidence. Scrivener (2011) and Ur (2012) have advised to devote some of the class time to silent reading, to bring books to the class, to keep a reader's diary and to have reserve reading materials (p.270; p. 147).

**Teaching Speaking.** According to Ur (2012), there exist several problems that concern getting students to speak in a classroom: shyness and inhibitions, finding things to say, low participation of individuals and L1 use (p. 118). Scrivener (2011) has agreed that the main goals in teaching speaking are students' fluency and confidence while speaking (p. 213). The following are therefore practical tips for the design of speaking activities. Firstly, using group or pair work increases the amount of student's talk and also lowers the inhibitions of students who are too shy to speak in front of the whole class. Secondly, the activity should be based on easy language, at the lower level than used in other learning situations at the same class; the vocabulary and grammar should be reviewed before the activity. Thirdly, a careful choice of the topic and task will stimulate students' interest and motivation. Even students themselves could choose a topic of their interest. Lastly, students must know the purpose of the activity and conditions for its success (Ur, 2012, pp. 118-119; Scrivener, 2011, pp. 211-212). Other practical tips involve using discussion leaders, who will regulate the students and control the time; L1 monitors and careful correcting of errors, for example by noting them and discussing them with the class later and ability to ask "open questions" (Ur, 2012, pp. 119-120; Scrivener, 2011, p. 212)

Ur (2012) has divided speaking activities into two groups; first there are topic-based activities and second there are task-based activities. In the case of the first one, students are just to discuss a given topic or opinion; it is greatly based on their knowledge and experience. In the case of the second one, students are primarily to do some tasks, which involve a lot of speaking. Ur (2012) has discovered that most students are more motivated and interested in the case of the task-based activities (p. 120).

As for individual activities, there is again a range of activities from the most simple ones intended for beginners to more advanced. There are dialogues, where students are required to learn the text by heart; then describing pictures, for instance with marking the number of sentences. Then there are activities that include picture differences or discovering things in common. Role play and problem solving belong to the more advanced activities (Ur, 2012, pp. 122-123). Ur (2012) has noted that more advanced classes will need to learn English for more formal presentations. These can be short, for example description of an object or a photography and introducing himself or herself; medium-length, for instance narrative (a joke, a story,...), supported by using of illustrations, instructions or recommendations; or long, examples being information based

in the previous research and presented as a project, or an argument from any interesting topic (pp. 126-127). Communicative activities such as information gaps are useful activities to practice speaking skills (Scrivener, 2011, p. 218).

Teaching and improvement students' pronunciation belong also to the area of teaching speaking. Elizabeth and Bhaskara (2007) have warned that it is necessary to use audiovisual aids such as tape recorders or films for students to learn the correct pronunciation (p. 42). However, Ur (2012) has suggested that teachers should concentrate on rhythm, intonation, stress, the contrast between long and short vowels and between the voiced plosives and unvoiced plosives, initial consonant clusters and the use of intonation to signal stress of a particular word. Pronunciation improvement activities are: receptive awareness-raising, focused explanations, imitation, production and meaningful tasks contextualizing pronunciation items (pp. 128-131).

**Teaching Writing.** As Ur (2012) has noticed, writing is different from the other four skills as following: it is permanent, dense, time-independent; the addressees are not physically present; it is produced slowly; it is learnt in high-prestige form and it uses standard forms. Writing therefore has to be systematically taught, with the emphasis on skills such as rewriting an editing and use of acceptable language that results in organized and coherent text (Ur, 2012, p. 151). The distinction has to be made between formal and informal writing, which are usually described as two distinct types in terms of grammar and lexis, punctuation, detachment, editing and redrafting, length and explicitness. Students should be aware "of the differences in general and in what contexts and circumstances each may be appropriate" (Ur, 2012, p. 153). Students, however, need to learn the basic skills to compose formal texts and then they may be taught the specific features of informal writing.

Ur (2012) has warned that students should be taught not only handwriting, but also typing, "as most writing today is done on a computer" (p. 156). Students should be given opportunities to use the keyboard and word-processing tools to format their writing and to create a presentation. As for individual writing tasks, Scrivener (2011) has again emphasized their purpose, their relevance for students' needs and the audience (p. 243). Writing tasks, intended for beginners, contain copying, colour copying, thoughtful copying (when students are to copy, for example, only names of animals), doing exercises, transliteration, dictation, completion or labelling pictures. In the middle there is guided

writing and next there are tasks that promote fluent writing, for instance creative writing (writing a story based on some stimulus, a personal anecdote or a poem); instructions and directions; interpersonal communication (a letter or e-mail applying for a job, a reply to a letter etc.); description of a view, place, person or process; responses to literature in form of a synopsis or a review; persuasion and lastly information (a newspaper report or a short paper) (Ur, 2012. pp. 158-159; Scrivener, 2011, p. 235). Other activities including writing activities in class include collaborative planning, five-minute writing or multiple contributions<sup>2</sup> (Ur, 2012, p. 160).

According to Ur (2012), the best way to promote students' writing ability is through the process-writing cycle, which is the "experience of writing the first draft, getting feedback and rewriting" (p. 160). After students have been given the assignment, they should be provided the support, for instance by displaying key vocabulary, by providing a model text, by discussion of a possible content, by guidance on the organization of the text and by an opportunity to consult the draft with the teacher at the beginning of the writing (Scrivener, 2011, p. 246).

Sometimes students may need to be taught particular features of a writing skill, such as the spelling and punctuation. For the first one, the spelling, Ur (2012) has suggested to teach basic spelling rules and to practice them in forms of dictations and the recall and share technique<sup>3</sup> (Ur, 2012, p. 164). For the second one, the punctuation and capital letters, practice tasks include writing punctuation into a text; dictation of common and proper nouns; dictation of fairly simple text and recall and share technique again (Ur, 2012. p. 165; Elizabeth & Bhaskara, 2007, p. 261).

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<sup>2</sup> students are given a topic and asked to write a phrase on it at the top of a sheet of paper; then they pass the paper to their neighbour, who adds another line, continuing the idea from the previous students (Ur, 2012, p. 160)

<sup>3</sup> students are given a minute to look at items on the board, they try to remember them and after deleting the items they try to recall them first individually and then by sharing; finally, items are displayed again (Ur, 2012, p. 164)

## Teaching Seniors

The last part of the theoretical background provides a synthesis of the previous two parts, dealing with the issue of teaching seniors. The lifelong education has become a necessity and it is important to open it to the general public. Education contributes to the training of self-confidence, to the use of modern technologies, to the prevention of the cognitive impairments and therefore to the improvement of the quality of life in ageing (Křivohlavý, 2011, p. 54). This section provides a brief look into the history of the education of adults and seniors, and also outlines practical tips for teachers about teaching elderly students.

### Adult and Senior Education over the History

According to Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008), as far back as in 17<sup>th</sup> century, Komenský suggested lifelong education; his idea has been fulfilled just recently, by establishment of the Universities of the Third Age. The school for seniors should have had three classes, divided approximately according to age, and its task should have been the help with the evaluation of seniors' life and with the preparation to the death and its acceptance (pp. 27-28).

In the fifties, the scientific branch gerontopedagogy, which is a part of andragogy<sup>4</sup>, emerged. Its aim is to seek new ways of preparing seniors for the last period of life (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 52). Livečka (2004) has divided the education of seniors into four areas: preventive, which is performed already in the adulthood and whose aim is to prevent mental diseases; rehabilitative, which is focused on maintaining the mental and physical state; exercising, which aims to find new hobbies and to receive help from others and lastly anticipatory area, which should prepare for the future life changes (in Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 52).

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<sup>4</sup> the science about the education in the adulthood

As noted in Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008), education of seniors began in the form of lectures in senior clubs and retirement homes. The united blocks called the Academy of the Third Age have arisen and in 1986 the cycle of lectures was firstly organised at the Palacký University. The first monothematic field of the Universities of the Third Age (U3A) in Prague, The Human Biology, was opened in 1986. Recently, almost all universities offer the programs of U3A (pp. 52-53). Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008) have estimated that there are approximately 4 thousands of senior students in the Czech Republic. Next, the spare-time universities (STU) can be chosen by seniors. These are intergenerational and have a strong social orientation. They can be attended also by mothers on maternity leave, unemployed or invalid persons. Students pay only a symbolic enrolment fee (p. 53). Except for the U3As, there is also a possibility of Lifelong Learning targeted at senior citizens, which is offered in Pilsen Institute of Lifelong Learning (Socrates Grundtvig, n.d.).

Recently, the senior education has started to have two main focuses. The first is the general senior education, which has a non-professional character and is focused on the areas of information sciences and languages, memory training etc. Apart from this, it satisfies the desire of social contact with contemporaries and of broadening general knowledge. The second focus aims to the preserving of the professional qualification, expert knowledge and skills. The aim here is to maintain seniors' independence and to allow them to be actively involved in a community (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, pp. 52-53). Petříková and Čornaničová (2004) have added other important functions of senior education: anticipatory, whose task is to prepare to life changes, and inter-generation understanding, where the education functions as a means of strengthening the inter-generation relations (in Nečasová, 2011, pp. 28-29).

### **Practical Tips for Teaching Seniors**

According to Ur (2012), teaching adults is substantially different from teaching children. The first key aspect is the students' motivation. Motivation is crucial for satisfying human needs, which cover not only the biological but also the social and existential demands. It is a key term in case of learning and teaching. Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008) have suggested three keys for a better motivation of seniors: the desire to

reach the aim, the confidence in their own abilities and the vision of the achieved change (p. 36). It is important to determine clear aims, which are definable and achievable in a short time period (p. 37). Next, adults usually learn voluntarily, which stands for the seniors all the more so. On the other hand, adults are more critical and more likely to complain to the teacher or the institution if the teaching is not satisfactory for them. Teachers must be aware that some tact may be needed in teaching adults and especially seniors, who may not feel comfortable in the role of a student and may find difficult to cope with the teacher's authority. Teachers should therefore treat these students respectfully and supportively, primarily in giving feedback and inviting active participation (Ur, 2012, p. 268).

Secondly, the differences of teaching seniors in comparison with teaching children are also in the area of students' cognitive abilities, as it has been noted in the first section of this chapter. The learning material, which does not have a logical structure and practical implication, is acquired with more difficulty; it is therefore suitable to concentrate on the use of logical-sensory memory (Chrástecká, 2010, p. 29). Moreover, the short-term memory stops functioning and the long-term memory works selectively, thus the practise needs more time; it is therefore important to make use of the acquired knowledge from the previous profession and to give clear instructions (Křivohlavý, 2011, p.55). Senior learning is next affected by uncertainty about one's own skills and abilities; thus the praise and encouragement from the tutor is a vital aspect of the process. As for practical tips, it is effective to incorporate more breaks into the class and not to teach in the evenings (Nečasová, 2011, p.31). Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008) have suggested the most suitable time to be between 9<sup>30</sup>-11<sup>30</sup> a.m. and 3<sup>30</sup>-5<sup>00</sup> p.m. (p. 54). The authors next have summarized the advice in the case of senior education (Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008, p. 55):

- Seniors need their own method and pace to understand something new.
- They need transparent and illustrative written information.
- Seniors cannot deal with too much information at the same time; it is therefore necessary to divide information into smaller pieces.
- It is important to express clearly, slowly and to ask for assurance about comprehension.



- It is important to repeat individual steps, to explain these steps carefully and to let students try the steps.
- It is impossible to want the seniors to learn by heart. The material is repeated and then put into the long-term memory.
- Seniors need to know their own limits and their motives for learning.
- Seniors need to be praised and appreciated for their effort.

Other practical tips, suggested by Joiner (1981), concern the importance of the compensation of classroom environment for visual or auditory impairments by combining audio input with visual presentation of new material, good lighting, and elimination of outside noise (as cited in Schleppegrell, 1987). Moreover, Klevetová and Dlabalová (2008) have suggested the list of topics, which are accepted well by seniors: childhood, school, hobbies, job, marriage, relationships, children, culture, film,....; natural topics (seasons, traditions); significant life events and experience (love, friendship,...); occupational activities; family events and meetings; politics and medial information; food and recipes; memories; advices and opinions; what would they do if they could... (p. 111).

Lastly, Socrates Grundtvig (n.d.) has proposed that an adult-oriented didactic should stress the improvement of meta skills and the retrieval of notions already acquired. Similarly important is that teachers should analyse the seniors' learning needs carefully and adapt the structure of the course accordingly; seniors, who need to communicate with neighbours, for instance, need to learn polite phrases more than conjugation (de Bretagne, 2007).

