



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.

Statement of authorship

This thesis contains no material which has previously been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of the candidate's knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. The author also consents to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan when accepted for the award of the degree.

Signed

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One grows feeble, so thin a thread holds you to life. The days turn grey. In strong sunlight the air is full of little black grains that fall. What do the aged listen to? ... They are harkening to themselves — systems that are going out. (*Langrishe, go down*. Aidan Higgins 1987: 146)

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith 'A whole I planned
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all
Nor be afraid!'
(*Dramatis Personæ Rabbi ben Ezra i*
Robert Browning 1984: 481)

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
(*Do not go gentle into that good night* Dylan Thomas 1966: 159)



Chapter 1

Introduction

The three quotations I have selected to present on the previous page (page xi) show three different views of the ageing¹ experience. One is of sadness at declining body systems. Another is joy at the knowledge of accumulated life experiences. And the third expresses the individual's need to rage against social perceptions and placement of the older person into the unlovely landscape of old age. I have selected these representations because of their differences. Individual experience of ageing is diverse. Everyone brings an accumulation of the memories of life events, of ongoing dynamic exchanges with others and personal and social values into how they experience and talk about their own ageing.

When I first considered this topic as a possibility for study, I believed that there had been very little research undertaken in the area of ageing in general and that there had been almost none carried out in the particular area of language and ageing. Since then I have discovered that not only is there a significant body of research and writing in train, but that it appears to be a growing area of interest, not only to scholars but also in the more public domain.

My initial ignorance of the breadth of research and discussion (scholarly or non-scholarly) on ageing could be explained by my own selfish interests or rather, previous lack of interest in this topic or my 'this has nothing to do with me' attitude. But there is also the possibility that in the past, the subject of ageing, like the act of ageing, has been denied in both an individual and a social sense and not been given an open forum in the popular press, unless perhaps to marginalise or mock.

It appears that in the past few years, authorities and governments have begun to recognise the fact of what they call 'the ageing populations'. For example, the proportion of the population of Australia aged sixty-five years or older (12% in

¹ I have used this spelling of 'ageing' throughout this dissertation except where I have quoted or referenced and the original author has used the alternative spelling 'aging'.

1997) is projected to increase to between 21% and 22% by 2031. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, reported in *Issues in society: Our ageing nation*. Justin Healey (ed.) 1999: 1) Subsequently, an increasing amount of discussion about ageing has crept into our daily lives in one form or another. So that there are now embryonic government policies on ageing, (following, for example, the *International Plan of Action on Ageing and United Nations Principles for Older Persons* 1998) there are public seminars on ageing and an increasing focus on 'the aged' as a target for consumer products. There is rhetoric about 'successful ageing', and older characters are being portrayed as heroes (or anti-heroes) in their own right in films and on the television screen.

Also, when I started thinking about the thesis of this topic, it seemed to me, the first thing I had to clarify was how to explain the constructs of 'normal', of 'old' and of 'ageing' as these would be pivotal to the thesis. Because there are no fixed criteria for 'normal' as applied to ageing, it is difficult to apply this term to any study. However, following Geschwind (1980) I have assumed the construct of 'normal' in ageing to indicate the situation where language and cognition abilities are unaffected as a result of illness or accident, that is, non-aphasic affected language use.

It is not difficult to find a definition of 'old' or 'ageing' in any dictionary and the constructs of 'ageing' and 'old' at first also seemed easy to apply. We all share an understanding of what the process of ageing is and what we mean when we talk about 'old' in whatever lexis we use to express it. For the sake of establishing manageable variables for investigation, it has become common practice in gerontological research to define 'ageing' and 'old' within three major chronological boundaries: sixty-five to seventy-five years old or 'young-old'; seventy-five to eighty-five years old or 'old-old' and over eighty-five years old or 'very old'. Recently, there has been some criticism of gerontological research which employs such narrow boundaries of ageing as being ageist in its very constructs. As I delved further into how these constructs 'old' and 'ageing' are applied socially and politically to individuals and groups within our society, I realised that the two expressions and their various synonyms, (See Nuessel 1985 for a detailed and

interesting description of synonyms) are in fact applied to all ages and that indeed chronological age is not necessarily indicative of meaning when we talk about ageing or being old.

To a child, for example, 'old' can be any one who is older, including an older sibling. Grandparents are consistently portrayed as old in literature and often in the press although grandparents can be and often are younger than fifty years old. In some sports, the 'too old' can be as young as twenty. (See Chapter 6 for an example of how chronological age is not always the marker of 'old'.) And in some cases of employment recruitment, despite the fact that in Australia it is illegal to claim an upper age limit for employment, in practice, an applicant who is over forty is often considered 'too old' for the job. To some healthy robust 'old' people, less healthy, more frail people, who may be younger in chronological years, are perceived as being 'old' in comparison to themselves. It seems to me that the constructs of old and ageing (we are all 'ageing' anyway), are floating and moveable and are considered and used from the perspective of the speaker/hearer, writer/reader according to the meaning they wish to be attached.

For the marketing of certain products, forty may be nominated as the upper age limit beyond which a consumer is expected to be too old to be interested in or to use the product or fifty may be nominated as the limit below which the consumer may be too young. A hundred, or even fifty years ago, life expectancy was lower than what it is now. Then, an individual may have been considered middle-aged at forty and expected to retire from work (if male) at sixty-five and to wait out the few remaining years at rest or at most, to fulfill the role of grandparent. Now, life expectancy is being pushed further and further on (Stephens 2001) and the concept of retirement is losing its value as a social and age marker.

Clearly, the need to confine the parameters of the constructs for the purposes of discussion poses problems for which there are no simple answers. When research is being carried out, boundaries of some sort are necessary. I have chosen to take a rogue attitude towards defining the construct in my examples of representations of

ageing and old in media, film and fiction (See Chapters 6 and 7). That is, I have taken up the meaning of a particular expression of ageing according to its social value allocated in the context of the discourse. For my samples of 'natural' or conversational discourse, I sought volunteer participants from the (Adelaide) community who were all over the age of seventy. (See Chapter 5 for a description of participant selection.)

Researchers also tend to talk in terms of different typologies of ageing such as chronological (calendar) ageing, biological ageing, physiological ageing (a medical construct), cognitive ageing (also a medical construct), and emotional and social ageing (both of which refer to the prescribed social attitudes and behaviour which are seen as appropriate for a particular chronological age group). Most writing on ageing blurs the differences between several of these typologies revealing a lack of conceptual clarity. It is accepted that at any given time an individual may exhibit a different 'age' in any of these categories. For example, cognitive and physiological ageing do not necessarily move in step with each other, nor do they follow a prescribed model according to chronological ageing. This is important for my thesis when, in Chapter 4, I examine some of the research which has been carried out into the effects of ageing on cognition and on language performance.

It also seems to me that whoever uses the expressions, and whoever attaches the meaning to expressions connected to ageing and old, the meaning and intention attached are more often than not negative. Most expressions involving 'old' carry a negative meaning whether the expression is literal, or metaphoric, or a commonly used collocation on which our metaphors and negative stereotypes are built ('old wives tale' as an untruth, for example). There are expressions involving old which denote a positive belief ('fine old wine', for example, indicates that the wine has reached its most perfect state) but such allocation of positive meaning is less common. While the expressions 'old', 'older' and 'oldest' are linguistically unmarked, our social and political uses of them reflect our meaning and understanding of the social construct and the value that we give to 'old' and 'ageing'

in our society. That is, that ageing is a negative process and being old is a negative state.

A great deal of the rhetoric about ageing is delivered in terms of the 'problem of the ageing population', the 'economic burden of our ageing population', or 'a demographic time-bomb ticking away into the next century'. The alarm with which the growth in the number of individuals aged eighty-five years and over is viewed, reflects a deep-seated ambivalence, even hatred and fear, towards older people, which can lead to an exaggeration of the size and nature of the resources required to meet their needs or of the sacrifice required to do so by younger people.

How realistic is the need to be 'alarmed' by the increasing number of older people in our society? How is the discourse around our increased longevity centred on the real experiences and achievements of individual older people? How do older people view and express their own identities and experiences? And do the expressions of their self-identity match the stereotypical images which society holds of the ageing experience? The following chapters attempt to answer these questions.

Chapter 2 discusses language theories which are pertinent to the study of language and ageing. I have taken as axiomatic that language and thought and social constructs develop and are intertwined in us all from childhood. We develop our own identities and beliefs and express them to ourselves and to others through the language that is available to us and the meanings which our social environment gives to the shared signs and grammar which give us the shared meanings of the language. Language is the enabling medium for social interaction and the positioning of the self in the society and at the same time it is the product of those processes.

In using language we are constantly involved in extending the meaning of words, in producing new meanings through metaphor, word-play and interpretations. We are therefore also involved, consciously or not, in altering, reworking, both positively and negatively, our relations with others and with the world. Language is not a closed system of fixed one-to-one significations. It is a living entity that develops and changes in time and space according to communication events.

With this in mind, I look at language theories most pertinent to the discourse of ageing. This includes theories of the meanings of signs, the role in language and social ordering of categories and stereotypes, theories of discourse, text and context, the concepts of metaphor and metonymy, theories of speech communities, and speech events, the power of silence, the Theory of the Communicative Predicament of Ageing and Speech Accommodation Theory. I also look at theories of the discursive construction of the self and the importance of narrative in self-identification. And finally I examine some theories of sociolinguistic methodology as it applies to research into 'natural' communication involving older people.

