

BACK BEHIND THE WHEEL

Social-interactional perspectives on older drivers and driver education

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WHY? With the percentage of older people in the population constantly increasing and the number of cars per inhabitant rapidly growing, the proportion of older drivers is likewise on the rise in Europe today. The project recognizes that car travel enables older drivers to continue leading active, mobile lives but requires skills and abilities that they may be losing or lacking.

HOW? Observations and findings in the project are based on audio- and video-recorded materials of voluntary post-licence driver training that took place in real traffic in real time. The materials were collected by Professor Heikki Summala and his team at the Traffic Research Unit, University of Helsinki, Finland (www.helsinki.fi/tru). The volunteers are older (aged 59–70 years) women who acquired their driving licences decades ago but who have not driven a car for years and have little driving experience overall.

WHAT? Through detailed examination of the materials, the project considers how older drivers conduct themselves, in interaction with their co-participants, in the complex, confined space of a moving car. It explores the following, partly interconnected research themes:



Ageing and interaction

How do older drivers use language and their body when engaging in interaction with their co-participants in cars? What kind of interactional practices do they use for accomplishing social actions and what kind of vocal, bodily and material resources do they draw on to do so? What purposes do these practices and resources serve for older drivers? What kind of a role does participants' age and ageing play in their interactions?

Use of car technology

How do older drivers manage the use of a car and the numerous technical devices that may be involved? How do they organize the activity of driving and cope with being on the move? How do they deal with the difficulties that may arise or pre-empt potential difficulties? How do they make explicit what it is that hinders or facilitates their driving? How are their co-participants involved in the activity of driving and the overall use of technology?

Learning at an older age

What kind of learning processes take place during a single training session and across several sessions as older drivers participate in voluntary post-licence driver education? Are there any particular challenges that older drivers face when learning (or re-learning) how to drive? In what ways do older drivers and their instructors contribute to learning? How do older drivers view and present themselves as learners?

Considering the research themes and answering the proposed research questions bring about new perspectives on ageing research. The project draws on and contributes to several fields of study, including research on language and social interaction, driving and traffic safety, use of technology and learning. It provides empirical observations and findings about the everyday lives of older members of society, which can be applied to practical concerns and taken into account and developed further in subsequent research. The project is best sited in an international and interdisciplinary environment that fosters ongoing and far-reaching communication between researchers, educators, policy makers and practitioners—an environment such as *FLARE: Future Leaders of Ageing Research*.

If you have any questions or comments concerning this poster and the project *Back behind the wheel: Social-interactional perspectives on older drivers and driver education*, please contact mirka.rauniomaa@oulu.fi.

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