**Language Teaching.** In terms of language teaching, certain methods are inappropriate for older adults. According to Schleppegrell (1987) these are methods and activities that rely on good auditory discrimination, oral drills and memorization, fast-paced drills, oral repetitions and competitive exercises; “the adult learns best not by rote, but by integrating new concepts and material into already existing cognitive structures” (Schleppegrell, 1987). Except for the encouragement of the use of adult learning strategies, making the material relevant and motivating, teachers should also reduce anxiety and build self-confidence of senior learners. Extensive pronunciation correction or an expectation of error-free speech should not be present in senior language teaching as well (Schleppegrell, 1987).

On the other hand, providing opportunities for learners to work together, focusing on understanding rather than on producing language and reducing the focus on error correction can build learners' self-confidence and promote language learning (Chrástecká, 2010, p. 31). Teachers should provide opportunities for learners to be successful. According to Schleppegrell (1987), older adults have already developed particular learning strategies that have served them well in other contexts; they are likely to use these strategies to their advantage in language learning. Teachers should be therefore flexible enough "to allow different approaches to the learning task inside the classroom". Schleppegrell (1987) has also warned that materials and activities should incorporate real life experiences, structures and vocabulary that can be of immediate use to learners, in context which is similar to situations they will encounter the language.

Donaghy (2009) has proposed other practical tips for teaching seniors: in case of students' hearing loss, teachers should have visible face and lips while speaking, adjust the volume for listening exercises and videos, repeat listening texts and minimise background noises. In case of their failing eyesight, red or orange colour should be used and italics or too decorated font should be avoided. Moreover, comfortable chairs and tables could also contribute to senior learners' confidence. As for the teaching process itself, it is good to train the senior's minds by mnemonic devices and memory exercises, to give them more time to respond, to avoid timed tests as well as fast-paced presentations and to make it clear when one task begins and when it ends (Donaghy, 2009). It may be also appropriate to supplement listening exercises and texts with images and graphics, to promote interaction with younger students and to use the rehearsal strategies, drills and repetitions (Doyle, n.d; Donaghy, 2009). Doyle (n.d.) has also suggested watching videos and DVDs many times and to use audio books.

To sum up, Gary and N.Gary (1981) have suggested that seniors should be taught mainly the receptive skills, particularly listening. Effective adult language training programs use materials that provide "an interesting and comprehensible message, delay speaking practice and emphasize the development of listening comprehension, tolerate speech errors in the classroom and include aspects of culture and non-verbal language use in the instructional program" (Gary and N.Gary, 1981 as cited in Schleppegrell, 1987).

This chapter firstly provides an insight into the phenomenon of ageing, with a concise description of biological, psychological and social aspects of ageing process. The emphasis is put on the processes important to learning in senior age and on the brief description of their changes. The consequence of the first section is that even seniors can learn, albeit differently than children and with respect to their potential shyness, low level of self-confidence and other characteristics. The second part is a summary of general English language methodology, concerning teaching vocabulary, grammar and four basic language skills. The chapter is finished by the section of Teaching Seniors. Except for brief introduction to the adult and senior education in the Czech Republic, it already includes some implications and suggestions for seniors teaching according to their needs and characteristics, such as using drills, repetitions, orientation on receptive skills and tolerating speech errors. This question is next explored in the practical part of the thesis; the following is the Research Methodology Chapter.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As implied in the theoretical background, seniors may learn English language despite the change of psychological abilities and mental condition. The question to be researched was what preferences seniors have in English language learning. This chapter covers a clear description of the research method used to investigate the relevant information, i.e. the questionnaire, next the structure of the participants, and the process of collecting data and their processing.

#### **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was constructed in order to respond relevantly to the research question. It is divided into two parts; the first one conducts a survey of sociological structure of the participants (gender, education, former occupation, experiences with English language learning, motivation for language learning and estimated level of English). This information is given in the following section of this chapter, Participants. The second part of the questionnaire concerns the methods of teaching and learning English, which is connected mainly to the second and third part of the theoretical background. The structure of the questions maps the methods from the theoretical chapter (vocabulary, grammar, listening, reading, speaking, writing) with an additional section “Other”, which explores the assessment, homework etc. The questions are closed; participants having choice from *Yes – No – No experience* options.

Questions as well as the extent of the researched subject had to be extensively simplified in terms of length and thoroughness, so the participants would be able to respond to all the questions. Consideration had to be taken that participants did not have any pedagogical education, nor much English language learning experience; that is also why the questionnaire was presented to participants in the Czech language. Similarly, individual headings of language items (vocabulary, grammar, etc.) are preserved in the questionnaire to facilitate the participants’ orientation through the questions.

Some questions are deliberately asked in the way for me to recognize whether participants answer truthfully and maintain attention; for instance, there is the opposite polarity of the question *Do you mind...?* among questions such as *Is it useful for you...?* and

*Do you enjoy...?*. Further, expectations must be done that participants would need some help and explanations, as well as that they may not respond to questions entirely truthfully due to their state of mind during the survey – they may feel fear and anxiety. They may choose the answer “Yes” in all questions just because of their worry that they could be punished in some way. That is why closed questions, which examine the important ideas and where participants are often asked to choose just one option, are added after each section except for the last two sections. This way more objective answers would be received. There are two versions of the questionnaire included in Appendices, the Czech version that was presented to participants and its English translation.

## **Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses are:

*Hypothesis no. 1:* Participants prefer demonstrative learning, for example with the aid of pictures, real objects etc.

*Hypothesis no. 2:* Participants prefer learning of vocabulary rather than grammar.

*Hypothesis no. 3:* Participants prefer learning of receptive comprehension rather than productive language use.

*Hypothesis no. 4:* Participants do not keep exercise books and do not take any notes in the lessons.

*Hypothesis no. 5:* Participants do not want to have homework.

*Hypothesis no. 6:* Participants do not consider writing to be an important skill.

*Hypothesis no. 7:* Participants want to be evaluated for their effort, not their performances.

*Hypothesis no. 8:* Participants want to learn English in a similar way as it is taught to young children (game-based activities, singing songs, writing no notes etc.).

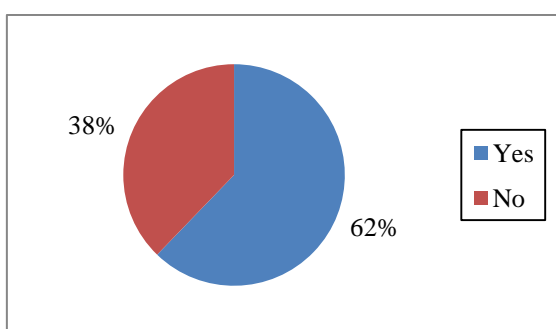
## **Participants**

The participants of the research are the students of the University of the Third Age in Cheb. To become a student, people need to be of the retirement age and pay 300,- Kč for one semester; however, also younger students are accepted in case that the capacity of the course is not filled. The previous education of the students is not relevant.

The sociological structure of the participants was examined by means of the first part of the questionnaire, in the Introduction Part. The following pie graphs illustrate the results from the first part of the questionnaire. There are questions worded and numbered as in the questionnaire, followed by results that are presented in percentages. The final number of participants who participated in the research was 48; nevertheless, three questionnaires were not completed in an acceptable way, thus I have finally analyzed 45 questionnaires.

## Results – Part one: Introduction

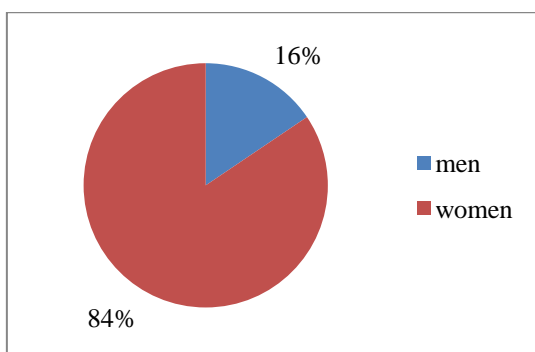
Have you ever attended an English course at the University of the Third Age?



**Graph 1: The previous experience with English courses at the University of the Third Age**

Out of all the participants, 62% have already attended an English course at the University of the Third Age.

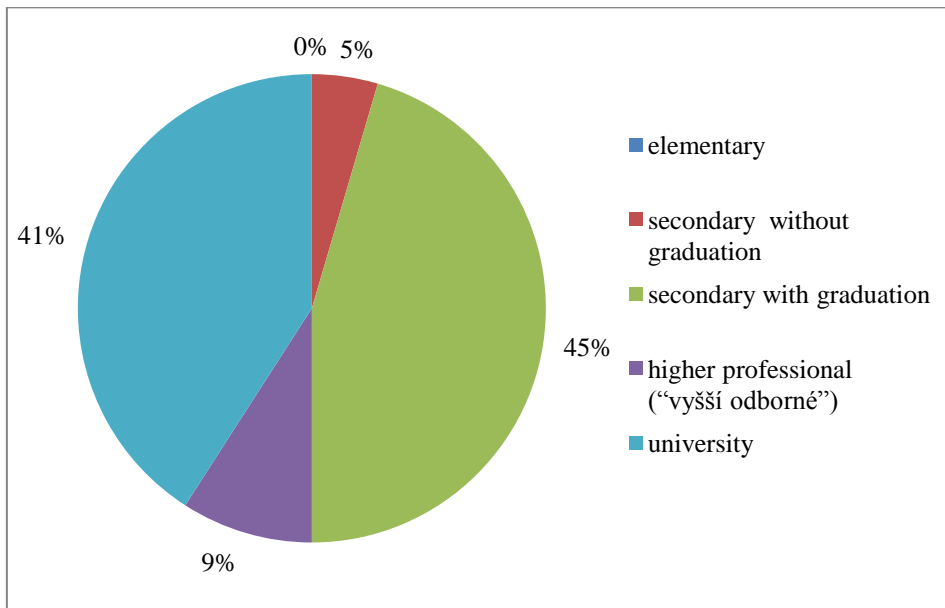
### 1. Gender



**Graph 2: The proportion of the gender of the participants**

As it is clearly visible from Graph 2 above, 84% of the participants were women.

## 2. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?



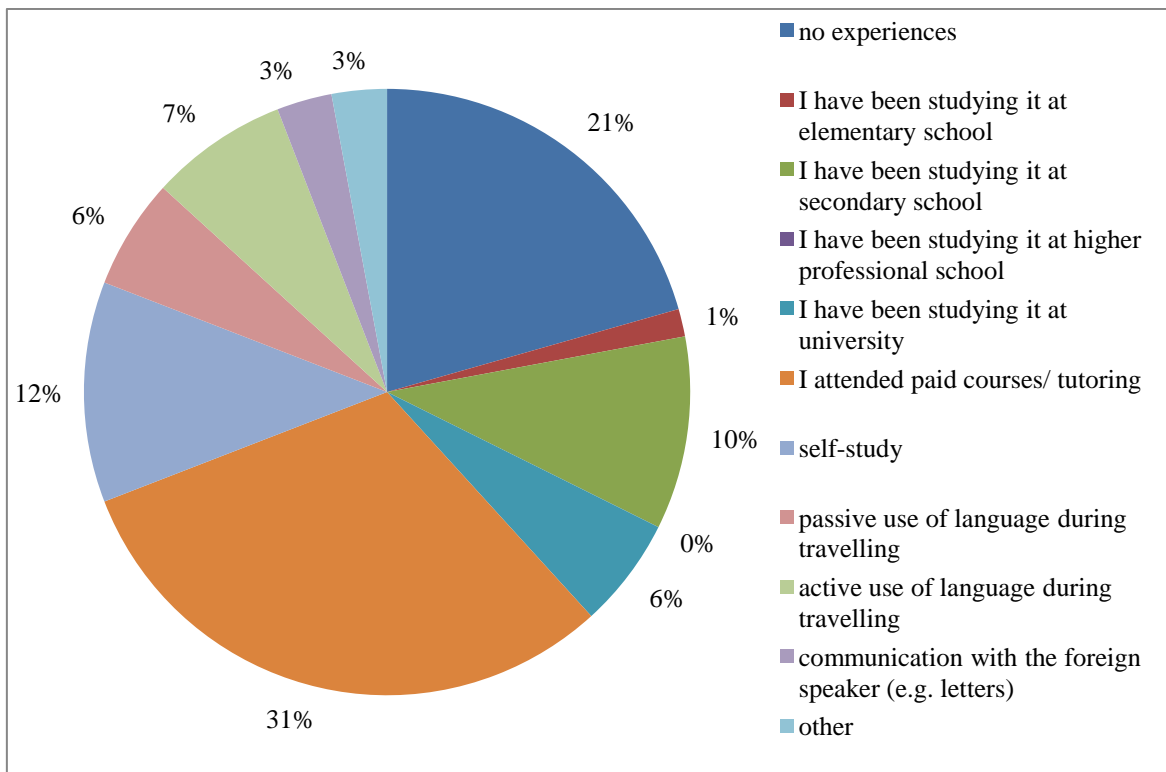
**Graph 3: The highest achieved level of education**

Most of the students have achieved the secondary education with graduation (45%). Then there were students with university degrees (41%), next students who have achieved higher professional education (9%) and lastly students with the secondary education without graduation (5%). There was no response of elementary education.