In Chapter 3, I first give an historical overview of the social construction of ageing. I then examine the concepts of ageism, gerontophobia and the perennial desire for the 'fountain of youth' and associated attitudes towards ageing held by both younger and older cohorts. I then discuss various social theories of ageing such as Disengagement Theory, Activity Theory, Role Theory, Continuity Theory and the Theory of the Third Age.

Disengagement theorists argue that, with increasing age, individuals gradually and voluntarily withdraw from key activities and relationships and they are encouraged to do so by society. Activity theorists argue the contrary — successful ageing depends on the individual staying in the mainstream of life through playing as many key roles as possible, sustaining social relationships in both the private and public sphere, and maintaining the resources for doing so. Role theory appears particularly relevant a study on language change in ageing because it recognizes both informal and formal role loss and gain in later life and the potential effects of such changes on older adults. Continuity Theory contends that personalities, lifestyles, values and behavioural patterns present in an adult's younger years play an important role in the adjustments to old age. With this theory, central personal characteristics become even more pronounced and core values even more salient with age. The theory of the 'Third Age' or the 'Age of Opportunity', extends the separations of stages of adulthood from three to four, given that in our society, our life expectancy is increased. The 'Third Age' lies between the ending of the years of formal employment and

parenting and the onset of the years of increased frailty. It allows for further education, role building and social group formations.

My discussion also involves such concepts such as healthy ageing, positive ageing, robust ageing, successful ageing and productive ageing, the debates surrounding the morality of the medical prolongation of life and the morality of euthanasia and the concept of adaptability as a requirement for life. I also examine the role that education, employment, the extent of family and social networks and institutional affiliations and the built environment play in the establishment and maintenance of communication opportunities. In this third chapter I also look at acts of identity which are revealed through life story narratives and the role of humour as a meaningful way of maintaining social values and how this reveals social attitudes and values towards ageing.

In the last few years, scholarship has shown that the meaning of aging is shaped by social institutions, government policies, economic forces, media images, humour, religious beliefs and modern medicine. Consequently, if the life course is a fabrication of human agency we can apply the metaphoric language of constructivism to it. If the retirement stage of life has been 'invented' and old age 'constructed', then we can 'deconstruct' the theories of later life and even 'reconstruct' old age to improve its quality or enhance its value.

Chapter 4 provides a review of existing research into aspects of language and ageing. Research to date focuses on five central issues. The first of these is the influence of sensory impairment or the effects of physiological changes which lead to personal withdrawal from social life. Physiological changes, visual and auditory for example, are sometimes referred to in terms of decrements or impairments and appear to influence communication behaviour, most often exhibited through withdrawal from communication participation.

The second issue is the relationship between language and cognition. Aging is typically viewed as being accompanied by losses in various basic cognitive skills.

Recent research suggests that short-term or 'working' memory capacity, in particular, is important for aspects of extended language processing. It is commonly believed that failing memory is a characteristic of older people. There is also a great deal of research into different kinds of memory (episodic memory and semantic memory, for example) attention and problem solving and how these affect language behaviour in ageing.

The third issue raised in research is the relationship between age perceptions and evaluative reactions towards adult speakers or stereotypes of ageing which evoke particular responses from others. This has usually been examined using speech adjustments to age referenced communication tasks. Some speakers (usually younger) have been observed to employ a special speech register, sometimes termed 'elderspeak' or 'secondary baby talk' or sometimes 'motherese', when addressing older adults. 'Elderspeak' has been shown to be particularly salient in nursing homes and other health care facilities, although variants occur in a wide variety of other contexts and settings, including sites of service such as banks. Although it has been noted that some older people in care find 'elderspeak' to be positive and supportive under some circumstances, it can also be argued that 'elderspeak' may reinforce negative stereotypes of older adults and therefore its use can constrain older adults' opportunities to communicate and ultimately contribute to their physical and cognitive decline. 'Elderspeak' can be identified through prosody, grammatical complexity, semantic content, or through the use of particular speech markers such as diminutives. Age-linked stereotypes about abilities are often shaped or elicited by communication factors such as speech rate, tone and voice quality. It has also been suggested that various cues of age, such as grey hair and apparent frailty, can evoke a schema or standard routine for conversation with older persons. Such communicative stereotyping by a speaker might lead to inappropriate accommodation to the presumed needs of the older person for louder or more simplified speech. Such accommodation may in turn have a negative impact on the older person's own sense of communication skill, and ultimately, on the older adult's actual cognitive capacities.

The fourth issue foregrounded in the literature is a small body of research which discusses aspects of language behaviour such as egocentrism and verbosity in older adults. Studies in referential communication situations indicate that older adults can display failure to adequately consider the perspective of the listener. Both speakers and listeners sometimes seem guilty of 'egocentrism', which Piaget (1955) described as the failure to take account of the other's communicative needs. One finding which has been reported several times in recent literature is that older adults tend to be more talkative than 'middle-aged' people in narrations, conversations and descriptions. This is referred to as verbosity and is further distinguished between on-target verbosity and off-target verbosity, the latter signalling that the speech of the older adult lacks clear reference points. This is frequently reported in the specific case of older people with sensory impairment such as a hearing loss. There may, of course, be sociological explanations for factors of egocentrism and off-target verbosity.

And finally, there are increasing reports on the language skills of older adults and the telling of narrative. This is one important type of larger, multi-sentence discourse form that plays a central role in everyday life and thought and in the maintenance of positive self-identification. Research on narrative skills tends to support the common notion that this may be an area of considerable language strength for older adults.

In Chapter 5, I first discuss theories and issues connected with conducting research with older people as subjects and the value of examples of 'natural' discourse for language analysis. Then I describe my methods of selection and analysis of representational images of ageing in the media and in a variety of fictional representations.

The second aspect of my data collection, the collection and analysis of actual verbal samples of discourse with older people will be described. I have selected samples (including anecdotal examples) of talk about and by older people and the ageing process to illustrate my discussions in all chapters. However, I describe my selected samples of the representation of both status of being old and the process of ageing from media (advertising, news reports, television programs such as soap operas and

films) in greater detail in Chapter 6, samples from fiction in Chapter 7 and those from recording of actual talk through open-ended interviews in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6 analyses some media representations of older adults. Many observers suggest that television and (secondarily perhaps) the other media are especially important in the socialisation process today because families have less influence in this arena than they had even a generation ago. The media are social gatekeepers for reporting the news of the world and setting social agendas. What is selected as news, both reflects social values and plays a role in establishing social values.

Language allows meaning to be conveyed and at the same time the choices (field, tenor, mode) give the semantic meaning. In the mass media in particular, receivers of messages (hearers, readers or observers) can be both informed and manipulated. The mass media are potent conveyers and purveyors of social messages because they are perceived primarily as dealing in entertainment and information and their ideological messages are often not consciously noticed or analysed.

Isolation from the audience is a characteristic of mass communicators. Ironically, the more 'mass' the medium, the greater the isolation, so that it is possible to speak of a degree of self-absorption, amounting almost to autism, which is one of the most pronounced traits of television. It is suggested that the mass communicator cannot attend to other's actual or perceived performance, only to a stereotype of that language and therefore the images presented in turn become stereotypes.

Chapter 6 also looks first at the paradigms of burden, problem, victim, and the more recent notion of successful ageing as for example, 'super gran' within which older people are represented in the news. Then I examine the power of advertising in its representation of older people and the subsequent socializing effect of selected portrayals. With the ageing of the population an extensive market exists for new services and new products such as retirement homes, pension plans, fiscal services of all kinds, health products, treatments, and tourism. However, it would seem that old faces and old bodies don't sell any products other than places in retirement homes, if

only for the reason that most people perceive themselves as essentially younger than they are. It is rare (though not impossible) to find older bodies portrayed in advertisements.

Finally in Chapter 6, I examine some portrayals of ageing and of older people in a sample of television soap operas and films. The images here, as has already been foreshadowed, are highly marked with stereotypical representations of ageing. These include the images which deal with the belief that older people are asexual, with the belief that older people have lost their capacities to care for themselves (in addition to their capacities to work for the benefit of the group) and finally the social and institutionalised concept of abandonment. In such films as *Logan's Run* (Directed by Michael Anderson 1976) and *The Ballad of Narayama* (Directed by Shohei Imamura 1983) we see the extreme power struggle between the generations, where for the good of the survival of the group, the weaker (older in this case) individuals must be sacrificed to make way for those who are stronger (younger).

Chapter 7 explores the images of ageing that are revealed through different works of fiction, written for children, adolescents and adults, including examples from picture books, adolescent fiction and a variety of fictional works for adults from novels, poetry and plays. Picture books, with their important combination of visual and verbal interaction, play a very important role in establishing the view of society for the child. Indeed, in an increasingly age-segregated society, it is likely that children's attitudes toward ageing will be heavily influenced by fictional presentations of older individuals.

Surveys indicate that a very small percentage of picture books, books for older children and adolescents, have the younger, principal characters interacting with older people. As already discussed above, the non-verbal discourse such as visual portrayals, in this case of older people, must play a dominant role for young children in the formation of their perceptions of what ageing means and the value of older people within their social sphere. And again, as I have already mentioned, the chronological age of the 'older person' in picture books is unclear, as most of the older characters are presented as grandparents but in the 'real' world, and within the

experience of most children today, grandparents are not grey-haired. While, with the exception of some fairy tales, the elderly are generally portrayed positively in children's fiction, the dominant characteristics represented within are fulfilments of the most popular stereotypical images of ageing, such a kind old lady, grandparent with memory loss or the grumpy old man who becomes neighbourhood friend in the resolution of the story. Images such as old person with failing memory, old person as grey-haired, kind and benign, old person as powerless (needing to live in a care situation because of failing health) prevail in both fictions for children and for adolescents.

