



On the Role of Language in the Context of Human Rights

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Human rights are fundamental for all persons from all walks of life. However, they become even more important for older persons and persons with who may be confronted with life-changing experiences and , where help or care often become necessary.

In the context of human rights, language is our connection to the world! Without it, life would be unthinkable. Everything we know about human rights is taken from laws, declarations, treaties, etc. composed in words, sentences and texts.

Unfortunately, language is taken for granted. However, when language breaks down and word-finding and understanding what is spoken or written fail, we become aware of the central role language plays in our everyday life for fulfilling human rights.

Take-home Message

Language

is



the key to quality of life

“The International Day for Older Persons ... reaffirms the commitment to promote full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for older persons.”

What must be undertaken to fulfill this commitment?

How is language affected in healthy older adults?

What does an acquired language impairment have to do with human rights?

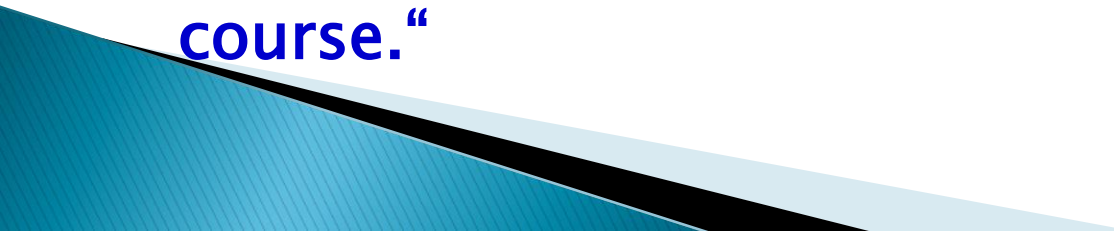


What must be undertaken to fulfill this commitment?

“Firstly, opportunities must be created for lifelong learning and gainful participation during different stages of the life course.

This is needed to guarantee economic and social sustainability which in turn safeguards the independence, autonomy and dignity of every older person.”

“Secondly, countries should provide older people access to opportunities for continued participation in different spheres of life including the world of work which provides meaning and productive engagement for older persons throughout their life course.”



How is language affected in healthy older persons?

Over the past decades single aspects of language processing – production and comprehension – have been reported on for the healthy aging population.

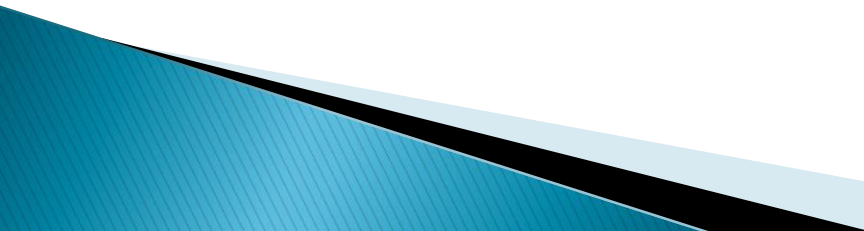
Two contrasting views are put forward:

1) 'Cognitive decline'

2) 'The myth of cognitive decline'



1) 'Cognitive decline': Results from lexical retrieval, syntactic processing, paired associate learning task results, researchers assert that cognitive-processing capacities decline across the lifespan, particularly in healthy older persons:

- reduced number of items named correctly on confrontation naming tasks
 - difficulties understanding more complex sentences in comprehension tasks
 - fewer correctly recalled items on a paired associate learning task, etc.
- 

2) 'The myth of cognitive decline':

Analyses of the cognitive processing abilities of older persons must take into account all the experiences and the information older persons have accumulated in their memory or mental lexicon, and the manner in which learning takes place.

Slower responses reflect a growing search problem due to a person's increased information-processing load inherent from a lifetime of learning.

The amount and range of knowledge and skills acquired throughout the lifespan results in an increase in the overall amount of information to be processed at any one given time. "Slower latencies reflect **learning**, not 'decline' "

(Ramscar, Hendrix & Baayen, 2014)

Support for the second proposal comes from our research (financed by City of Vienna and ÖAW):

Study of oral sentence production to photos depicting everyday life activities across the life span:


5–6 year olds

17–19 year olds

65 and above

The 17–19 year olds produced short succinct sentences, whereas the older persons produced more and diverse sentences to each item!