## 3. What was your previous job position/ positions?

The most frequent previous job positions of the participants were: teacher (6), nurse (5), economist (4) and accountant (4). Other employments, occurring two times or once, are: customs officer, office worker, dentist, controller, secretary, doctor, manager, chemist, technician, massage therapist, shop assistant, hygienist and laboratory technician.

**4. What are your present experiences with the English language study?** (you can choose more options)

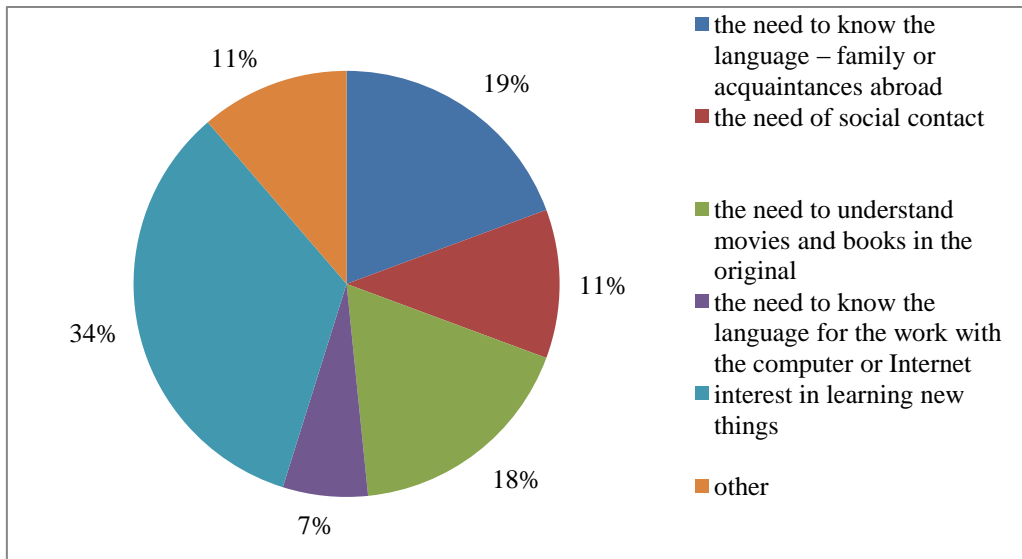


**Graph 4: The previous experience with the English language study**

Out of all participants, 31% have attended paid courses or had tutoring; 21% have had no experiences; 12% have studied English language on their own; 10% have been studying it at the secondary school; 7% used English actively during travelling, 6% used English passively during travelling and have studied it at university. Just 3% of the participants have communicated with the foreigners.



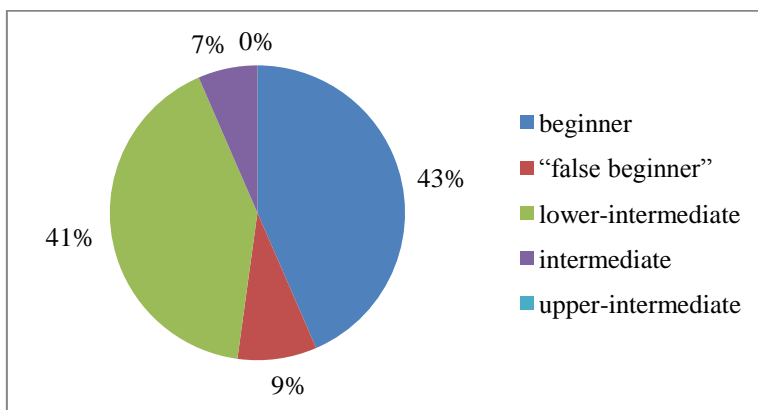
**5. Why have you decided to attend English courses at the University?** (you can choose more options)



**Graph 5: The motivation for attending English courses**

As we can see in Graph 5 above, the participants want to learn new things in 34% of instances; next they need to know the language because of family or acquaintances abroad in 19% of cases; then they need to understand movies and books in their original language in 18% of instances and they have written other motives (to know the language for travelling) and the need of social contact in 11% of cases. Lastly, they also need the language for computer or Internet work in 7% of responds.

**6. To which English language level would you assign yourself?**



**Graph 6: The language level of English**

Graph 6 illustrates the last question from the Introduction Part, which is the supposed level of the English language. Out of all the participants, 43% of them have

described themselves as beginners and 41% of them as lower-intermediates. 9% of participants have chosen intermediate and 7% of them “false beginners” levels. There was not any upper-intermediate level student.

## **Method**

After the determination of the research question, the aim of the research and target participants, individual items were formulated in forms of particular questions and the questionnaire was constructed, based on the theoretical background chapter. Then sample questionnaires were tested firstly by me, secondly by two senior students of English, as a pre-research. The validity and reliability of the research tool were confirmed as there were no difficulties with completing these samples as from the form of the questionnaire as well as from the contents. The particular distribution of the questionnaires took place on March 4<sup>th</sup> 2014 during two English lessons taught at the University of the Third Age in Cheb.

There were not any difficulties with participants’ completing it either; students were responsible and thorough while filling out the questionnaires. The supposed troubles that I would have to help them with understanding the questions did not occur at all – either they understood everything or they were ashamed to ask me. The completion took them approximately 15 minutes; I was present there for possible help or explanation. After everybody had finished, I collected the questionnaires and thanked them for helping me. The teachers as well as some participants showed their interest in knowing the results and so I promised them to provide them the final results of the research.

Lastly, I analysed all questionnaires that were acceptably completed (45) and marked participants’ responses of each item. In the following section, the results from the second part of the questionnaire, Methodology, are presented by the means of graphs. The commentaries of the results follow the presentation of the results.

#### IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

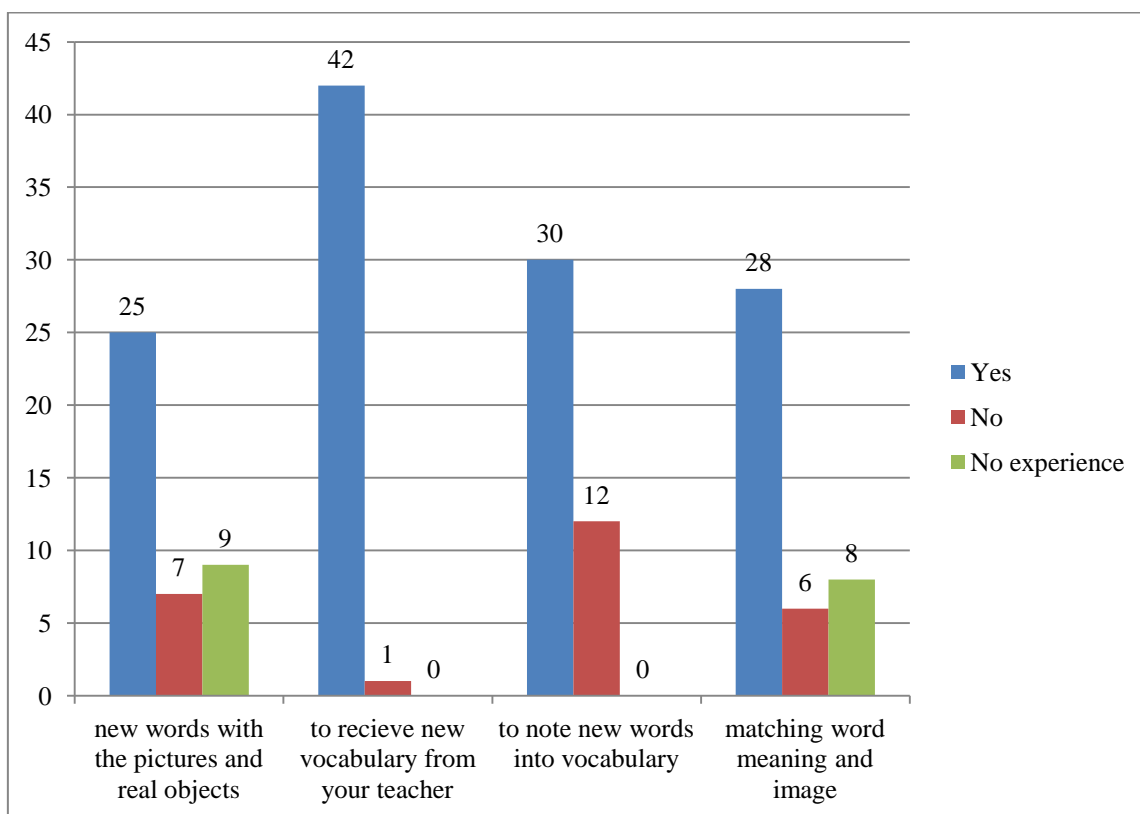
In this section, the results of the analysis of 45 questionnaires, part Language Teaching Methodology, are presented. The results from the closed questions that have *Yes – No - No experience* options are presented in bar graphs; particular questions follow the sequence of the questions in the questionnaire and they are shortened. The results are expressed in figures.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the results from the additional questions that examined the main ideas from individual parts of the questionnaire are presented in pie charts. Here the results are expressed in percentages. For the complete questions see the questionnaire in Appendices. Further on, the commentaries of the results follow each graph and at the end of this chapter, the summary of the research in terms of the research question and stated hypotheses is added.

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<sup>5</sup> *Note:* Not all participants have answered each question; thus the total of figures may not equal 45 in all cases.

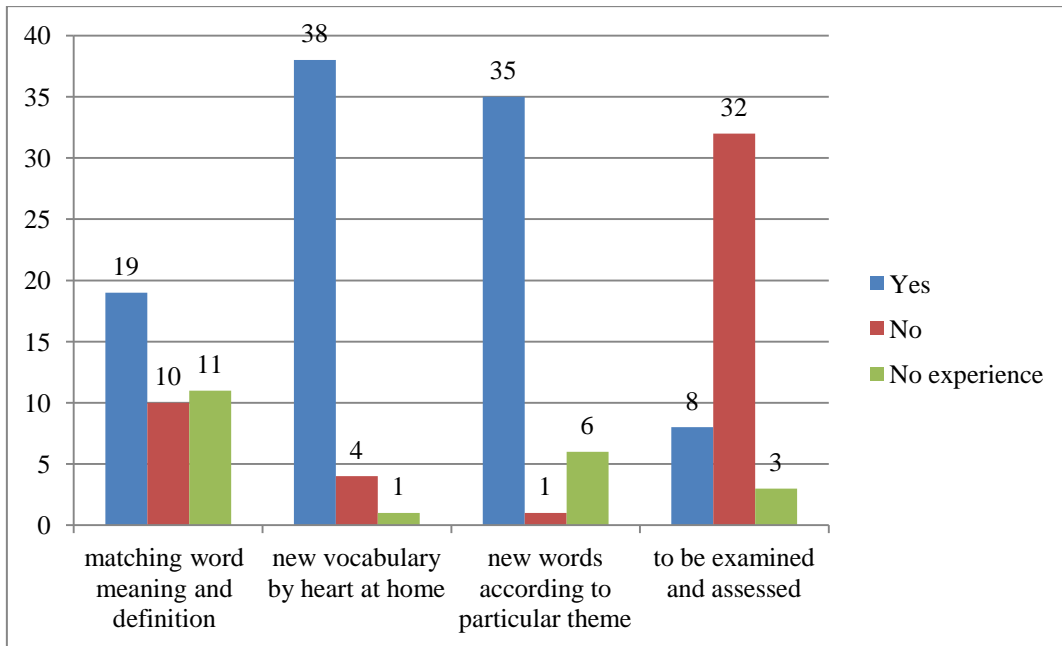
## Results – Part two: Language Teaching Methodology

### Vocabulary



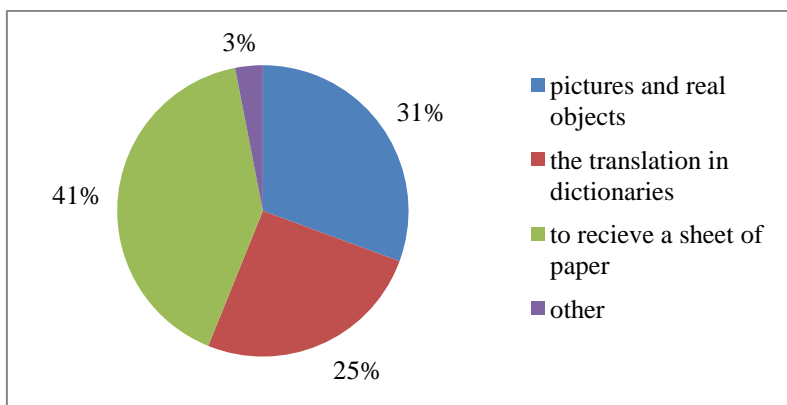
**Graph 7: Vocabulary part one**

Graphs 7-9 indicate participants' preferences in learning vocabulary. According to Graph 7, more than half of the participants (25) find it useful to learn new vocabulary with the help of pictures and real objects; however, 9 participants have no experience with this. Next, overwhelming majority of the participants (42) want to receive new vocabulary with an explanation or translation and pronunciation on a piece of paper from the teacher. The participants also largely regard helpful to note new words into their own vocabulary (30), similarly to matching word meaning and image exercises preference (28).