One aspect of communication interaction between older person (perhaps grandparent) and young adolescent, is the cross-generational tension which arises between the two as the younger person begins the process of self- and group-identification which acts in opposition to familiar, established relationships. When we examine the position of adolescents in relation to ageing, we can see the tensions between the emerging self-articulation of the adolescent identity and the established set of defined identities of older people. The case of wisdom is set aside, set in opposition and the beginnings of fear and bias show through. Group membership begins its alignment with the group of choice in parallel with isolation from familial groups. The 'them and us' paradigm begins to take shape. The metaphors of burden, uselessness and powerlessness assume dominance as the power struggle takes place.

In adult fiction, the representation of both the ageing process and the state of being old are most often displayed as acutely negative experiences. Very few redeeming features about being old can be found in adult fiction including poetry and plays. The decline and decay paradigm prevails. One's self-view then takes on the negative aspect which is held by the collective. We search for the fountain of youth, even if only on the outside as in *The djinn in the nightingale's eye* (Byatt 1995) to convince the 'rest' of society that we are not yet in that despised place. Again, fear of losing abilities and of abandonment may well be a reality for us as we are faced with the options of maintaining a balanced society. There is a strong need to maintain social

order and to keep the categories clear. This is the message which both the media and the fiction reinforce.

Chapter 8 looks at samples of the data collected from interviews with five volunteer older participants as examples of:

... language as it is used by native speakers communicating with each other in everyday life. (Labov 1972b: 184)

I extend this definition to the data collected through media, films and fictions as all of the language used is 'natural' in the sense that it is communicating thoughts, ideas and beliefs and sustaining social groupings and ideologies or forming new ones. In this sense all language carries meaning and is therefore 'natural' text.

... it is difficult to avoid the common-sense conclusion that the object of linguistics must ultimately be the instrument of communication used by the speech community: and if we are not talking about that language, there is something trivial in our proceedings. (Labov 1972b: 187)

The establishment of a relationship and a context for the interaction with the participant is important. In the context of this study, all participants were volunteers and the activity of establishing a relationship, through preliminary meetings, participants' choices of venue and times for meeting, enabled the rapid and easy formation of an exchange relationship.

The collection of data included open ended interviews using a set of questions which could be put to each participant, but which allowed a free range of expression from each. Labov used a set of socially related questions for each subject to allow each one to develop the subject as they wanted but still retain the theme so that the narrative could involve the same type of speech act for each participant. Such questions as: 'What was the best day of your life?' for example, allow for past narrative as well as giving the participant an opportunity to reveal the language width within field, tenor and mode.

The methodology of researcher's observation of interactions with participants is, of course, a restricted one. It does not allow any degree of generalisability and risks skewing so-called natural behaviours through the intrusion of research interests. Nevertheless, as analysis of actual speech events, what is learned remains valuable.

And finally, the value of gerontological linguistic research is to see where we put our words when we evaluate the roles and the policies of the aged and economics, the value that society gives to the aged experience, the construction that is put on it and, on a personal level, to reflect on the intergenerational exchanges and how this in turn reflects on social status for ageing.

I hope to show that if there is a 'problem' with our social perception of ageing, the problem is not with the aged but with the myths about ageing and the resulting negative attitudes displayed towards older people politically and socially. An exploration in the following chapters of 'Who says what to whom and when' should help us see how this comes about.

This dissertation, then, discusses the changes in individual and social identity in the ageing process and the changes in communication abilities and possibilities. There are three interrelated elements:

- Linguistic self-identification of the elderly

This thread explores how the elderly use language to identify themselves as either belonging to a group (identified by age) or as distinct from other groups (identified by age).

The research question is: What are the linguistic markers of this identity?

- Linguistic representation of the elderly

This strand explores the many language representations of the elderly as demonstrated specifically by the media and through literature.

The research question is: Does stereotypical representation match the observed data?

- Communication networks of the elderly

This component is concerned with the observation and analysis of the 'who' and the 'how' of communication behaviour of the elderly. It involves an examination of the inter- and intra- group communication networks which engage the elderly, with an observation of any differences in discourse between these networks.

The research question is: Does the language of the elderly reflect their position in selected communication networks?

Chapter 2

Language theories and ageing

In this chapter, I discuss theories about language as they relate specifically to how an individual constructs a self-identity and how an individual perceives or identifies herself/himself in relation to others and in turn how the individual is perceived by others. I also want to examine how we, within our various cultural and social groups, make decisions and judgments and how we present ourselves and our ideas and beliefs and pass news from one person to another so that others can understand what we think and believe. How do we persuade others to think like us and make decisions collectively and carry out all the other small and large negotiations we need to do in our personal, social and business worlds? Is it really possible to share another's meaning? What are the cultural values of signs?

In attending to theories of language, my focus is on the ways in which language and social experience are integrated and how they work together. I discuss some of those theories which demonstrate that language is a system through which we identify and describe the experience of the self, the society and the self in relation to the society. I also want to explore how the signs we use to express the infinite variations of meanings in our complex networks of relationships can be, at the same time, manipulated to create new meanings as new experiences come into our world. That is, as we can construct our realities through language, so then can we deconstruct and/or reconstruct them.

Bearing in mind my three research questions which are all related to language and the representation of the aging self and the social relatedness of self and others, I take as axiomatic that language and social identity work together and are in essence intertwined. My focus is on general language theories as they relate to signs, categorisation and stereotypes as social organisers, to language use (spoken, written and visual texts and contexts), the roles of metaphor and metonymy, the construction of the self (individual voice), the construction of lifespan discourse (speech communities and speech events), cross generational discourse and discourse where

individuals are in positions of uneven power (for example in institutional settings). In other words, my examination is of what Fishman (1972) referred to as the questions to be answered: 'Who speaks (or writes) what language (or what language variety) to whom and when and to what end?' (Fishman 1972: 2) Or, as Kreckel (1981) has put it in querying the meaning of the expression 'language use', 'Use by whom? Which kind of language? And Use under what conditions?' (Kreckel 1981: 13) Or as Meinhof and Richardson (1994) ask, 'How do we represent social life and give that life substance?' (Meinhof and Richardson 1994: end page)

I will also look at theories of methodology for the study of actual conversations as everyday discourse or communicative acts.

Signs and language

Signs carry meaning but the meaning attached to signs can be arbitrary, iconic or indexical according to the intention of expression the speaker/writer and the intention in understanding of the hearer/reader. In the Saussurean sense, the arbitrariness of the sign refers to the relationship between content and expression of the signs, or between the signifier and what is to be signified. Or it can be seen as the paradox of the speech gap between thought and expression, which means exploiting any number of possible combinations of match between an idea, a thought and the expression of it during negotiation of meaning which will then allow communication to take place. The sign is accepted as iconic when we negotiate the shared understanding of the meaning or representation of the sign. The following two examples underline the importance of negotiated meaning.

In *Through the looking glass* (originally published in 1887), Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty responded, 'smiling contemptuously', to Alice's concerned, 'I don't know what you mean by 'glory'', with the following:

'Of course you don't — till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'

‘But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument,’ Alice objected. ‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean different things.’

The question is’, said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master — that’s all.’ (Carroll 1993: 113-114)

And in Virginia Woolf’s *To the lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay reflects:

How then did it work out, all this? How did one judge people, think of them? How did one add up this and that and conclude that it was liking one felt, or disliking? And to those words what meaning attached, after all? (Woolf 1977: 27)

Many linguists have detailed and affirmed the relationship between language, thought and meaning. For example, Wittgenstein wrote that, ‘... the sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the system of signs, from the language to which it belongs.’ (Wittgenstein 1969: 5) and ‘the use of a word in the language is its meaning’. (Wittgenstein 1974: 60) And Harris (1988) interprets Saussure’s claim such that ‘a linguistic sign, as far as the individual language-user is concerned, is a mental association between a concept and a sound pattern’ (Harris 1988: 12)

Halliday takes this further with, ‘Language arises in the life of the individual through an ongoing exchange of meanings with significant others’. (Halliday 1978: 1)

Halliday describes language as a linguistic system consisting of three interweaving aspects. They are, ‘Semantic (the meaning), lexico-grammatical (the syntax, morphology and lexis) and phonological (the sound)’. (Halliday 1978: 128) And Trudgill (1983) claims that:

Language is not simply a means of communicating information ... It is also a very important means of establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. (Trudgill 1983: 13)

Trudgill (1983), Gergen (1991) and Fairclough (1995) all extend the value of signifiers to include semiotic practice in other semiotic modalities such as photography and the clothing we wear. I would add to this list the notion of non-verbal language including facial expressions, hand and arm expressions and body movement in general. We can also extend this concept of non-verbal language to include clothing and hairstyle as often these individual choices reflect decisions which help identify an individual into a social grouping of their choice. Harré (1976) would also include the acts of having and displaying possessions as signs, particularly as signs which identify the self. Specifically in the case of ageing, physiological factors play a role as non-verbal language as most of us make a judgement on the language positioning of an older individual from their bodily appearance. We can clearly see this at work, for example, through the signs or visual images and representations of older people as bent (down), with undefined body shape and usually with a walking stick carrying the message of the body as apparently frail. But we have negotiated this meaning for these verbal and visual signs. As a society we have agreed that this is their representation. This is the iconic sign of ageing we recognise in our society. Non-verbal language can stand alone as speech act or can be brought into play in conjunction with utterances. Silence as a conveyer of cultural meaning must be added to this list. Although neither non-verbal language nor silence can convey a literal meaning, they can effect communication since they are all social semiotics and therefore represent an individual's signs of self-identification.