What the older persons have learned over the years was mobilized and produced!



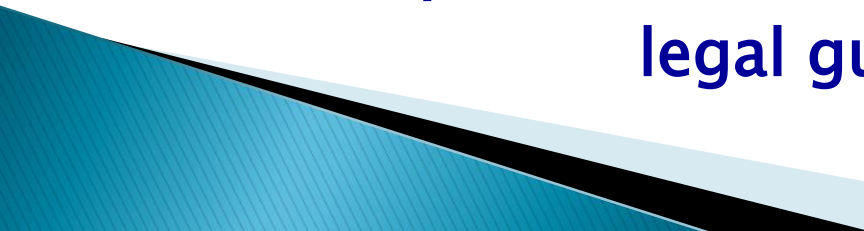
What does all this have to do with human rights?

We see that even in healthy older persons language difficulties can affect human rights

This is even more the case with persons who have suffered a stroke resulting in an acquired language disorder aphasia – which can severely affect all aspects of language processing.

In persons with an acquired language impairment, human rights are endangered in everyday life and, in particular in persons with a dementing illness.

Serious problems often arise in cases of legal guardianship!



How can we achieve continued participation and preservation of human rights?

By enhancing verbal communication skills!

How?
Through lifelong learning?



Enhance verbal communication skills before
language difficulties become striking!

Which language skills?

*We need words to form sentences and
express one's thoughts:*

Word-finding or lexical retrieval

We communicate in dialogues:


**Dialogues on relevant topics from everyday
life**



Enhance verbal communication skills!

How?

From a neuropsycholinguistic perspective and in accordance with the principles of experience-dependent neural plasticity (Kleim & Jones, 2008), there is an increasing demand for the use of **computer-assisted programs** to complement face-to-face interactions in rehabilitation and even more so for enhancing verbal communication skills in healthy older persons!



Departing from research carried out with persons with 'aphasia' based on applying the Everyday Life Activities Photo Series (ELA®) (Stark, 1992–2003) picture stimuli to improve language skills, the ELA®–computer assisted programs were conceptualized and developed.

The new computer–assisted programs are

ELA®–Basic Vocabulary

ELA®–Language Modules

ELA®-Basic Vocabulary

36 Categories of words to practice

The screenshot shows a web application interface for selecting vocabulary categories. The header features a home icon, the text 'Grundwortschatz', a 'Categories Selection' tab, and a hamburger menu icon. A 'Back to the Hauptmenü >' link is located in the top right. The main area contains a 6x3 grid of category buttons. The 'Freizeit und Hobbies' button is highlighted in yellow, while all other buttons are orange. A vertical scrollbar is on the right side of the grid. At the bottom right, there is a 'Starten' button.