**Graph 8: Vocabulary part two**

As we can see from Graph 8, matching word meaning and definition exercises are less favourite than exercises with images but still majority of the participants find them enjoyable (19). Next, 38 out of 45 participants have answered that they learn new vocabulary by heart at home. Similarly, 35 of them find useful to learn new words according to particular theme or topic. Lastly, 32 participants do not want to be examined and assessed from their vocabulary knowledge.

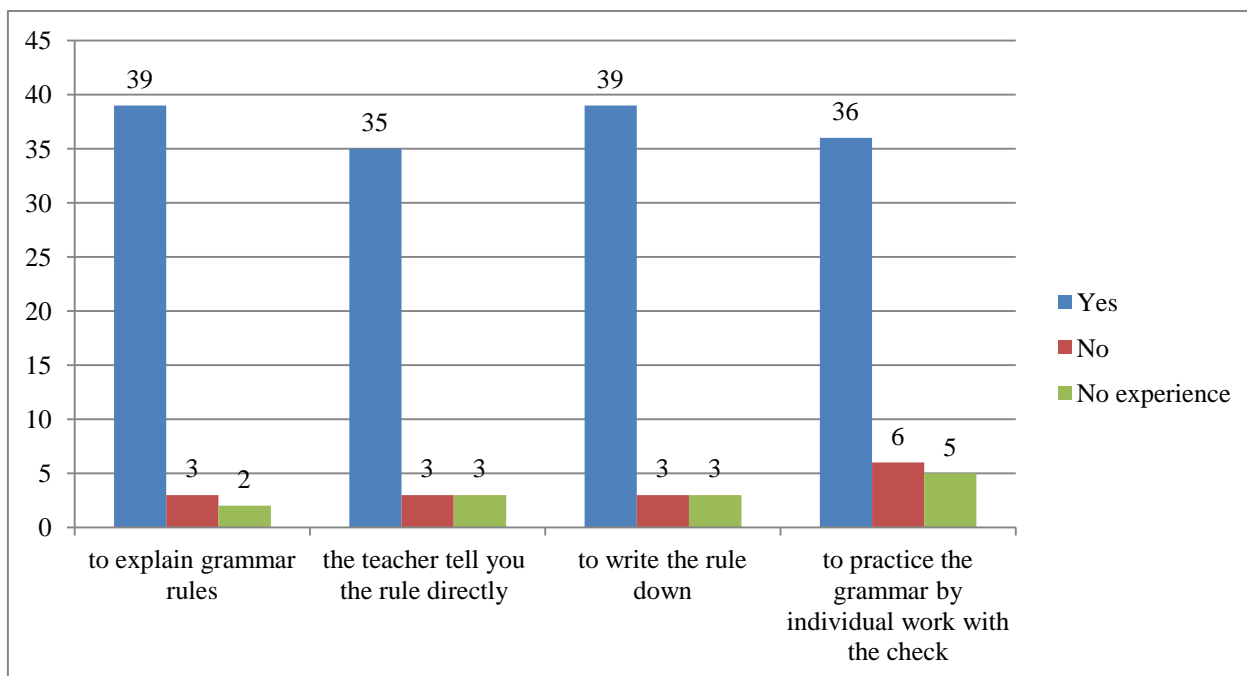


**Graph 9: New vocabulary preference**

Graph 9 illustrates the additional question examining the preference for learning new vocabulary. 41% of the participants want to receive a sheet of paper with translation or meaning of new words from the teacher; 31% of them prefer to use pictures and real

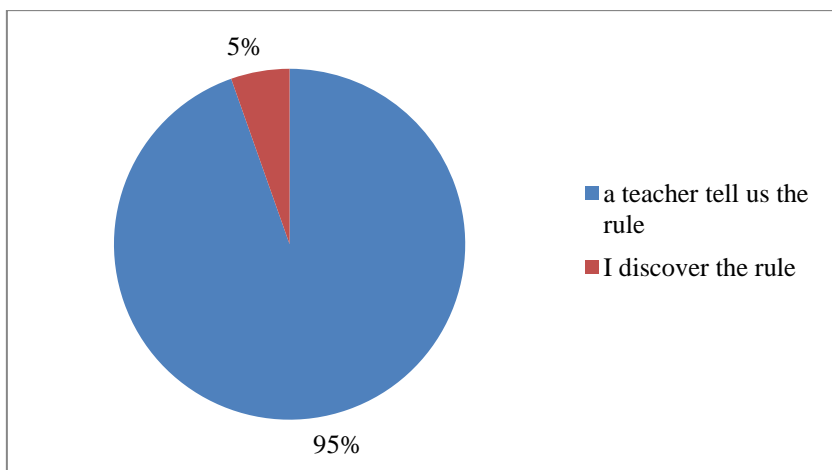
objects. 25% of the participants prefer to search the translation in dictionaries and 3% of them have chosen “other” - to use an online translator.

### Grammar



**Graph 10: Grammar**

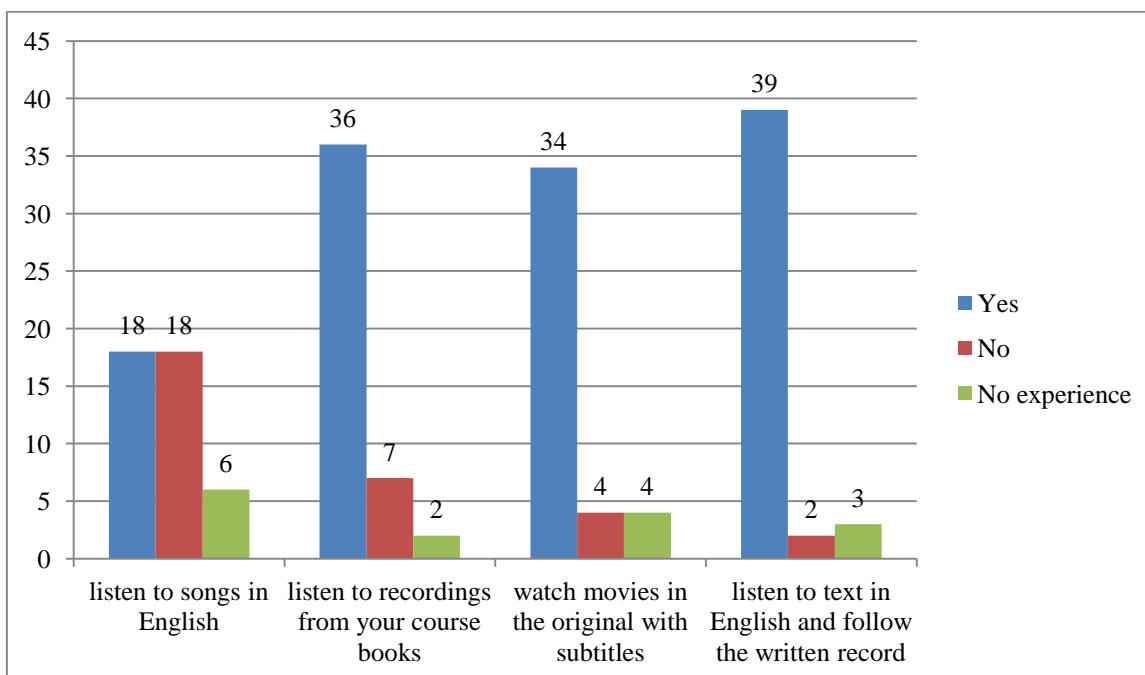
As it is visible from Graph 10, 39 participants want to be explained the grammar rules and they want the teacher to tell them the rule directly, i.e. explicitly (35). Similarly, majority of the participants find it useful to write the rule down (39) and to practice the new grammar by individual work with the consequent collective check (36); however, this question has the most negative answers from the grammar section of the questionnaire (6).



**Graph 11: Grammar preference**

Graph 11 illustrates the additional question that had only two options and examined the preferred way of teaching grammar rules. 95% of the participants prefer the teacher to tell them the rule and then to practice it collectively; just 5% of them have chosen the second option - the discovery of the rule by themselves from a number of examples.

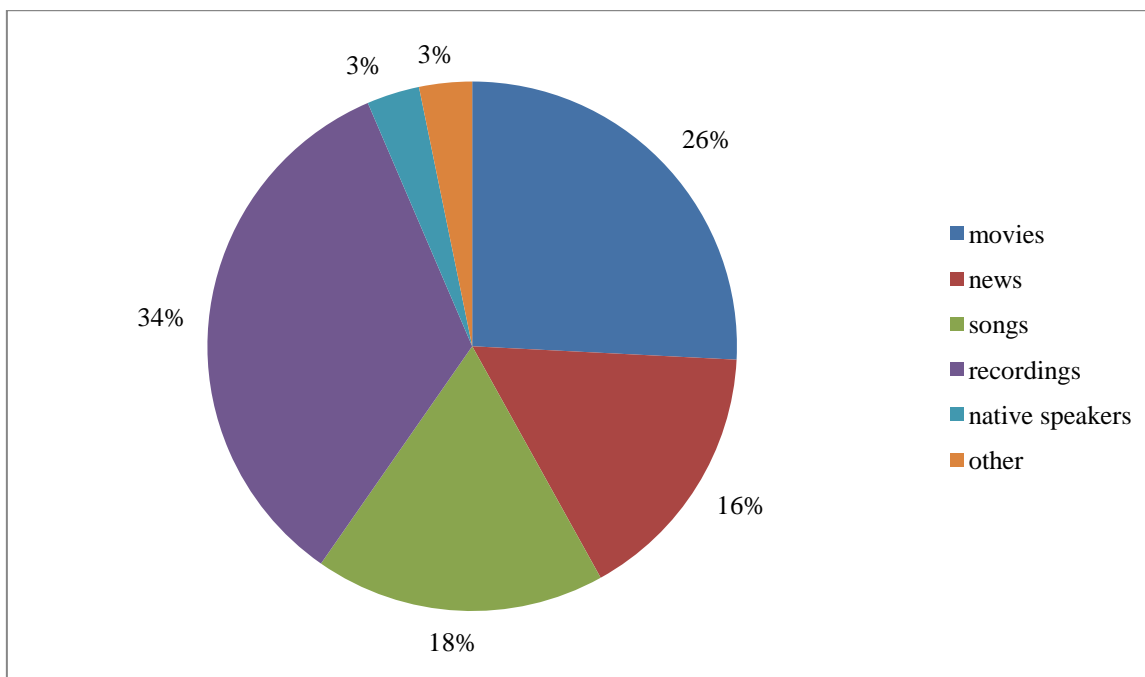
### Listening



**Graph 12: Listening**

Graph 12 presents the results from the listening section. As we can see, the same number of the participants find it helpful to listen to songs in English as those who do not

find it helpful (18). Moreover, some of them do not have any experience with it (6). Nevertheless, they largely find it helpful to listen to course books recordings (36), to watch movies in the original language with subtitles (34) and the most preferred of this section is listening to a text in English and following the written record (39).