To make sense of another's words or actions, the audience must proceed from some perspective. Others' words do not come with instructions attached indicating how they should be interpreted. The interpretations of words and other signs are based on a set of assumptions, or a perspective — concerning, for example, 'what people have on their minds', how they are motivated and what their intentions are. Meinhof and

Richardson (1994) suggest that, 'To enquire into the meaning of a word is to enquire into present attitudes and practices ...' (Meinhof and Richardson 1994: 28)

Language is our means of expression of both our internal and external experience. And experience is the sum of human experience and everything that plays a role in it including the nature of our bodies, our genetically inherited capacities, our ways of doing things and our ways of organising our social structures. The essence of this belief, that language reflects the way we experience ourselves and our relationship with those around us and how we interact with our environment, has been expressed in many different ways by different linguists (See Vygotsky, Saussure, Labov, Bernstein, Gumperz, Hymes, Fasold, Halliday, Harris, for example). Our self-identification, our relationships with other people and with events, our negotiations, our thoughts, values, judgements, emotions and motivations can only be expressed and fully realised through language. An infinite variety of positionings of signs relate to the width and depth of our experiences. Vygotsky put it that:

Language actively symbolises a social system representing metaphorically in its patterns the variation that characterises human culture. (Vygotsky 1962: 153)

Meaning comes about through the selection of signs which can be arranged syntagmatically together. This is Saussure's concept of syntagmatic and paradigmatic choices. There are infinite varieties of settings of signs although constraints are put upon the arranger within a social paradigm to ensure communication, that is, understanding by another or others in the community.

In our allocation of meanings to signs we also need to examine the values we give to 'unmarked' and 'marked' signs. Unmarked values of signs carry what Hymes (1974) refers to as the most continuously usual and understood meaning of the sign within the speech community. So that we could say that the meaning of 'old' in its most unmarked sense is that of something which has endured chronologically as opposed to something which is 'new' or 'fresh'. In the situation of the 'marked' use of 'old'

we could be allocating value to the word which it does not ordinarily carry. In this sense it may serve to surprise, to shock, to mock, or to signal a shift in meaning of some sort. Such use may be, for example, found in the expression ‘silly old fool’, where the word ‘old’ does not imply chronological endurance but rather some kind of special usage of derision or mockery.

There are convincing arguments that even from childhood, as we learn language, at the same time we understand and express meanings within our experience and culture. (See, for example, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bernstein, Halliday, Harris and Hasan) The construction of our reality is inseparable from the construction of the semantic system in which our social experience or the reality of people and environment is encoded. In this sense, as we interact with others in our world, language becomes the shared meaning potential. We exchange meanings through the text or the discourse all of which carry social values which enable participants to predict, understand and participate in what is going on. In this way, we act out our social structure and our individual roles within it. Everyday talk, written words and visual images work together in providing the signs and allowing us to use them to make meanings in order to communicate with each other.

Language consists of text, or discourse — the exchange of meanings in interpersonal contexts of one kind or another. The contexts in which meanings are exchanged all carry social value; a context of speech is itself a semiotic construct, having a form (deriving from the culture) that enables the participants to predict features of the prevailing register — and hence to understand one another as they communicate.

By their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and of knowledge. (Halliday 1978: 2)

Therefore, in the processes by which the child becomes a member of society, language plays the central part. Vygotsky held that ‘All basic intellectual operations

are already formed by the age of three'. (Vygotsky 1962: 99) And, according to Halliday:

A child learning language is at the same time learning other things through language — building up a picture of a reality that is both external and internal. In this process the construal of reality is inseparable from the construal of the semantic system in which the reality is encoded. (Halliday 1978: 1)

Bernstein, in discussing a child learning language and complex codes said about the shared community codes that:

Such a communication system has a vast potential, a considerable metaphoric range and a unique esthetic capacity. (Bernstein 1972: 472)

Consequently:

The social structure becomes the child's psychological reality through the shaping of his acts of speech acts. (Bernstein 1972: 473)

The concept that children acquire language as it represents the social world through all their learning situations and socialising activities is important to understand when we look at the perceptions of ageing and indeed the concept of the word 'old' that is presented to children.

Categories and stereotypes

Within any culture, standard forms of behaviour, including language behaviour, prevail as ordering markers. Standard forms allow common understanding of meaning between participants or communicants. Stereotypes are such forms. The common usage of the term 'stereotype' is defined by activities and behaviours which are seen as typical of a group. Many aspects of daily life are described through

stereotypes. Stereotypes play an important role in the social cohesiveness of any community. In order to understand the world and to function in it, we have to categorise, in ways that make sense to us, the things and experiences that we encounter. Some of our categories emerge directly from our experience, given the way our bodies are and the nature of our interactions with other people and with our physical and social environments.

Language has to interpret the whole of our experience, reducing the infinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, and also the world inside us, the processes of our consciousness, to a manageable number of phenomena: types of processes, events, and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions and the like. (Halliday 1978: 21)

And Fowler (1981) says that:

The world of perception and cognition — the world as we know it — is an artifice, a social construct. We have a variety of names for this world: commonsense, everyday life, the natural attitude, ideology. All of these designations refer to the world as we take it for granted, the habitualised world. ... Typical and repeated patterns of interaction, technological procedures and the development of roles and institutions cause the members of a society to represent the world as a system of recognisable objects: habituated categories of perception and action which simplify the society's management of itself and of its habitat. ... Together, the complete set of objectivations in a culture constitutes the representation of reality, or world view, enjoyed by the community and its members. In a nutshell, we see the world in terms of the categories through which we, and our society, have constituted it. (Fowler 1981: 24)

Language provides labels for the objects which a culture has determined are relevant to its functioning: the existence of linguistic signs ensures the identity of the objects we call, for example, 'memories', 'grandparents', 'hearing aids', 'yarns', 'aged', and

'retirement home'. Language also classifies these objectifications by groupings into lexical sets, such as kinship terminologies or the registers or 'jargons' of specific occupations or fields of knowledge such as medicine.

Lakoff (1987) also suggests that we categorise 'events, actions, emotions, spatial relationships, social relationships, and abstract entities'. (Lakoff 1987: 6) When we give everyday descriptions, for example, we are using categorisation to focus on certain properties that fit our purposes. So that we might describe an older female person as 'a little old lady' or we might refer to older males as 'grumpy old men'. Such discursive constructs, bringing into being syntagmatic collocations such as 'little' and 'old' or 'grumpy' and 'old' leading to stereotypes which we all, even children, will come to take into our thought, our belief system and our language. It is also suggested that we can ultimately come to behave to the stereotype to whichever category we are consigned. So that within our language, we have expressions such as 'grow up', 'be your age' or 'act your age' which carry the meaning that there are specific ways of behaving which are ordered according to specific age groups.

Lakoff (1987) discusses many of the models of categorisation process which we use to sort and contain aspects of our experience. He claims that one way of categorising is through connecting common properties of items. For example we could say that the common properties of older people are gray or thinning hair and wrinkled skin (physical properties) and the fact of having lived a certain number of years. However, for each individual, the experiences gained from living those years should be quite diverse. Lakoff (1987) would call the categorisation of ageing people by the physical signs alone as limited value categorisation a 'frame with fault lines in it' (Lakoff 1987: 116), since the properties of the category do not truly define all the units within it. This is also illustrated by Wittgenstein's (1982: 692) idea of 'family resemblance', where convergence on or divergence from a certain paradigm in any situation is a most probable proposition.

Krueger, Heckhausen and Hundertmark (1995) examine the issue of stereotype from a different stance, claiming that:

The prevalence of age stereotypes shows that age plays an important role as an organising principle in social perception. Unlike other prominent variables of social categories such as sex or nationality, however, age categories have no clear socially defined boundaries. Although age is a continuous chronological variable, people tend to break down the life span and categorise themselves and others into discrete age segments. (Krueger, Heckhausen and Hundertmark 1995: 82)

These segments vary according to who is doing the breaking down, but they usually include childhood, youth, young adulthood, middle-age, and old-adulthood. These categories are associated with a network of stereotypic expectations about social roles, about life events, and about stages of personality development and with the behaviours and language which accompany them and, in the case of language, describe them.

The language we have available for us to use or choose to use, is a powerful force in shaping and communicating our ideas and feelings. Stereotypes, metaphors, similes, imagery, all give us a picture of our world. We can condemn or praise by the language we use and the perceptions we create. Who we are, at the various points in our passage through life, bears some systematic relation to our experiences of, and our participation in, language and social interaction.

Research shows that the stereotype of ageing also includes an underlying assumption that age can appropriately be seen as a determinant of language competence and language behaviour. The relationship between the perception of the situation and the participants involved, and the linguistic representation of it is important in that, how the situation is played out and described affects the ongoing image which is scooped up by the community and absorbed as a reality and subsequently replayed as a stereotype.

