



I'VE HAD A GOOD LIFE — I CAN'T COMPLAIN

**A DESCRIPTION OF COGNITIVE, PHYSIOLOGICAL AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS
ON DISCOURSE BEHAVIOUR WITH AGEING
AND AN ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATIONS
OF NORMAL AGEING**

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Abstract

I've had a good life. I can't complain.

**A description of cognitive, physiological and environmental effects
on discourse behaviour with ageing
and an analysis of discursive representations
of normal ageing**

Opportunities for communication, at any age, depend on being able to access and understand the speech acts and speech events of a speech community. A speech community is any group which shares the grammatical and semantic fields of a language and understands the metaphoric use of the language appropriately to express meaning in that community. We should expect that as we age, we have opportunities to develop a diversity of associations within various speech communities (kin groups, education groups, employment groups, political groups, sports groups and so on). By the time we reach seventy years or more, we should expect to have accumulated a great deal of experience in communicating within a diversity of social and interpersonal situations.

On the other hand, physiological changes (external body appearance, vision and hearing), cognitive changes (memory, recall and communication partner awareness), environmental changes (effects of the built environment on mobility and distance from speech communities with shared knowledge and experiences), together with personal and social attitudes towards the ageing process and towards the state of being old, bring about alterations in opportunities for communication. This, in turn, brings about changes in who we talk to, what we talk about and how we are talked about.

Paramount in effecting changes in communication performance and opportunities, is the expectation of physical and mental decline and decrement which is held as a social

stereotype, not only by younger people towards older people but very often by older people towards themselves and each other.

This dissertation discusses the changes and the subsequent effects on communication abilities and possibilities. There are three interrelated elements in this research project:

- Linguistic self-identification of the elderly.
- Linguistic representation of the elderly.
- Communication networks of the elderly.

This research has brought together the linguistic expressions, including metaphor, of individual and social perceptions of the ageing experience from three sources. The first source is an examination of texts on ageing found in the media (news, human interest stories and advertising). The second is an examination of how older people are represented in various works of fiction for children, adolescents and adults. The third source is the observation of age salient discourse from interactions with older people.

The findings indicate that the predominate social perceptions of ageing as revealed through the media and most fiction, with the exception of some children's picture books, are linguistically marked for negative stereotypes. Individual perceptions of the ageing experience as revealed through the observation of interpersonal discourse, indicate that older people do not view themselves as fitting either a negative or a positive stereotype. Self-identity is as individual as experiences and is revealed through language with the exchange of ideas and information. The creation of the self-identity is an ongoing, dynamic process which is not affected by age, but rather by circumstances such as health and environmental conditions which may bring about the loss of conversation opportunities.

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