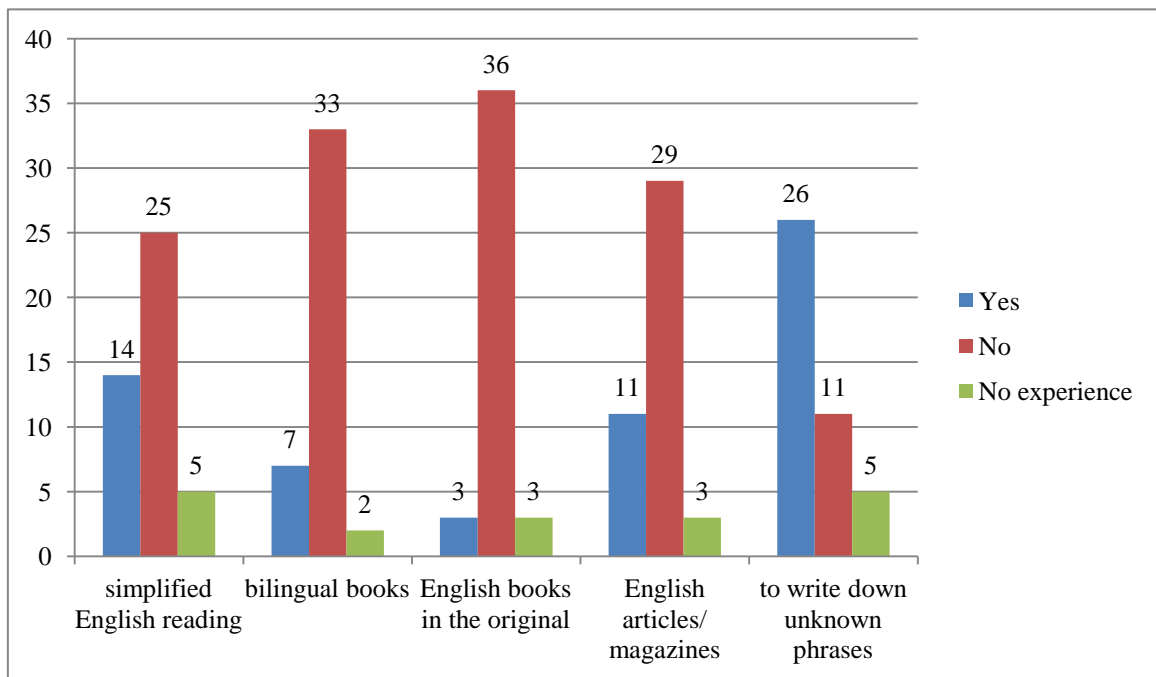


**Graph 13: Listening preference**

According to Graph 13, 34% of the participants listen to course books recordings in English; 26% of them listen to movies in English; 18% of the participants listen to songs in English and 16% of them listen to news in English. Just 3% of them listen to native speakers and 3% of participants have chosen the “other” – they listen to their course teacher.

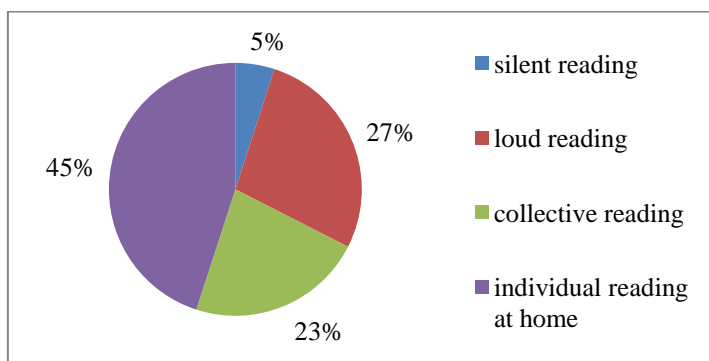


## Reading



**Graph 14: Reading**

Graph 14 illustrates the participants' preferences in reading. More than half of them do not read simplified English reading (25); still, 14 participants do. Next, 33 of them do not read bilingual books and 7 participants do. The difference is biggest in reading books in the original language – 36 of them do not read them, 3 do. As for English articles or magazines, 29 participants do not read them, 11 do. And lastly, participants largely find it useful to write down the unknown phrases from reading – 26 of them have answered positively, 11 negatively.

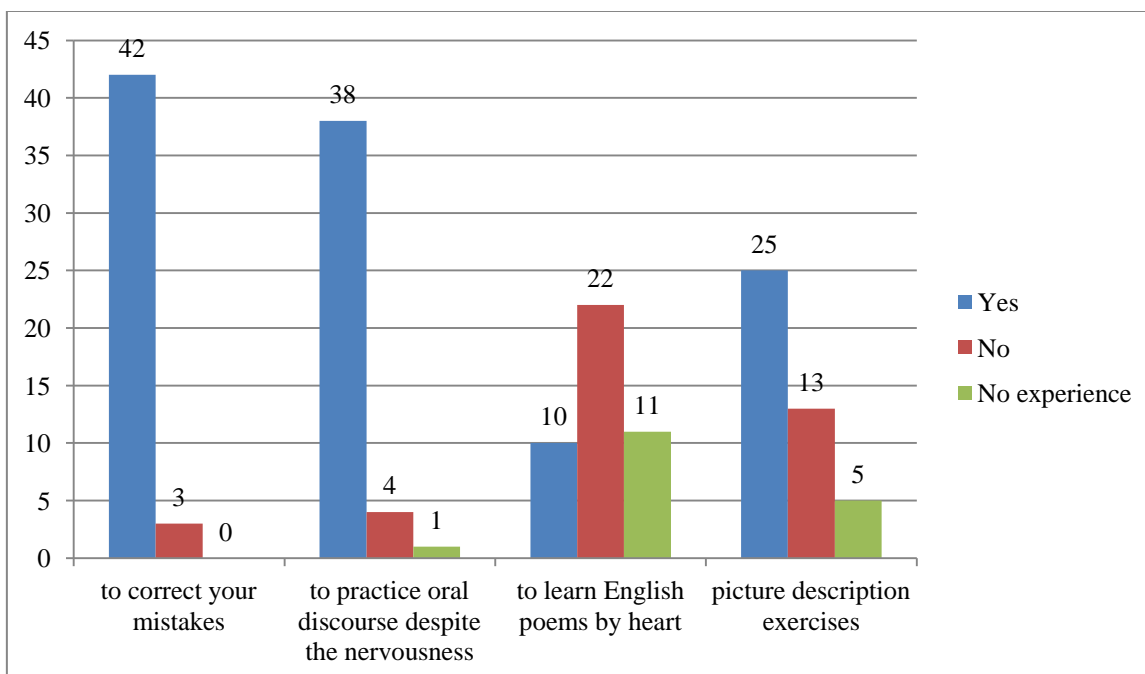


**Graph 15: Reading preferences**

The additional question examined the way of practising reading. 45% of the participants prefer practising by individual reading at home; 27% of them prefer loud

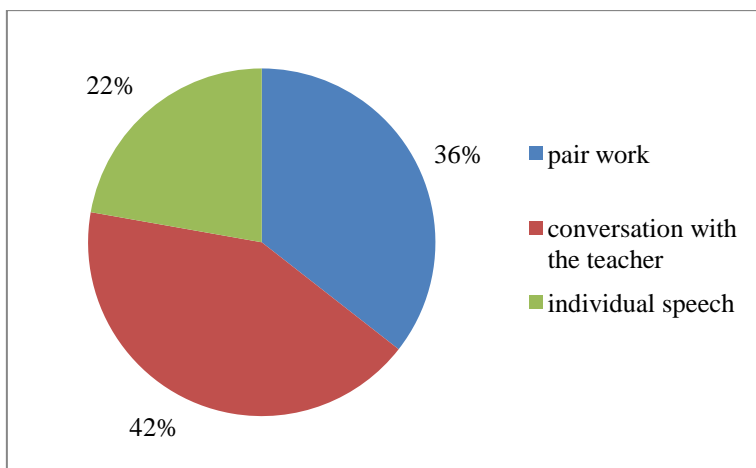
reading in the lesson; 23% of participants prefer collective reading in the lesson and 5% of them prefer silent reading in the lesson.

## Speaking



**Graph 16: Speaking**

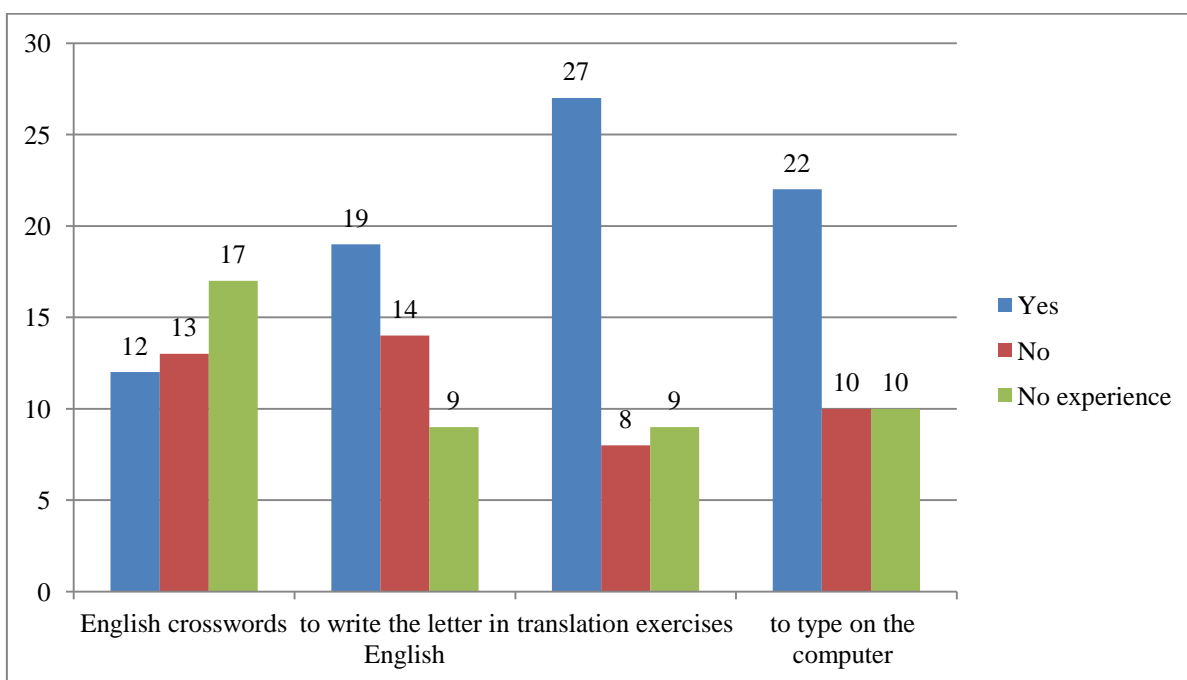
Graph 16 presents the results from the speaking section. According to it, a great majority of participants want the teacher to correct their mistakes while speaking (42). Next, still majority of them think that it is important to practice oral discourse despite the nervousness (38). As for learning English poems by heart, 22 participants do not find it helpful and 11 of them do not have any experience with it. Lastly, 25 participants find picture description exercises enjoyable, 13 do not.



**Graph 17: Speaking preferences**

The additional question examined the way of speaking practising. According to Graph 17 above, 42% of the participants prefer conversation with the teacher, 36% of them prefer pair work and 22% of them prefer individual speech for practising their speaking skills.

## Writing

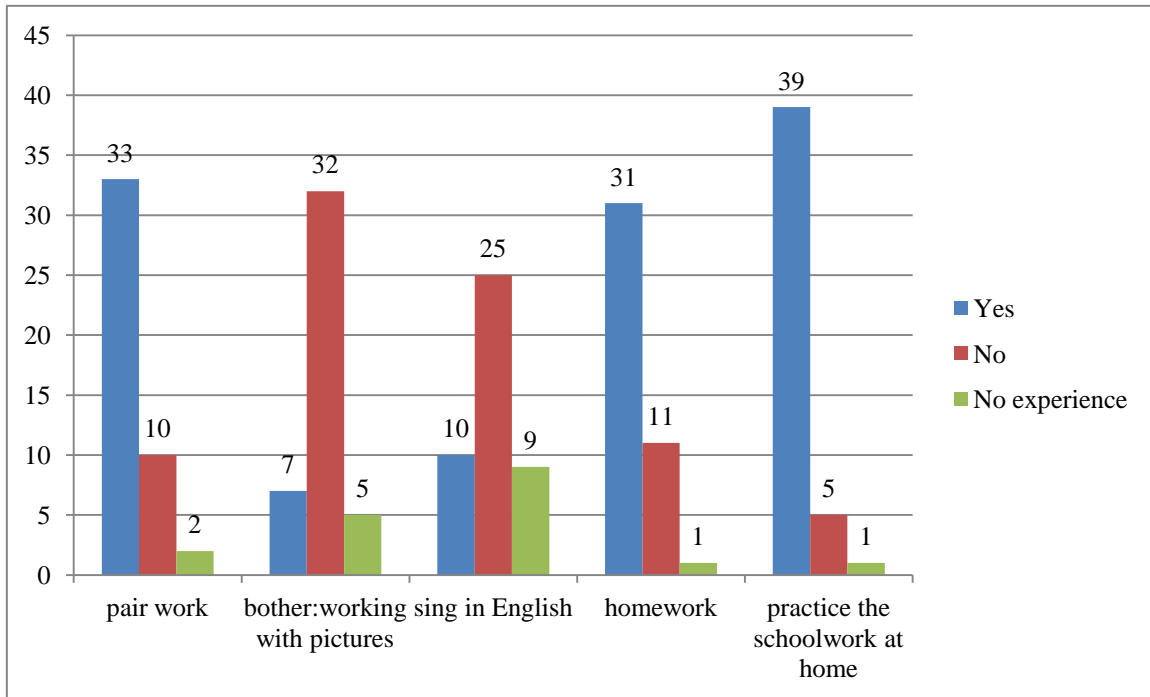


**Graph 18: Writing**

According to Graph 18, majority of the participants do not have any experience with doing English crosswords (17) and when they do, more of them do not enjoy