As an anecdotal exemplar of resultant expectant attitudes and behaviour from younger people towards older people in our society, I relate a personal experience. I

was recently in a bank, standing in the express service queue waiting for my turn. An older woman standing ahead of me, turned to me and said, ‘I hope I don’t get served by *that* person’, and pointed towards the assistant nearest us. The older woman explained, ‘She thinks I’m too old to know. I said I didn’t have a passbook and she said I must have — she said I’d forgotten it. But I never had one.’

And, as another exemplar of ageism in everyday practice, I relate that a friend reported accompanying her (seventy-five year old) mother to a bank where the assistant persisted in addressing the business questions to her (my friend, the daughter), as though the mother was too old to be able to competently discuss her own banking business.

Discourse, text and context

It is quite common for linguists to use the expressions ‘text’ and ‘discourse’ as interchangeable in meaning. Talbot (1995), while recognising this common usage, also claims that the two expressions are often set in opposition, in order to make some kind of distinction between two views or aspects of language. She uses ‘text’ to mean the observable product of interaction; that is a cultural object, and ‘discourse’ to mean the process of interaction itself; a cultural activity. Talbot observes, citing others (Widdowson 1979; Brown and Yule 1983; Halliday 1985), that ‘this distinction between text and discourse is an analytical one between the observable materiality of a completed product and the ongoing process of human activity.’ (Talbot 1995: 24) Text is the fabric in which discourse is manifested, whether spoken or written, whether produced by one or by more than one participant. This distinction is valuable for this thesis where I examine the importance of shared background knowledge sometimes referred to as shared prior texts, or intertextuality. Shared background knowledge is crucial to successful participation in any language exchange. Any text contains, is part of and is constituted by, the society which produced it and that society’s history.

Talbot claims that:

In the actual production and interpretation of a stretch of language (a simple example being a conversation) the interactants have access to historically prior texts. These are products of previous interaction, which make up the conversant's interactional history. In reporting previously uttered speech, as one might do in everyday chat or gossip, for instance, a fragment of an earlier text may be embedded in the current text. Text, then, is a 'frozen', observable substance, a concrete cultural object. (Talbot 1995: 25)

Examples of such fragments can be found in news reporting for example, where the news reader or writer quotes what has been said by someone else (by the Prime Minister, for example) or in casual conversation where one speaker 'reports' the words of a third speaker probably not present (such as in 'she said' or 'he said').

Discourse, on the other hand, is not a product but a process. Discourse is text and context together, interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants (who are both part of the context and observers of it). To analyse discourse we need to look at both the text itself and the interaction in which the text is embedded. A text is part of the process of discourse. It is the product of a writer/speaker and a resource for ongoing interaction for the readers/hearers. As a resource, a text consists of cues for interpretation processes; as a product, a text consists of lexico-grammatical realisations.

In systemic linguistics, these realisations relate to the three basic language metafunctions which inhere in any text: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language. The ideational function refers to the function of language to communicate ideas and logical relations between those ideas. It refers to language as 'contents' and 'about' something. The interpersonal function refers to the function of language to establish and maintain relationships, to influence people. The textual refers to the text-creating function of language, the strictly textual contribution to the

construction of coherence between elements. The lexico-grammatical cues in a text are encodings of ideational, interpersonal, and textual kinds of meaning. They are interpreted with the help of other resources beyond the text and which must be understood in order for communication to take place. (See Halliday 1978 for a much more detailed discussion.)

Discourse is produced and interpreted by specific people in specific institutional and broader societal contexts. Discourse is both spoken and written. Individuals and societies use discourse all the time. It is part of a person's cultural competence to divide the discourse of their society into units, to give those units names and to assign them to categories. Some discourses are perceived to be conversations, for example, others are consultations, lessons, prescriptions, news bulletins. There are many categories of discourse. Some merge together or overlay so that, for example, a joke may include the discourse of a medical setting or a news bulletin may include someone giving eyewitness testimony or someone being wished well on the occasion of their hundredth birthday.

A text can only carry social value as it is observed within a context. So what can constitute a 'context'? In a simple sense, any utterance is the context for the utterances that follow it. Wittgenstein said that questions of meaning can only be answered when we examine the context around any utterance. That is: 'In what sort of context does it occur?' (Wittgenstein 1953: ix: 188b) For Wittgenstein, describing a play as the best example of talk in context, context included physical setting, the relationship between participants, and what the participants are experiencing when they communicate. And Gergen (1991) believes that:

... language is inherently a form of relatedness. Sense is derived only from coordinated effort among persons. One's words remain nonsense ... until supplemented by another's assent (or appropriate action). (Gergen 1991: 157)

In order to examine how a text is embedded intertextually in history and society, we need to consider how it comes into being in the social practice of discourse. Spoken interaction consists of two or more interweaving texts each utterance settling into the 'intertextual' context of the utterance following it, as the interaction proceeds through time. In the interaction sense of intertextuality, then, face-to-face communication (whether real or imaginary) is intertextual. Each speaker produces a separate text; interactants intertextually connect their utterances. So exchanges (for example, negotiation, bartering, or question and answer interview in a medical situation) are intertextually connected. In the case of a written text, although the reader is not contributing as a producing participant, the interaction between writer and reader takes place through the writer's initiated text and the reader's shared background knowledge and motivation to participate and become involved in the text. As Paul Woods claims:

In the case of the written word, there is no story without a reader.
(Woods, personal communication, October 2000)

Conventions which are brought into interpretation inevitably have an intertextual quality. For instance, schemata, frames and scripts which provide, as Fairclough (1989) says, 'stereotypical patterns against which we can match endlessly diverse texts' (Fairclough 1989: 64) are accumulations of past practices for text organisation. Humour, for example, always draws on such stereotypical patterns for its effectiveness. These stereotypical patterns have developed over time in intertextual relations construed across texts to become conventional. A convention is the accumulation of past actions; the enactment of a practice is intertextually connected to all previous enactments of that practice.

Another way an external text is 'embedded' in another text is through presupposition 'implicit content'. (Fairclough 1995: 5) Presupposition triggers may signal the placement of some antecedent text in 'intertextual' context. By using presuppositions a writer can postulate an audience with shared interactional histories. Presuppositions are a way of setting up shared assumptions and experiences as common ground. For

example, in the ageing context, a movie entitled *Grumpy old men* (Directed by Donald Petrie 1993) can attract the attention of moviegoers because the title has a value of shared assumptions of representation of ageing men as grumpy and this value carries a culturally understood sense of humour with it.

Text and context work together most obviously in our society in the media, where, for example, according to Talbot (1995):

... the construction of an implied reader/listener/hearer/watcher puts writers in a powerful position, in the sense that they can assume all kinds of shared expectations, commonsense attitudes and even experiences. Actual readers in the target audience are more likely than not to take up the subject positions of the constructed implied reader. There is great potential for manipulation in this kind of power relationship. The interaction is asymmetrical and writers are in the position to place all sorts of beliefs, as givens in peoples' heads. Sometimes writers go to a great deal of trouble to give the impression of familiarity, even intimacy, with an audience who as individuals are in fact quite unknown to them. (Talbot 1995: 29)

In giving weather reports through television for example, the speaker of the report very often complicitly seeks agreement with the audience that the day's weather has been either wonderful or awful. It is assumed through the syntagmatic arrangement of words, that both speaker and hearer/watcher share the same weather 'experience'.

Within culturally meaningful contexts, presupposition must work between speaker/writer and intended other participant(s) in order for understanding to take place. Fairclough (1995) claims that all social practices, including discourse, are both enabling and constraining, providing the social conventions within which it is possible to act. Applied to creators of works of fiction, this double view of social practice as both enabling and constraining in nature underlines the limitations of originality and creativity. Individual writers are only able to create certain

preconditions which make the activity of creation possible. Those preconditions are the complex of social conventions that govern fiction-making. Fiction as social practice enables the creation of new texts but only within constraints. As social subjects, writers are constrained to act within the social positions set up in discourse types.

Cook (1992) believes that discourse, with reference particularly to advertising discourse, (but I would also include children's picture books, where the iconic sign is paramount in presenting social constructs) includes all the textual and intertextual elements such as illustrations, photographs, and the surrounding context as situation for example, in the case of print advertising. For electronic television and radio advertising the discourse must include background music, intonation of speaking voices, visual presentation of participants and so on. And according to Meinhof and Richardson (1994), texts must always be read in the context of surrounding text complexes. These issues of establishing a relationship between writer and speaker through media and fiction, will be examined further, with examples, in Chapters 6 and 7.

Metaphor and metonymy

No analysis of language can be undertaken without access to the social value of images and alternative meanings of propositions. Aristotle (Rhetoric 3) claimed that to be a master of metaphor was to be a genius. The Western Apache describe what they call 'wise words', a distinctive speech genre associated with adult men and women who have gained a reputation for balanced thinking, critical acumen, and extensive cultural knowledge and who have plenty of time for visiting and talking. It is in the context of these conversational settings, called 'old people talking here' that 'wise words' (metaphorical talk) are used most frequently. (Basso 1976: 93)

In contrast to the wisdoms of the Western Apache or of Aristotle, that the understanding and use of metaphor is a particular gift for the educated or mature or indeed a possession of an elite group, it is believed by many linguists that metaphor

is an integral part of making meanings in everyday talk and is available to and used by all members of society. Metaphor is creativity in language, allowing us to make sense of otherwise illogical and absurd arrangements of words. Burgess (1987) says that metaphor ‘... is a playful pragmatic way of interpreting the universe.’ (Burgess 1987: 21) Children perceive the world around them in metaphorical terms as well as literal terms from the beginning of language acquisition. Rumelhart (1993) for example, claims that:

... both theoretical considerations of the language acquisition process and empirical observations of the language of children suggest that far from being a special aspect of language, which perhaps develops only after children have full control of literal language, figurative language appears in children’s speech from the very beginning. (Rumelhart 1993: 72)

At this time, there is no consensus amongst linguists on the derivation of metaphors, nor the use or value of metaphor. Debate on metaphor revolves around the application of either ‘truth value’ of utterances and the otherwise heuristic value (the freedom of the hearer/reader to have their own experiential interpretation) of utterances.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claim that we base our actions, both physical and social, on what we take to be true.