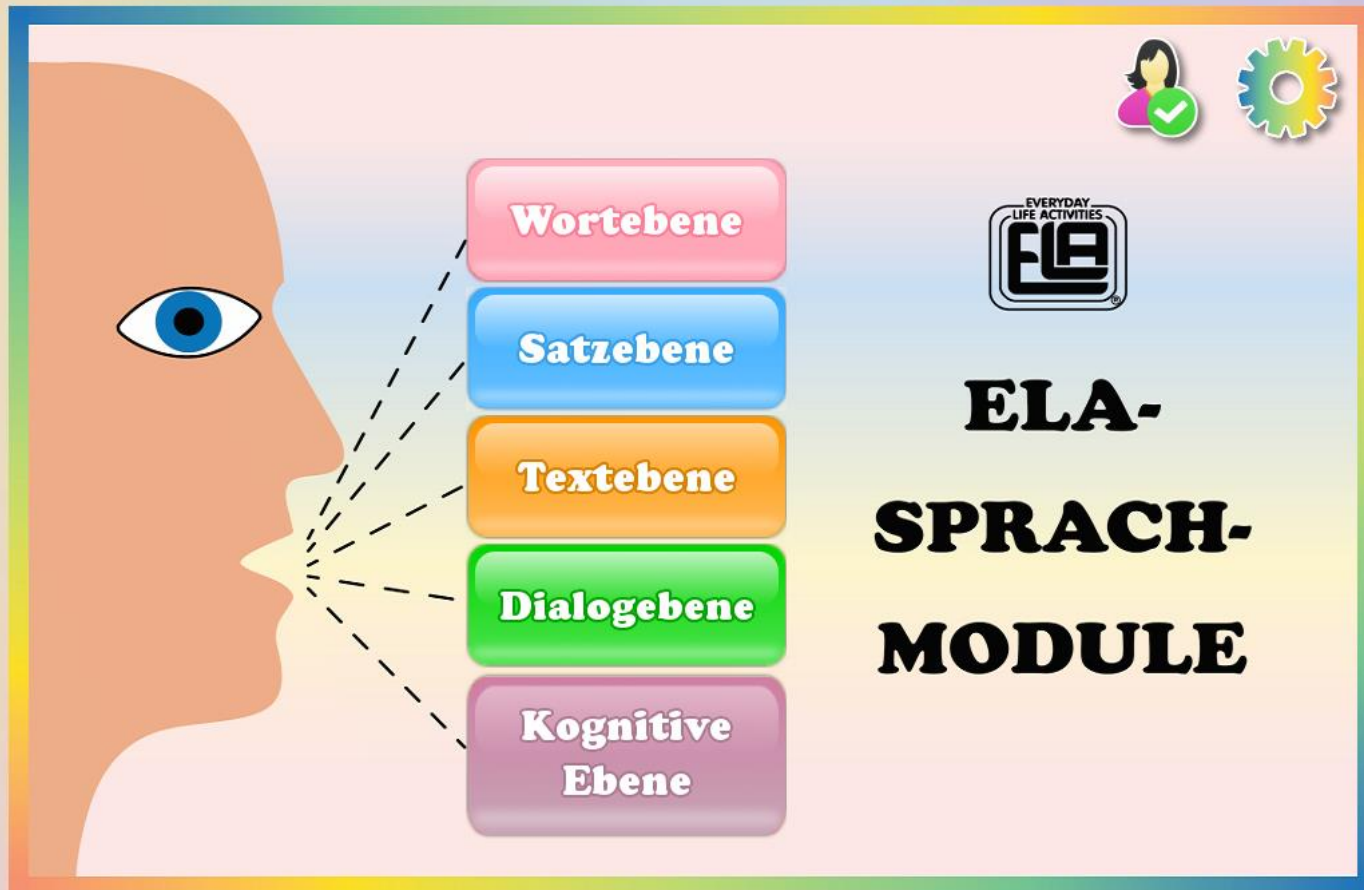
Categories Selection		
Accessoires	Ausbildung und Berufe	Beleuchtung
Büro- und Schulbedarf	Dekoration	Ereignisse und Feierlichkeiten
Fertige Speisen	Freizeit und Hobbies	Gartenarbeit
Gebäude	Gefühle und Vorstellungen	Gesundheit und Krankheit
Getränke	Heimwerken	Kleidung
Körper	Küchenausstattur	Lebensmittel

Starten

ELA®-Language Modules

Sprachmodule

Bitte wählen Sie ein Modul!



v5.0.14

Building a story to match the images



Ins kühle Nass

1



2



3



4



5



Constructing a Dialogue – Written

Sprachmodule

Produktion > Dialoge bilden > visuell > 3 > Ereignisse und Feierlichkeiten

Bringen Sie die Aussagen in die richtige Reihenfolge, sodass ein Dialog entsteht!

Richtig

Überprüfen

Ich hoffe, du hast ein wunderschönes neues Jahr!

Danke, dasselbe wünsche ich mir auch für dich!

Ich habe auch einen Glücksbringer für dich!

Oh! Ein Schweinchen auf einem Schlitten - das ist aber nett!

☐

☐

☐

☐

Dialog anzeigen

7/10

In light of the ever increasing ageing population and in the interest of stroke patients with aphasia we have to think of ways to provide the services necessary for enhancing their verbal communicative abilities, and thus to maintain their human rights for a longer period of time!

Lifelong continuous learning is key in this endeavor!



Thank

you

for

your

Attention !