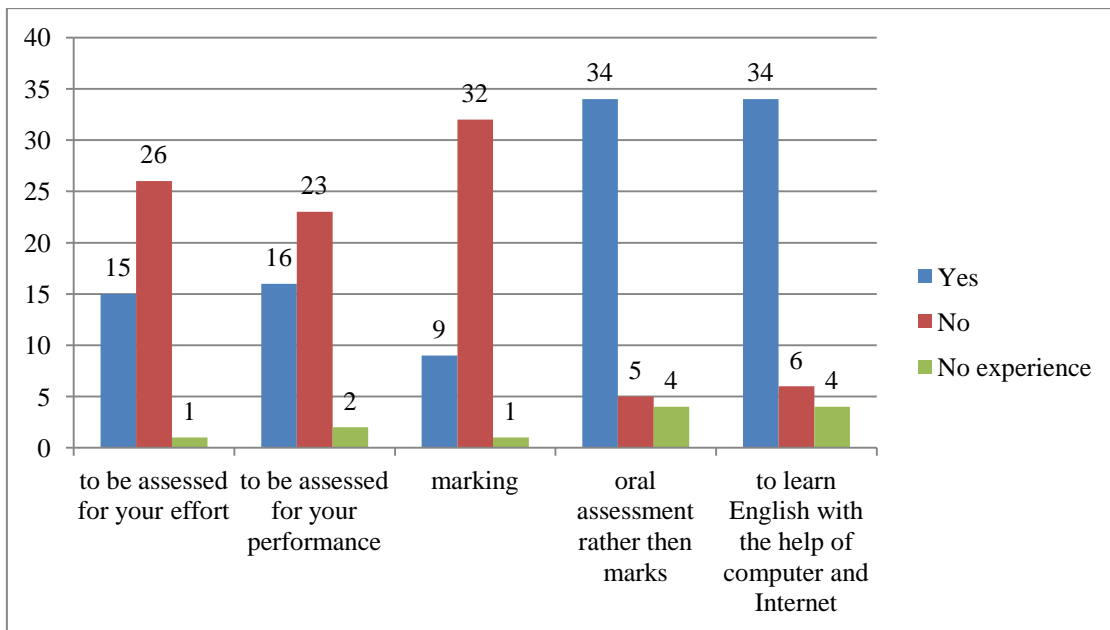
completing them (13). Next, for majority of the participants it is useful to learn to write the letter in English (19). Greater majority of them enjoy doing translation exercises (27) and similarly, they want largely to learn to type on the computer in English (22).

## Other



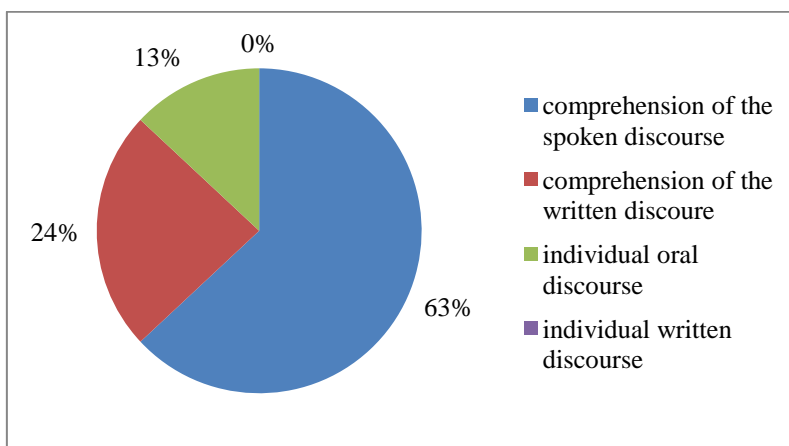
**Graph 19: Other part one**

As it is visible from Graph 19, 33 out of 45 participants enjoy pair work, 10 of them do not. Next, 32 participants do not mind exercises based on working with pictures. 25 participants do not find it useful to sing in English; 31 of them want homework. Lastly, a great majority of them practice the schoolwork at home (39).



**Graph 20: Other part two**

As we can see from Graph 20, the participants mostly do not want to be assessed for their effort (26) nor for their performance (23). Similarly, they do not find marking useful (32) and they prefer oral assessment rather than marks (34). Lastly, majority of them regard it useful to learn English with the help of a computer and the Internet (34).



**Graph 21: English skill preference**

The last graph illustrates the last additional question, examining the preferred English skill in terms of utility for participants. 63% of them prefer to learn or to be able to understand the spoken discourse; 24% of them want to understand the written discourse and 13% of participants find individual oral discourse the most important. There was no answer of individual written discourse as the most preferred English language skill.

## Commentary and Summary

The research question of the thesis, stated in the Introduction and Research Methodology parts, was: *What language teaching preferences do senior learners of English have?* Based on the results of the analysis of the questionnaires, this section aims to summarize the findings, to comment them in terms of the Theoretical Background chapter and to answer to individual hypotheses that were stated in the Research Methodology Chapter.

The first language element that was dealt with in the theoretical part and then examined in the research is vocabulary. Learners here mostly prefer to receive new vocabulary on a sheet of paper from the teacher, where there is a meaning or translation and pronunciation of the words. Then they learn new words by heart at home and prefer to learn new words that are connected by particular theme or topic. They also note new words into their own vocabulary and it is helpful for them to use pictures and real objects in both the presentation of the new vocabulary and their practising. Less preference, but still of the majority of the participants, was in matching word meaning and its definition exercises. Lastly, overwhelming majority of the learners do not want to be examined and assessed for their vocabulary knowledge.

The findings agree with the theoretical part in terms of the need of visual aids and avoiding the amount of written text for presenting and practising new vocabulary. The fact that learners learn new words by heart at home but then they do not want to be assessed for their knowledge may indicate another aspect of ageing and that is the lowered self-confidence. The motivation for learning is quite high so the results do not agree with the theoretical part that seniors do not learn by memorization and it is impossible to learn by heart (e.g. Klevetová & Dlabalová, 2008). They learn vocabulary by heart but due to the discussed aspects of ageing (fear, anxiety and lower self-confidence) they do not feel comfortable in the role of a student who is assessed by a teacher. The preference of getting the vocabulary from the teacher may be connected with this as well; learners may not feel that they would satisfactory find particular words in dictionaries or it is simply more comfortable for them. Lastly, the preference for learning new vocabulary around particular themes or topics may reflect the life knowledge and the notions of the world, which are always associated in some way.

The second language item to be examined is grammar. Here the results were quite unilateral: learners definitely want to know the grammar rules, they find it useful to write the rule down, they want to practice the grammar by individual work with the consequent collective check and they want to be explained the rule explicitly.

The results again agree with the theoretical part; seniors already have existing language structure in their minds and they therefore need to know the English language system, even if a deep knowledge of grammar is not of great importance for them and their needs. Moreover, they need to compare the new knowledge of foreign language with their knowledge of Czech, so they may find the grammar-translation exercises helpful. This could be a difference from teaching young children: they, on the other hand, learn language without any knowledge of a foreign language system.

Thirdly, listening was explored. The most preferred activity for senior learners is listening to an English text together with following the written record, which correspond with the seniors' needs of visual as well as aural impact. They also find listening to course books recordings and watching movies in the original with subtitles useful. What is surprising, majority of the participants do not find it helpful to listen to songs in English. The reasons for that may be the worsening hearing sense, which could make the listening highly difficult, or the bad choice of songs. These should be chosen by seniors themselves as their taste in music may greatly differ from the teacher's. Even from the additional question it is clear that they really listen to course books recordings the most.

The fourth examined element was reading. According to the results, learners predominantly do not read English books in the original nor bilingual books. Some of them read English articles or magazines and simplified English reading, but they are still in the minority. They largely find it useful to write down the unknown phrases from the reading. This may lead to the assumption that they have tried to read and to write down the words and then they have abandoned their effort as it was demanding and time-consuming. Of course, the difference should be made between reading an article in the lesson and the extensive reading. Nevertheless, the results may again indicate what was already written in the theoretical part – that seniors read less and that they read undemanding books. However, learners prefer reading at home on their own and then loud reading in the lesson, collective one being the third. These types of reading aim to practice not the reading skills but the pronunciation; yet they are often used and labelled as reading exercises both by

teachers and by course books. It is surprising that learners prefer loud reading to silent reading in the lesson. This may indicate the need to practice the pronunciation and to listen to English language from their colleagues.

The fifth explored item was speaking. Learners definitely want the teacher to correct their mistakes while speaking. Next, they think that it is important to practice speaking despite the learners' nervousness; none of this agree with the theoretical part section. Again it may be explained by their high motivation and also previous learning experience and learning models from younger age. Learners also largely enjoy picture description exercises, which on the other hand correspond to the previous statements about the visual aids.

Surprisingly, learners do not want to learn English poems by heart; they think that it is not helpful for them. Consideration has to be taken that participants may think of serious and difficult poems; nevertheless, short poems and rhymes are very effective for learning individual aspects of language (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, stress etc.). The reason for this low preference for poems in English lessons (particularly when comparing the results from vocabulary, where learners learn new words by heart) may be that they have not met with this before or that they are afraid of an oral presentation of the poem. Lastly, the additional question shows that learners want to practice speaking mostly by a conversation with the teacher and then by pair work, for instance by a dialogue or by a picture description. This accord with the previous paragraph – they want to be (or they think that they should be) trained in their speaking and corrected.

The sixth language element that was examined was writing. Here, learners prefer to do translation exercises, which again agree with the previous part regarding grammar. Next, learners find it helpful to learn to type on the computer and also to write a letter in English. On the other hand, they do not have any experiences with completing English crosswords as a way of practising writing and spelling.

Lastly, various methods and aspects were examined in the “Other” section. Learners practice school work at home, they want homework and they like pair work. The question of opposite polarity, asking about working with pictures exercises, confirms the validity of participants' answers – most of them have answered “No”; i.e. that they do not mind working with pictures, as it was already written several times. The low popularity of singing in English lessons may be quite unexpected; but when considering the shyness and



introversion of seniors it should be taken as a truthful result. It is not surprising that learners do not want to be assessed for their effort nor for their performance and marking is not helpful for them. When being assessed, they prefer oral assessment rather than marking. This perfectly agrees with the psychological characteristics of seniors and also with the fact that learners are motivated from the inside, marking being just stressful for them.

Finally, preferred English skill is a comprehension of the spoken discourse, i.e. listening. This is interesting in terms of previous results indicating that participants listen mostly just to course book recordings.

### **Confirmation/ Disproval of hypotheses**

*Hypothesis no. 1:* Participants prefer demonstrative learning, for example with the aid of pictures, real objects etc.

This hypothesis was confirmed.

*Hypothesis no. 2:* Participants prefer learning of vocabulary rather than grammar.

This hypothesis was disproved due to the high number of “Yes” questions in the grammar section.

*Hypothesis no. 3:* Participants prefer learning of receptive comprehension rather than productive language use.

This hypothesis was confirmed in the last question of the questionnaire, but the emphasis on practice of speaking skill occurred while analysing the results.

*Hypothesis no. 4:* Participants do not keep exercise books and do not take any notes in the lessons.

This hypothesis was disproved – participants find it useful to keep their own dictionaries and to note down the grammar rules.

*Hypothesis no. 5:* Participants do not want to have homework.

This hypothesis was disproved.

*Hypothesis no. 6:* Participants do not consider writing to be an important skill.

This hypothesis was confirmed.

*Hypothesis no. 7:* Participants want to be evaluated for their effort, not their performances.

This hypothesis was disproved; participants do not want to be evaluated for their effort nor for their performance.

*Hypothesis no. 8:* Participants want to learn English in a similar way as it is taught to young children (game-based activities, singing songs, writing no notes etc.).

This hypothesis was disproved.

To sum up this section and to answer to research question, senior language learners want to learn English with the help of illustrative aids. They want homework and put a lot of effort to learn the language items. They do not want to be marked and assessed but they want to be corrected in speaking. They do not want to sing, to listen to songs or to learn English poems. They prefer to do translation exercises and practice speaking skills, even if the most preferred skill for them to know is listening.

In this chapter, the results of study were presented. In the commentary and summary, results were interpreted in terms of the theoretical part and research hypotheses were confirmed or disproved. In the following chapter, the implications for teachers based on the results of the research are provided.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides advice for teachers of senior language learners based on the theoretical chapter and on the research results. Contradictions that appeared from the synthesis of learned theoretical literature and practical occurrence are also argued here. Secondly, limitations of the research are outlined. Thirdly, suggestions for further research are discussed.