On the whole, truth matters to us because it has survival value and allows us to function in our world. Most of the truths we accumulate — about our bodies, the people we interact with, and our immediate physical and social environments — play a role in daily functioning. They are truths so obvious that it takes a conscious effort to become aware of them: In order to acquire such truths and to make use of them, we need an understanding of our world sufficient for our needs. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 160)

A pragmatist may discern two types of meanings of words or utterances. The first is propositional or literal meaning. The second is meaning as inferred through context and world knowledge. Grice's (1975) theory of 'the cooperative principle' describes a formula for successful conversational interaction which depends on a shared understanding of non-literal meanings. It is clear that a metaphorical meaning while not a 'truth' meaning, has the value in culture of giving meaning and is understood by those involved in the interaction be it written or spoken.

Metaphor is used in all domains and contexts (for example, news reporting, advertising, jokes, gossip, everyday chat, and in institutional and academic contexts) and in order to achieve understanding it is assumed to be within the linguistic repertoire of all participants. Political and economic ideologies are framed in metaphorical terms. Like all other metaphors, political and economic metaphors can hide or highlight aspects of reality. Metaphors offer us ways of thinking in line with common social practices. They are conceptual means of dealing with the world which have become accepted and common knowledge or property within any given linguistic and cultural community.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have found that:

... metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

Then they go on to say that:

... if this is the case, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5)

Metaphors are culturally loaded. They highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience. Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain:

Labour is a resource, time is money or youth is beauty are by no means universal concepts. They emerge naturally in our culture because of the way we view work, money and good looks, our passion for quantification, and our obsession with purposeful ends. These metaphors highlight those aspects of labour, time and youth that are centrally important in our culture. In doing this, they also de-emphasise or hide certain aspects of labor, time and youthfulness. We can even see what these metaphors hide by examining what they focus on. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 156)

At the same time, these metaphors tell us about the value of the opposite entailments which are socially held truths in our culture such as 'idleness is wasting time' and 'old is ugly'.

Metonymy, while it is like metaphor in the sense of applying cultural value to meaning through images we employ to give a dimension of understanding, also carries meaning by 'standing for' another idea or item. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explain:

Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It serves the function of providing understanding. (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 36)

Like metaphor, metonymy functions actively in our culture. Photographs and portraits, for example, are based on it. In our culture we look at a person's face —

rather than their posture or movements — to get our basic information about what the person is like. We function in terms of metonymy when we perceive the person in terms of their face or their body and act on those perceptions. Like metaphors, metonymies are not random or arbitrary occurrences, to be treated as isolated instances. Metonymic concepts are also systematic, as can be seen in the iconic representation of an ‘aged’ person on some street signs or signs for seating reserved for older people on public transport. Thus, like metaphors, metonymic concepts structure not just our language but our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. And, like metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience and the way we conceptualize it.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) detail many examples of the use of metonymy and metaphor that hold for our culture. Suffice to say that both metaphor and metonymy are tools for the experiential understanding and expression of the ageing experience and the social and self-representation of it. Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) linear movement metaphor would apply to how we perceive the ageing experience. While we often view the life course through the metaphor of a ‘journey’, we predominantly look at ageing as downward movement and, we use metaphorical expressions such as ‘over the hill’, ‘going down hill’, ‘having one foot in the grave’, ‘slowing down’ (while child movement is upward movement as in ‘growing up’). We use expressions such as ‘little’ as in reduced in height, actively ‘stepping down’ (as in resigning) ‘declining years’ and ‘decrement’. We can also see a negative aspect in the ‘seasons’ of nature metaphor where spring means birth and winter means death. In the movie *Daisies in December*, (directed by Mark Haber 1995) there is marked reference to the unexpected possibility of daisies flowering in the winter (December in the northern hemisphere) representing freshness and youth in this case the unexpected flowering of romantic and sexual love in old age. Other commonly understood and used metaphors for ageing from nature move through the days or seasons in such a way that we understand expressions such as ‘twilight years’ and ‘spring chicken’ and we liken types of behaviour to animals as in ‘silly old cow’ (See Figure 2.1, below), usually referring to an older female or ‘silly old goat’, usually referring to an older

male. Both of these images, while often used in humour, usually carry negative implications.

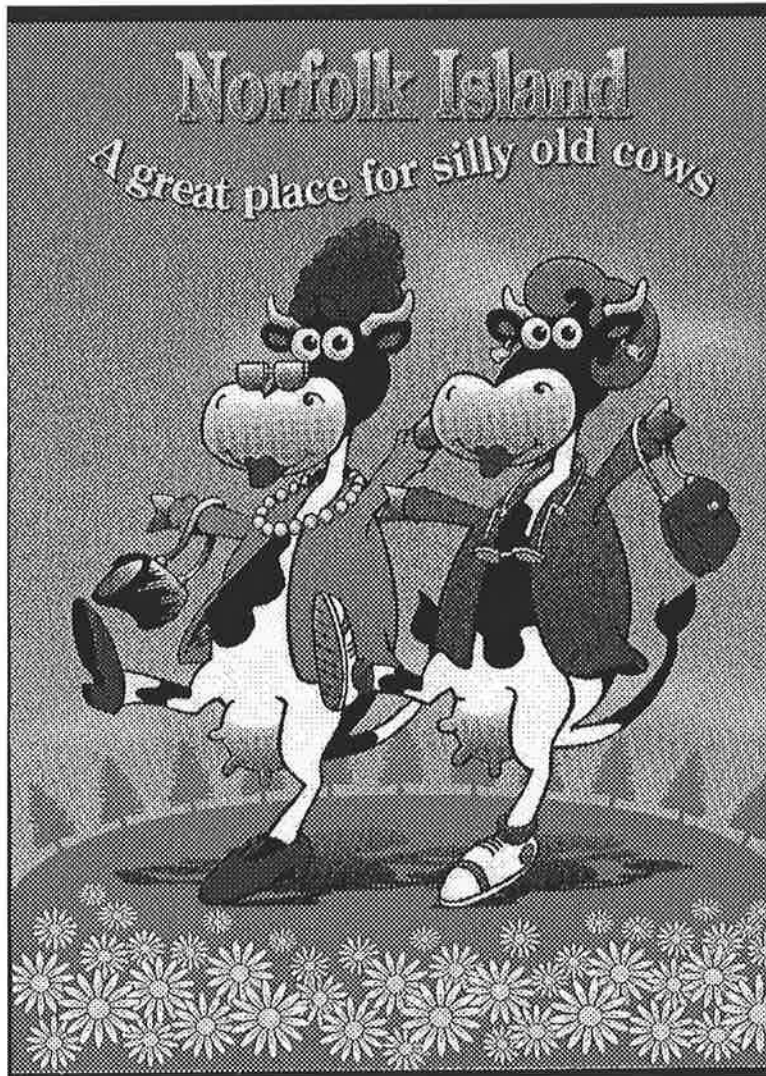


Figure 2.1 *Norfolk Island. A great place for silly old cows.* Postcard Nucolorvue Productions Australia.

Colour are also metaphors. We have such expressions as ‘looking at life through rose coloured glasses’, where the colour rose represents an extraordinarily or deceptively positive outlook and ‘feeling blue’ where the colour blue denotes sadness. We find that metaphors of colour for ageing and older people are usually dull colours or they

indicate loss of colour and fading colours. Participants S¹, when describing her success at university as a mature student said:

*‘Yeah, I was going — nowadays they’re all grey-haired, but in those days I was the only one, = =’

And as we see in the following cartoon, Figure 2.2 below, beige is also used as a colour metaphor for older people whose lives are perceived as being colourless and boring by younger people. In this cartoon, the couple is going out to play bingo and paint the town beige, where a younger person would be expected to be participating in more exciting activities and painting the town red.



Figure 2.2 Painting the town beige. Breakey. *Advertiser Weekend Magazine* July 15 1995: 2.

¹ For details of the selection and description of volunteer participants in this research, see Chapter 5. The mark * indicates that the extract of volunteer participant discourse is taken from one of the two example transcripts reproduced in full in Appendix E.

Other metaphors for older people can be found in nature, particularly facial representations likened to wolves and body limbs as limbs of trees. This use of metaphor appears in children's fiction and will be explored further in Chapter 7.

Fairclough (1990: 77-108) explains that metaphor is a principal means of de/reconstructing common sense ordinary language categories, where the kinds of language which one chooses to construct, deconstruct or reconstruct will depend upon one's ideological position. Some metaphors we can willingly accept as models in the quest for truth, but we have to recognize that truth is relative to purpose. For purveyors of beauty products or the anti-ageing gene, youth is beauty. If our purpose is a better and more powerful representation of older people then we will select metaphorical models to reach that goal. But as we evolve those ways of thinking and perceiving, we develop metaphorical models which are positively adaptive to our environment. If these models don't work, they won't survive and they must be reconstructed. If we have evolved a model, an ideology of ageing (as in the downward metaphor) in which we can dominate and exploit older people, increasingly to serve the purposes of youth, and this model will be tested against our experience through negative and positive feedback.

Such creativity in metaphor consists in the use of existing structures to forge new ones. In addition, certain knowledge (presupposition) is required to interpret metaphor in a culturally appropriate manner. The interpretation of metaphor is also grounded in an ability to form novel semantic categories. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such action will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors such as 'ageing burden' can be self-fulfilling prophecies.

Speech community

A speech community is any group of people who have at least one speech variety in common so that their communication can function even in its simplest form and

correspond to appropriate cultural events and values shared by the community. An extension of speech community is speech repertoire. This refers to the varieties of language that any one person can make use of in daily life. Each language variety may be useful for communication with a different speech community depending upon the circumstances of the event. The number of speech varieties to which an individual may have access and thereby the extent to which an individual may belong to different speech communities, can vary at any stage along the chronological life span and can vary according to age, educational background, sex, employment status, and life experiences.

In fact, there is much debate on the definition and concept of speech community. Gumperz wrote that speech community described 'the knowledge of shared values'. (Gumperz 1972: 16) For Labov (1972c) the expression speech community is:

... defined not by the presence or absence of a particular dialect or language but by the presence of a common set of normative values in regard to linguistic features. (Labov 1972c: 513)

This could include categories of local identity or 'social intelligibility'. Hymes (1972) stresses that it is not adequate to define a group as all those who have access to a particular language or dialect. He argues that it is possible for speakers to share formal linguistic features, phonology, grammar, lexis but still be unable to interpret accurately each other's messages. For example, Labov (1972b), in a discussion of aspects of language use among adolescent New York negroes, presents utterances like 'your momma's a peanut man', or 'your mother's a duck', which are superficially intelligible but whose real significance as *ritual insults* is not available to most English speakers. (Labov 1972b: 304)

Milroy (1987) and Milroy and Milroy (1985), influenced by Labov's concept of speech community, developed a concept of communication networks which they document as social networks which cross status, economic and geographic boundaries. And Cameron (1993) refers to language communities or 'communities of

practice' which are groups constituted by their engagement in some joint endeavour, or 'what people do together rather than just who they do it with'. In this sense hers is a 'micro speech community' or 'social network'. For example, in Coates (1993), women doing gossip becomes a speech community. Coates and Cameron (1988) suggest that different networks could be defined as open or closed or as low density (participants are little known to each other) or high density (people know each other well). And Kreckel (1981) explains that:

... within a speech community one may distinguish between sub-codes, developed in mutual interaction and thus based on shared knowledge, and sub-codes acquired separately and thus based on common knowledge. (Kreckel 1981: 38)

She calls the former 'homodynamic' and the latter 'heterodynamic. Speakers who apparently share the same language may also have different norms of greeting, topics which are acceptable to the community, what can be said next in a conversation, how speaking turns are distributed and so on. This may be specifically different across generations. In some cultures, (Thai and Khmer, for example,) it is important to know the age of the conversation partner so that the form of address and the structure of the conversation can be appropriately applied. Participant C said:

*'... Er sometimes grandparents tend to use their grandchildren's slang. It's never a success. It's not what grandchildren want from their grandparents. They expect them to be more stately, more oldie worldie — more ... [laughs].'

Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964) suggest that it is possible to make very fine distinctions of speech community and argue that a speaker's linguistic repertoire consists of a large number of varieties, or registers, distinguished according to use. Speech communities within the same language area could then be distinguished by the range of registers they had available. Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1964)

mark that a sports commentary, a church service and a school lesson are ‘obviously linguistically distinct’, and suggest that there is a register appropriate to each. Kress (1988) says that:

No one individual’s discursive history can be exactly that of another, no matter how similar their personal and social histories. (Kress 1988: 32)

However, while it must be acknowledged that there is much disagreement on the breadth and on the limitations of an identifying communication group, most linguists agree that there is a unit of analysis which refers to cohesive groups of people who have a clear consciousness of belonging. Indeed, across the lifespan, an individual may access many different and varied speech communities. In this respect, Gergen talks about shared histories using Bakhtin’s expression *heteroglossias*. (Gergen 1991: 247)

Words in the language only have meaning by virtue of their use in a social context and all the words belong to a speech community. Words have meaning only because they have been used and shaped by others, to serve other people’s purposes and in other people’s contexts. Speakers or writers have to use these tools and fit them to their own purposes. As Bakhtin (1981) says:

The word in a language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own. (Bakhtin 1981: 293-294)

The relationship between speaker and listener can differ in terms of the amount of specific and cultural/world knowledge they share. (Kreckel's (1981) idea of homodynamic and heterodynamic) Intimate friends will share considerable specific knowledge about one another, even to the extent that two people may be talking and the arrival of a third person will force the conversation to shift in terms of topic or at least in terms of depth of meaning, lexis use, and so on. Business associates will share little specific personal knowledge but much 'purpose' knowledge. And relations among participants can differ in the extent of interaction possible or appropriate, although this factor will be influenced by the physical/temporal setting and the purpose of communication, and the mood of the interaction. For example, communication involving negotiation in a bank will normally be restricted to the business at hand with possibly some exchange of interpersonal communication such as a brief comment on the weather. Indeed, such talk may reflect cooperative discourse in a way that there may be convergence of language even where there is divergence of thought.

Wardaugh (1992) believes that language is both an individual possession and a social possession. He claims that we also need to extend the concept of speech community to include topic as, when two or more speakers engage in communication, the topic may or may not be the uniting element. For example, when two people of approximately the same age, for example, seventy-five to eighty years old, engage in talk about the war or the depression, no background contextual knowledge is required as this topic most likely lies within each one's remembered experience. However, when two people of different ages, for example where one is say, seventy-five years old and the other is forty years old or younger, engage in a conversation about the depression or the war, the interaction will most likely require a great deal of filling or contextualising and indeed must be a one sided conversation where one speaker imparts information and the other listens or asks questions. The reverse situation may also occur, of course. If the conversation topic is the music of the seventies or eighties, the conversation is likely to require some contextual filling by the younger person for the older person. A base of common understanding must be located for equal dyadic conversation to take place. Any uneven exchange can

become difficult or boring if one of the partners is making too much effort and not receiving sufficient value. As Fowler (1981) suggests, this is often the case with cross-generational exchanges where story telling the past (which belongs to only one of the dyad) is a common form of such an exchange.

However, Kreckel's (1981) analysis of natural discourse suggests that in open (heterodynamic) communication networks it is not always necessary to have shared knowledge between conversation partners in order for the communication to be successful. In conversation there is a range of other activities on the part of the participants which act to membership and to shift the conversation style into whatever direction the participants wish.

Communication is a supremely social and dialogical process. Even when one communicates intrapersonally, with oneself, as in verbal planning, or thinking, the developmental roots of this process are social. According to Vygotsky (1978) verbal thought develops as the child appropriates the dialogic forms of conversation for use in telling herself what to do. The links between communication and social cognition are multiple and complex as each influences the other dynamically. The prototype of communication is the dialogue, in which two people alternately fill the roles of speaker and listener. Such roles are intimately dependent on social-cognitive skills. The speaker must consider the knowledge, background and attitude of the listener in shaping a 'message' — consider the salesperson's differing 'pitches' to different customers, for example, or one's own 'telephone' voice when speaking to an unknown person and how it changes or shifts when speaking to a known person. Listeners must use their own knowledge of the speaker and their social context to construct or 'read' a meaning for the message. And these intricate conversational processes typically extend over periods of time and changing interpretations of the situation and dialogue by both partners.

According to Labov (1972c), variation in the language and meaning system, is in itself functional in expressing variation in social status and roles. Sacks (1969) uses the expression 'membership categorisation devices' suggesting that it is important to

membership the hearer or reader in order to aid social identity boundary maintenance in everyday discourse. At least one function of categorisation work in ordinary conversation appears to be the maintenance of existing social/cultural categories, in part by constantly defining and affirming the conditions for assigned speech community membership.

In order for cooperative conversation to take place, a speaker must 'membership' the listener, that is ensure that the listener is able to participate in the conversation by understanding the rules and sharing the knowledge and concepts. Speakers will membership age, for example, through such expressions as 'Remember such and such' in order to acknowledge shared background knowledge or experience, or what Bytheway (1995) refers to as 'generational membership'. In this context, speakers will identify their own membership category as being different from another's with 'When you're my age, you'll understand.' or 'That was before you were born.' or by talking about 'In my day ...', as opposed to 'These days ...'.

In terms of speech accommodation (discussed more completely below and in Chapter 4) many exchanges which take place between conversation partners of different ages, from different speech communities, or as hetero-dynamic conversation partner, can be membershiped into the conversation through style shift or the conversation can move to a homo-dynamic engagement even within one interaction through continual accommodation and adjustment and readjustment of negotiation and of speech style, which according to Hymes, 'implies selection of alternatives with reference to a common frame or purpose'. (Hymes 1974: 59)

Speech events

All communities have an underlying set of non-linguistic rules which governs when, how and how often speech occurs. The rules may apply to such features as forms of address, use of silence, lexico-grammatical forms, turn taking or choice of topic all of which may depend on who is talking to whom. For example, the concept of 'tellability' and 'newsworthiness' is used by conversationalists all the time. People

constantly analyse what is said for its newsworthiness, ‘why are you talking about that now and to me’, and someone who consistently produces talk which is not newsworthy is regarded as boring, just as a speaker who is engaged in off-target verbosity, may also be perceived as a bore.