### **Suggestions for Teachers of Senior Language Learners**

Considering the first part of the results, from the Introduction Part of the questionnaire, there is quite diverse sociological composition of learners as regards their previous experience with the English language study, previous job positions and their motives to attend language courses. Firstly, it should be therefore suggested to perform needs-analysis at the beginning of the course to discover the preferred requirements from the course. Teachers should focus on the professional experiences of their participants and their learners' need of learning particular English skill or element (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, facts about English speaking countries etc.). According to the results of such survey, the content of the lesson should be adjusted, so the majority of the learners have pre-knowledge or at least an interest in the topic or area being taught. The attempt to respond to seniors' needs seems more important than to children's needs and interests, as seniors learn English for a particular reason and are strongly motivated to study. On the other hand, senior learners are handicapped by worse memory, the state of the perception organs, worse attention and other psychological and biological aspects that were discussed in the theoretical part; thus the adjustments of the subject of their study can highly contribute to the learners' higher self-confidence and therefore to better results in a study.

Secondly, senior learners prefer to learn English in a similar way it is taught at schools. They want to get homework and they also practice and revise school work at home; in case of vocabulary, they even learn words by heart at home. According to the results of the research, it can be advised to teachers to present new vocabulary with the help of images and/ or real objects and to avoid the amount of written text, for instance to offer to seniors long definitions of words. Learners also find it useful to receive new words

from the teacher so that they do not have to search for them in dictionaries. It should be emphasized that teachers should present them new words that are connected in some way, e.g. according to a particular theme or topic. Lastly, teachers definitely should not examine and assess learners' knowledge of vocabulary; they should only present new words and offer practise exercises to their learners.

Next, teachers should teach also grammar rules to senior learners, who want to understand the structure of the English language. Teachers should emphasize the explicit teaching of grammar and limit the requirements of learners' discovering some grammatical structure. Teachers could write the rule on the board for learners to note and then offer them amount of practice exercises.

Regarding individual language skills, listening and speaking are regarded important for learners, even if individual oral discourse was marked as the third preferred skill in the last question of the questionnaire. Teachers ought to play course books recording and support them with transcripts, preferably with some picture illustrating the context. Next, listening to songs should be minimized or at least, teachers could give learners the chance to choose the songs. This could be done as homework for the next lesson – everybody would bring a song for them to listen to, together with the written lyrics, where some words may be omitted (it depends on the learner). This way senior learners could contribute more actively to the lessons.

As for reading, teachers could help learners with choosing a suitable book for extensive reading and with teaching them strategies of reading, for instance Know – Want to know – Learnt (Ur, 2012, p. 146). Regarding reading of short pieces in a lesson, teachers should allow time for learners to write down the unknown words from the text; nevertheless, only important and crucial phrases should be noted. As for speaking, a lot of speaking exercises based on the pictures could be covered. The most suitable here seems again that the learners bring a photo of their family or of any other interest of theirs to a lesson and describe a picture to their colleagues. Teachers also should not avoid the pronunciation exercises and loud reading; on the other hand, it is not useful to teach them short poems and rhymes.

Considering writing, this skill was not marked as the most preferred in any case. Nevertheless, learners may want to learn to write a letter in English. Teachers should again refer to their current English language needs and invite them to write a letter to English-

speaking friends. Senior learners also find it useful to do translation exercises for practising both the grammar and the writing.

Lastly, as it was indicated, teachers should avoid marking and assessment both learners' performance and their effort. Nevertheless, participants just did not have to realize the variety of ways of assessment: it may be supposed that learners would appreciate for example teachers' smile or their nodding head as a form of assessment. Teachers should support them and express positive feedback. There is no need to stress senior learners by giving them bad marks.

Finally, particular contradictions have occurred through the whole thesis. First of them is that teachers should emphasise the listening reception; on the other had, hearing sense deterioration and problems with perceiving the speech occur in older age. This contradiction has emerged also from the research results – learners have indicated the listening skill to be the most important for them, but other results have shown that they listen mainly to course book recordings, i.e. that they do not devote so much time to practising listening at home. Learners may realize the importance of listening skill, but the worsening state of their hearing sense may have an impact on their real activities. Secondly, some experts have emphasized the high self-confidence in a senior age; some, to the contrary, have discussed the low level of self-assessment. According to research results, a tendency to underestimation may be visible.

Thirdly, there is a discrepancy between the suggestion of group or pair work in English language teaching and seniors' tendency to be more introverted and less open. Similarly, some authors (e.g. Gruss, 2009) have emphasized improvement of social skills, social intelligence and emotional intelligence as benefits of ageing; others (e.g. Křivohlavý, 2011) have mentioned reduced tendency to extroversion and tendency to avoiding contact with other people. The results again show disunited inclination – the majority of the participants prefer pair work; on the other hand, conversation with the teacher rather than with the classmate or participants' reluctance to sing or to recite poems in the lessons as the possible effect of shyness could be visible.

It could be expected that seniors would prefer to learn the English language in a way that prefers no notes, popularity of songs, poems and game-based activities. This speculation emerged to be untrue. Maybe in even advanced age (the fourth age) this could

be valid, but definitely it is not true in the case of the analysed sample of participants. Age could become one of the limitations of the research, which are treated with in the next section.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The results of the research should not be generalized for there are several limitations of the research and these have to be taken into account. Limitations are connected firstly to the method of the research, i.e. constructing questions for the questionnaire; secondly to the sample of participants. As it has been already mentioned, the questionnaire has been constructed in order to cover many of the elements of English teaching methodology which occurred in the theoretical background; nevertheless, it had to be greatly simplified. Thus the research of English methodology is nowise any systemic as it should be; it is rather research of particular interesting phenomena. The results mirror just the relatively few questions that were given to participants. The questions could not cover all the English teaching methodology issues; even now the participants have found the questionnaire rather long.

The second problem could be the age and the personality characteristic of the participants. Similarly to disunited division of ageing in terms of specific years according to different authors, senior students can be of different ages, ranking from 60 years and more. Due to time-saving and also to some tact, the questionnaire did not ask participants about their age; still, the difference should be made between 60 years and 75 years old learners. That is maybe why the results are slightly against the expectations; five from eight stated hypotheses were disproved.

Thirdly, there is also a problem of credibility and validity of the participants' responses. It has already been mentioned that many of them have not answered all questions, reasons for that may be speculated – either they were bored, they did not understand the question or they simply regarded the questionnaire too long. Out of 48 questionnaires I have analysed 45, which were completed in an acceptable way so that the results bear some information. Next, there may be a discussion over the reliability of the given answers. Participants did not have to respond fully according to their beliefs and preferences for various reasons. Nevertheless, results have shown diversity and also the

“testing” question contributed to the validity and reliability of the results. Lastly, the number of participants was highly limited to 45. Participants’ teachers could be a limitation as well; every teacher has its own teaching style, so the results may greatly differ in another teacher’s classes and lessons. Correspondingly, factors such as the material equipment of classes and conditions for learning at home (computer, Internet, etc.) have to be considered too.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

It would be interesting to include a qualitative research: the conversation with both the teachers and the students and the observation of the lessons. This would provide a more complex view of the examined issues. The research could be also extended by comparing English teaching methods to children, adolescents, adults and seniors. It would be also noteworthy to conduct the same research among English language teachers of senior students, asking them about individual methods, strengths and difficulties of teaching English to senior learners. Without any doubt, the research could be improved in terms of areas that were not examined, for instance the use of English during the lesson, the preferred organizational form, the preferred learning materials, the use of technology and others. Likewise, the questions may be directed to the teacher’s personality. As for the methodology itself, it would be reasonable to provide senior learners with opportunities to try the individual methods and then to ask them to evaluate these methods in terms of their usefulness, strengths and weaknesses.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As described in the theoretical background section of this thesis, the changes in ageing processes, connected to learning, concern mainly the brain, perception organs, memory, intelligence, personality characteristics and creativity. Almost all of these components evince the deterioration in terms of slower reactions and qualitative decline; nevertheless, some areas, mainly the social experiences, social knowledge, emotional intelligence etc., may improve their role in the senior age. In these characteristics' relation to English teaching methods it has been suggested to use simple and undemanding tasks with clear instructions, practical implication and logical structure; to develop also learners' meta-skills, to offer them audio as well as visual input, to emphasize listening activities and to put stress on learners' understanding rather than language production.

Nevertheless, the results of the research show that the key factor in English language teaching in senior age appears to be the motivation. Senior learners want to be taught English in a similar way as it is taught at schools. They want to do grammar exercises, learn vocabulary by heart, listen to course book recordings and work with the illustrative aids. On the other hand, they do not prefer to be assessed or marked. Also, senior learners do not prefer activities that could be expected to be favoured: they do not want to sing, to listen to songs or to learn poems. Unlike the information in the theoretical chapter, senior learners want to practice their speaking skill, including pronunciation, and they want to be corrected while speaking.

From what was being investigated, there occurred to be a particular scheme that might be generalized at least to some extent. The motivation of senior learners is very high, thus they put a lot of effort into the study. On the other hand, due to lowered self-confidence, as a result of deteriorated psychological as well as biological processes, learners do not want to be assessed for their performances nor for their effort. Therefore, it seems crucial to maintain or at least not to reduce the learners' motivation by forcing them to do irrelevant activities or by marking them.

English teachers of senior learners should discover at least basic needs of their students since teaching English covers so many areas and elements to teach. By doing such needs-analysis at the beginning of the semester, teachers would contribute to students'



motivation for learning and more effective teaching, which would be helpful for learners and interesting for learners as well as for teachers.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Czech version of questionnaire

Dobrý den, jmenuji se Eva Zítková a jsem studentkou posledního ročníku pedagogické fakulty v Plzni. Prosím Vás o vyplnění dotazníku k mé diplomové práci, který Vám zabere 15-20 minut. Ve své diplomové práci zkoumám metody výuky anglického jazyka u seniorů z pohledu studentů chebské Univerzity 3. věku. Vyplněním dotazníku pomůžete nejen mně, ale také Vaším vyučujícím, kteří mohou získané podklady využít k Vašemu lepšímu poznání, Vašich potřeb a představ o studiu.

Velice Vám děkuji za Váš čas a přeji hodně štěstí při studiu.

#### I. ČÁST – ÚVOD

**Už jste někdy absolvoval/ absolvovala kurz Aj na Univerzitě 3. věku?**

- ano
- ne

**1. Jste**

- muž
- žena

**2. Jaké je Vaše nejvyšší dosažené vzdělání?**

- základní
- vyšší odborné
- středoškolské bez maturity
- vysokoškolské
- středoškolské s maturitou

**3. Jakou profesi/ profese jste během života vykonával/ vykonávala?**

.....

**4. Jaké máte dosavadní zkušenosti se studiem anglického jazyka? (zde můžete vybrat více možností)**

- žádné zkušenosti
- studoval/ studovala jsem ho na ZŠ
- studoval/ studovala jsem ho na VOŠ
- studoval/ studovala jsem ho na SŠ
- studoval/ studovala jsem ho na VŠ

- navštěvoval/ navštěvovala jsem placené kurzy/ doučování
- samostudium
- pasivní použití při cestování
- jiné:.....
- aktivní použití při cestování
- komunikace s cizojazyčným mluvčím (např. dopisy)

**5. Proč jste se rozhodl/ rozhodla navštěvovat kurzy anglického jazyka na Univerzitě?**

(zde můžete vybrat více možností)

- potřeba znát jazyk – rodina či známí v cizině
- potřeba sociálního kontaktu
- chci rozumět filmům, knihám v originále
- jiné:.....
- potřebuji jazyk na práci s počítačem, internetem
- zájem se učit nové věci

**6. K jaké jazykové úrovni angličtiny byste se přiřadil/ přiřadila?**

- začátečník
- „falešný začátečník“
- mírně pokročilý
- středně pokročilý
- pokročilý

**II. ČÁST – METODOLOGIE**

Zaškrtněte prosím u každé otázky jednu ze tří odpovědí. V případě, že jste ještě nikdy nenavštěvoval/ nenavštěvovala kurz Aj na Univerzitě 3. věku, odpovídejte prosím podle Vašich představ, jak byste se učili jazyk nejraději.

| Slovíčka   | ANO | NE | NEMÁM ZKUŠENOST |
|--|-----|----|-----------------|
| 1. Je pro Vás užitečné učit se nová slovíčka pomocí obrázků a reálných předmětů?                                       |     |    |                 |
| 2. Je pro Vás užitečné dostat nová slovíčka napsaná i s vysvětlením významu či překladem a výslovností od vyučujícího? |     |    |                 |
| 3. Je pro Vás přínosné si slovíčka zapisovat do vlastních slovníčků?   |     |    |                 |
| 4. Baví Vás cvičení na spojování významu slovíčka a obrázku?   |     |    |                 |
| 5. Baví Vás cvičení na spojování významu slovíčka a definice?  |     |    |                 |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| 6. Učíte se nová slovíčka doma nazpaměť?                               |  |  |  |
| 7. Je pro Vás užitečné se slovíčka učit podle určitého tématu/ okruhu? |  |  |  |
| 8. Cítíte potřebu být ze slovíček zkoušeni a hodnoceni?                |  |  |  |

Při vysvětlování významu nových slovíček preferuji (vyberte prosím **pouze jednu** z daných možností):

- používat obrázky či reálné předměty
- vyhledávat překlad ve slovníčku
- dostat od vyučujícího papír s napsaným významem či překladem
- jiné:.....  
.....

| <b>Gramatika</b>   | <b>ANO</b> | <b>NE</b> | <b>NEMÁM ZKUŠENOST</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1. Je pro Vás užitečné vysvětlovat si gramatická pravidla?   |            |           |                        |
| 2. Je pro Vás přínosné, když Vám vyučující pravidlo rovnou sdělí (na rozdíl od toho, kdy na pravidlo sami přijdete na základě příkladů)? |            |           |                        |
| 3. Je pro Vás užitečné si zapsat dané pravidlo?  |            |           |                        |
| 4. Je pro Vás užitečné si procvičovat gramatiku samostatnou prací s následnou společnou kontrolou?                                       |            |           |                        |

Při vysvětlování gramatiky preferuji (vyberte prosím **pouze jednu** ze dvou možností):

- když vyučující pravidlo sdělí a poté ho procvičujeme
- když na dané pravidlo přijdu sám/ sama z množství příkladů

| <b>Poslech</b>  | <b>ANO</b> | <b>NE</b> | <b>NEMÁM ZKUŠENOST</b> |
|---|------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1. Je pro Vás přínosné poslouchat písně v angličtině? |            |           |                        |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
| 2. Je pro Vás přínosné poslouchat nahrávky z učebnice?                           |  |  |  |
| 3. Je pro Vás přínosné sledovat filmy v originále s titulky?                     |  |  |  |
| 4. Je pro Vás přínosné poslouchat anglický text a sledovat k tomu písemný zápis? |  |  |  |

Poslouchám v angličtině (lze vybrat **více** možností):

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> filmy               | <input type="radio"/> rodilé mluvčí |
| <input type="radio"/> zprávy (např. BBC)  | <input type="radio"/> jiné:.....    |
| <input type="radio"/> písně               | .....                               |
| <input type="radio"/> učebnicové nahrávky | .....                               |

| Čtení   | ANO | NE | NEMÁM ZKUŠENOST |
|---|-----|----|-----------------|
| 1. Čtete zjednodušenou anglickou četbu?   |     |    |                 |
| 2. Čtete dvojjazyčné knihy?   |     |    |                 |
| 3. Čtete anglické knihy v originále?  |     |    |                 |
| 4. Čtete anglické články/ časopisy?   |     |    |                 |
| 5. Je pro Vás přínosné zapisovat si neznámé výrazy, které se vyskytnou v textu? |     |    |                 |

Čtení si nejraději procvičuji (vyberte prosím **jednu** možnost):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> tichým čtením v hodině   | <input type="radio"/> hromadným čtením v hodině |
| <input type="radio"/> hlasitým čtením v hodině | <input type="radio"/> samostatným čtením doma   |

| <b>Mluvení</b>   | <b>ANO</b> | <b>NE</b> | <b>NEMÁM<br/>ZKUŠENOST</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1. Chcete, aby učitel opravoval Vaše chyby při mluvení?              |            |           |                            |
| 2. Myslíte si, že je důležité trénovat ústní projev i za cenu trémy? |            |           |                            |
| 3. Je pro Vás přínosné se učit nazpaměť anglické básně?              |            |           |                            |
| 4. Baví Vás cvičení na popis obrázku?                                |            |           |                            |

Mluvení si nejraději procvičuji (vyberte prosím **jednu** možnost):

- prací ve dvojicích (např. rozhovor na dané téma, popis obrázku,...)
- konverzací s vyučujícím
- samostatným ústním projevem

| <b>Psaní</b>  | <b>ANO</b> | <b>NE</b> | <b>NEMÁM<br/>ZKUŠENOST</b> |
|---|------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1. Baví Vás vyplňovat anglické křížovky?                  |            |           |                            |
| 2. Je pro Vás přínosné naučit se psát dopis v angličtině? |            |           |                            |
| 3. Baví Vás dělat cvičení na překlad?                     |            |           |                            |
| 4. Je pro Vás přínosné umět psát anglicky na počítači?    |            |           |                            |

| <b>Další:</b>                                    | <b>ANO</b> | <b>NE</b> | <b>NEMÁM<br/>ZKUŠENOST</b> |
|--|------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| 1. Baví Vás spolupráce ve dvojicích?             |            |           |                            |
| 2. Vadí Vám cvičení založená na práci s obrázky? |            |           |                            |
| 3. Je pro Vás přínosné zpívat v angličtině?      |            |           |                            |
| 4. Chcete domácí úkoly?                          |            |           |                            |



|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| 5. Procvičujete si učivo doma?  |  |  |  |
| 6. Chcete být hodnoceni za svou snahu?                                |  |  |  |
| 7. Chcete být hodnoceni za své výkony?                                |  |  |  |
| 8. Je pro Vás přínosné známkování?                                    |  |  |  |
| 9. Dáváte přednost slovnímu hodnocení před hodnocením známkami?       |  |  |  |
| 10. Je pro Vás přínosné učit se anglicky pomocí počítače a internetu? |  |  |  |

Nejpřínosnější je pro mě (vyberte prosím **jednu** možnost):

- porozumění mluvenému slovu
- porozumění psanému slovu
- samostatný ústní projev
- samostatný písemný projev

## Appendix 2: English version of questionnaire

Hello, my name is Eva Zítková and I am a student of the last degree of Faculty of Education in Plzeň. I would like to ask you to complete the questionnaire to my thesis, which will take you 15-20 minutes. I examine methods of teaching English to seniors from University of the Third Age students' view in my thesis. You can help not only me, but also your teachers by completing the questionnaire. Your teachers then can use gained data to better cognition of yours, your needs and your ideas about the studies.

Thank you very much for your time and good luck in your studies.

### I. PART – INTRODUCTION

**Have you ever attended an English course at the University of the Third Age?**

- yes
- no

#### 1. Gender

- man
- woman

**2. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?**

- elementary school
- secondary school without graduation
- secondary school with graduation
- higher professional (“vyšší odborné”)
- university

**3. What was your previous job position/ positions?**

.....

**4. What are your present experiences with the English language study?** (you can choose more options)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> no experiences                               | <input type="radio"/> I have been studying it at higher professional school |
| <input type="radio"/> I have been studying it at elementary school | <input type="radio"/> I have been studying it at university                 |
| <input type="radio"/> I have been studying it at secondary school  | <input type="radio"/> I attended paid courses/ tutoring                     |

- self-study
- passive use of language during travelling
- other:.....
- active use of language during travelling
- communication with the foreign speaker (e.g. letters)

**5. Why have you decided to attend English courses at the University?** (you can choose more options)

- the need to know the language – family or acquaintances abroad
- the need of social contact
- the need to understand movies and books in the original
- other:.....
- the need to know the language for the work with the computer or Internet
- interest in learning new things

**6. To which English language level would you assign yourself?**

- beginner
- “false beginner”
- lower-intermediate
- intermediate
- upper-intermediate

**II. PART – METHODOLOGY**

Please tick one of the three options in each question. In case that you have never attended English courses at the University of the Third Age, please answer in accordance with your ideas about your preferences of language learning.

| <b>Vocabulary</b>   | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> | <b>No experience</b> |
|---|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| 1. Is it useful for you to learn new vocabulary with the help of pictures and real objects?   |            |           |                      |
| 2. Is it useful for you to receive new vocabulary written together with explanation or translation and pronunciation from your teacher? |            |           |                      |
| 3. Is it helpful for you to note new words into your own vocabulary?  |            |           |                      |
| 4. Do you enjoy matching word meaning and image exercises?  |            |           |                      |

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |
| 5. Do you enjoy matching word meaning and definition exercises?                  |  |  |  |
| 6. Do you learn new vocabulary by heart at home?                                 |  |  |  |
| 7. It is useful for you to learn new words according to particular theme/ topic? |  |  |  |
| 8. Do you need to be examined and assessed from your vocabulary knowledge?       |  |  |  |

When explaining meaning of new words I prefer (please choose just **one** of the options):

- to use pictures and real objects
- to search for the translation in dictionaries
- to receive a sheet of paper with translation or meaning from the teacher
- other:.....  
.....

| <b>Grammar</b>   | Yes | No | No experience |
|--|-----|----|---------------|
| 1. Is it useful for you to know the grammatical rules?   |     |    |               |
| 2. Is it helpful for you when the teacher tell you the rule directly (contrary to your own discovery of the rule on the number of examples)? |     |    |               |
| 3. Is it useful for you to write the rule down?  |     |    |               |
| 4. Is it useful to practice the grammar by individual work with the consequent collective check?   |     |    |               |

When explaining grammar points I prefer (please choose just **one** of two options):

- when a teacher tell us the rule and then we practise it collectively
- when I discover the rule from a number of examples

| <b>Listening</b>   | Yes | No | No experience |
|--|-----|----|---------------|
| 1. Is it helpful for you to listen to songs in English?                              |     |    |               |
| 2. Is it helpful for you to listen to recordings from your course books?             |     |    |               |
| 3. Is it helpful for you to watch movies in the original with subtitles?             |     |    |               |
| 4. Is it helpful for you to listen to text in English and follow the written record? |     |    |               |

I listen in English (you can choose **more** options):

- movies
- news (e.g. BBC)
- songs
- course book recordings
- native speakers
- other:.....  
.....

| <b>Reading</b>  | Yes | No | No experience |
|---|-----|----|---------------|
| 1. Do you read simplified English reading?                              |     |    |               |
| 2. Do you read bilingual books?   |     |    |               |
| 3. Do you read English books in the original?                           |     |    |               |
| 4. Do you read English articles/ magazines?                             |     |    |               |
| 5. Is it useful for you to write down unknown phrases from the reading? |     |    |               |

When practising reading I prefer (please choose **one** option):

- silent reading in the lesson
- loud reading in the lesson
- collective reading in the lesson
- individual reading at home

| <b>Speaking</b>  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Do you want the teacher to correct your mistakes while you are speaking?              |  |  |  |
| 2. Do you think that it is important to practice oral discourse despite the nervousness? |  |  |  |
| 3. Is it helpful for you to learn English poems by heart?                                |  |  |  |
| 4. Do you enjoy picture description exercises?   |  |  |  |

When practising speaking I prefer (please choose **one** option):

- pair work (e.g. conversation on a given topic, picture description,...)
- conversation with the teacher
- individual speech

| <b>Writing</b>   | Yes | No | No experience |
|--|-----|----|---------------|
| 1. Do you enjoy completing English crosswords?                         |     |    |               |
| 2. Is it useful for you to learn to write the letter in English?       |     |    |               |
| 3. Do you enjoy doing translation exercises?                           |     |    |               |
| 4. Is it useful for you to be able to type on the computer in English? |     |    |               |

| <b>Other</b>  | Yes | No | No experience |
|---|-----|----|---------------|
| 1. Do you enjoy pair work?                              |     |    |               |
| 2. Do you mind exercise based on working with pictures? |     |    |               |
| 3. Is it useful for you to sing in English?             |     |    |               |
| 4. Do you want homework?                                |     |    |               |

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| 5. Do you practice the schoolwork at home?  |  |  |  |
| 6. Do you want to be assessed for your effort?                                    |  |  |  |
| 7. Do you want to be assessed for your performance?                               |  |  |  |
| 8. Is marking useful for you?   |  |  |  |
| 9. Do you prefer oral assessment rather than marks?                               |  |  |  |
| 10. Is it useful for you to learn English with the help of computer and Internet? |  |  |  |

The most useful for me is (please choose **one** option):

- comprehension of the spoken discourse
- comprehension of the written discourse
- individual oral discourse
- individual written discourse

## SHRNUTÍ

Diplomová práce se zabývá vyučováním anglického jazyka u seniorů. Hlavní fakta o procesu stárnutí z pohledu biologického, psychologického a sociálního jsou představena v teoretické části. Zde je dále přehled metodologií a základních metod výuky angličtiny, na což navazuje stručný nástin vzdělávání seniorů v České republice a především návrhy a praktické tipy pro výuku seniorů. Výzkum provedený na Univerzitě Třetího věku a uskutečněný pomocí dotazníků je popsán v následující části práce. Dotazníky zkoumaly představy seniorů o výuce anglického jazyka. Výsledky, které jsou prezentovány formou grafů, doprovázejí komentáře a důsledky pro učitele. Na základě výsledků výzkumu lze konstatovat, že studenti požadují výuku slovíček, gramatiky, poslechu i mluvení formou tradičních metod. Preferují například cvičení na překlad či práce s obrázky, ovšem bez jakéhokoli hodnocení či známkování; klíčovým momentem je motivace studentů k učení.