A speech event is a situation where speech acts are played out between members of a speech community. There are several studies that catalogue the components of the speech situation, which provides the situational context for ‘speech events’. Fishman (1972) identified three primary components of the situation of language use: the participants and the relationship among them; the topic, which is simply what the message is about; and the setting which refers to the different aspects of where the communication takes place, when it takes place and whether there is an audience. Halliday (1978) also distinguishes among three components of the communicative situation: the type of social action (the field) the role relationships (the tenor) and the symbolic organization (mode). All of these aspects fit into the explanation of ‘context’ given above.

One of the most complete descriptions of speech event is presented in Hymes’s (1974) ‘components of speech’, described through the mnemonic SPEAKING, which include message form (‘how something is said is part of what is said’), message content (‘content enters analysis first of all perhaps as a question of topic, and change of topic’), speaker, hearer, (there may in fact be several participants including audience and/or people being talked about) purposes (Hymes claims that all speech events have a purpose even if only phatic), key (‘tone, manner or spirit’ in which an act or event is performed), channels (‘choice of oral, written, telegraphic, semaphore, or other mediums of transmission of speech’), and norms of interaction. (Hymes 1974: 53-62)

Eggins and Slade (1997) have reproduced Hymes’s SPEAKING grid in the following way:

S	setting	temporal and physical circumstances
	scene	subjective definition of an occasion
P	participant	speaker/sender/addressor/hearer
		receiver/audience/addressee
E	ends	purposes and goals
		outcomes
A	act sequence	message form and content
K	key	tone, manner
I	instrumentalities	channel (verbal, non-verbal, physical forms of speech drawn from community repertoire)
N	norms of interaction and interpretation	specific properties attached to speaking interpretation of norms within cultural belief system
G	genre	textual categories

(Hymes's SPEAKING grid. Reproduced from Eggins and Slade 1987: 33)

Milroy (1987) and Jaworski (1993) have both documented the social importance of silence as either meaningful discourse or causes of miscommunication. In terms of maintenance of 'face' and self-identity, silence can be extremely powerful if only as a means of refusing to be included in a speech event against one's will in situations where uneven power exists. In terms of meaningful and successful communication 'silence may be *culture* specific or *situation specific* (regardless of culture)'

(Enninger cited in Jaworski 1993: 22)

'Communicative Predicament of Ageing' and 'Speech Accommodation Theory'

In 1986, Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood, developed a model to describe the conversation moves which form what they called The Communicative Predicament

of Ageing, where stereotypical expectations of decline in communication ability from younger people towards older people in turn bring about reduced young/old interaction possibilities which in turn can lead to the 'decline as expected' paradigm, that is, reduced communication confidence, increased anxiety and lowered communication performance in older people.

As a tool for discourse analysis, Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood (1988) developed Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) sometimes also referred to as Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). This theory has been applied to a great deal of research where communication takes place between individuals of presumed uneven status or power such as within medical institutions, legal settings, cross-generational communication and in the media.

Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) also build on the theory that because individuals have well-established speech repertoires, communication success is therefore very largely dependent on context and is prescribed and proscribed by the situation in which it is used. Language then, not only reflects objective indices of context but is also a barometer of how individuals define the situation, as they see it and their own identity at that time. Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) postulate that since talk changes depending on what type of relationship exists between the participants, (See also Kreckel 1981), then the presence of uneven power between communication partners works to alter the self perception and the social perception of the 'weaker' communication partner. A differential in power in conversation can be revealed through speech markers such as voice pitch, hedges, inclusive or exclusive use of pronouns or particular forms of address or degrees of politeness. (See Scherer and Giles 1979, for detailed examination of the uses of speech markers) A weaker communication partner may be simply one who does not have access to the complete history of the topic or control over a topic and is placed in the predicament of finding strategies for communication such as in question and answer or simply accepting the role of silent listener.

Within accommodation theory, Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) include over- and under-accommodation where one of the participants in conversation accommodates their speech in some way (through choice or control of topic, lexis, levels of politeness, for example) to another so that successful communication can take place.

When a speaker has particular relational goals for an interaction (for example wanting to gain another's approval, wanting talk to be effective and efficient or, conversely, wanting to establish self or self's social group as distance from the interlocutor or his/her group), she or he will select from a range of sociolinguistic (and non verbal) strategies *attending to or anticipating the recipient's own communication characteristics*. (Coupland Coupland and Giles 1991: 26)

Both of the theories mentioned above, and research based on them, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The construction of a social self

It is who we are or how we perceive ourselves at the various points in our passage throughout life, that bears some systematic relation to our experiences of, and our participation in, language and social interaction.

Mühlhäusler and Harré (1990) posit that:

Central amongst the conditions for personhood is the possession of a sense of identity, of being one self and continuously one self. ... The sense of self is not to be denied, but for us it is a sense that each of us has of being located in certain ways relative to an environment of beings similar to ourselves. (Mühlhäusler and Harré 1990: 87)

To become a socially responsible agent, children must learn to organise their behaviour, including language behaviour, in a way which makes sense to others and relates in some way (either positively or negatively) with what overall, others are trying to do in their lives. This is developing knowledge of self in relation to others and to the culture and through this the development of agency. It includes the idea of how a person, beginning in childhood, is talked to and talked about and how the child and the maturing person develops the sense of self and of the place in the society. So that at a very young age a mother might respond to a child's small achievements encouragingly with 'What a clever girl!' and 'Aren't you clever'. (Shotter and Gregory 1976: 5) In this simple way, the referent pronoun 'you' is directly and exclusively aimed at the child who is then enabled to see herself through her mother's talk and so begin to build a picture of herself based on how another sees her.

However, there remains the question of whether or not we do in fact see ourselves as others see us. How does the child see herself as 'clever'? And how do we see ourselves as 'young', 'middle-aged' or 'old'? Many older people express that they 'don't feel old'. In the non-physical sense, judging differences between how we see ourselves and how others perceive us is complex because it depends on how we interact and communicate with each other and we do this in different ways with different people. The concept of the individual taking on a version of the self as imposed by an externally formed social construction, such as being 'old', is crucial to my discussion of the impact of stereotypical images on the ageing identity and the subsequent issues of communication with others. (For a more detailed discussion on the self becoming the person others' perceive, see Gilbert 1976) Self-identification and identification by others according to age-related expectations is particularly relevant with respect to physical appearance. If others see us as old, they treat us as old. (I refer again to the Communicative Predicament of Ageing) However, according to Thompson, Itzin and Abendstern (1991), it is also quite commonplace for older people to experience others saying, 'You haven't changed a bit', when they meet a friend or relative they haven't seen for a period of time. As one of their respondents is quoted as saying:

Well I think I'm getting wrinkled. No matter who comes to here, or who I meet at the gate, they'll say, 'Ye haven't changed a bit,' yet I'm that much older and I'm nearly 79. And they'll say 'Ye still look the same Agnes.' Now how can I still look the same? I'm bound to be wrinkled. (Thompson, Itzin and Abendstern 1991: 115)

Chambers (1995) suggests that most adults can 'guess' the age of other adults within a reasonable range. Therefore, to '...comment that an individual appears to be younger than their years is a common form of flattery.' (Chambers 1995: 147) On the other hand, to suggest that an individual appears older than their years is usually taken as an insult, except to adolescents.

We create our own identities in light of the field of social identities that are available to us in particular historical contexts (for example an older person may be socially perceived as an 'active retiree' or 'frail elderly'). Further, a body may itself be text, a language for representation. An 'old woman' or 'young child', for example, may represent any number of messages. Embodied images are carefully selected and used in all kinds of communication ranging from political campaigns to children's stories. In representations explicitly directed at the process of ageing, particular (often negative) images of embodiment (such as frailty, disease and death) overshadow others. (This will be explored further in Chapter 6 Media representations of ageing)

If we examine the creation of social identities under postmodern conditions, we can say that persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction. It is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning, irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. This is what Gergen (1991) calls 'social saturation' and suggests that since the expansion of telephonics, air travel, television, radio, computer networks and fax systems is dramatically increasing our exposure to others, we are absorbing opinions, beliefs, attitudes and values from all over the world. These give us alternative voices which populate our own texts, both in public and private spheres and we become

what Gergen (1991) refers to as 'ersatz beings'. We need to examine how this effects the self and social identification of the ageing experience as it is a state which we will all experience if we live long enough. As we age, we should be able to talk about ourselves and our accumulation of experiences in terms of multiple identities. So that we may see a variety of expressions of 'self' being enacted in the ageing context, such as 'grumpy old men', 'kind old lady', 'victim' or 'super gran'.

However, our individual identities are not created in a vacuum. As they are constituted through our experiences and our interactions within speech communities and our world, so they are affected by the many events and relationships which constitute the experiential context. One strong effect on the ageing experience in our society, as has been expressed above, is ageism. Ageism, (Butler 1969) like racism or sexism, is a form of prejudice, a form of oppressions that not only limits people who are the object of that oppression but which also shapes perceptions of people, both young and old, who hold ageist attitudes. Ageism is thus central to the construction of identity. Unlike racism and sexism, however, ageism is something that we will all encounter, should we live long enough, and will affect us accordingly by adding new dimensions to the 'isms', as we see in the cartoon below (Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3 I told you never call me old! Nicholson. *Australian*. April 28 1997: 8.

Bytheway (1995) has also documented how ageist practice determines the identity of ageing individuals. Ageism is an embodied form of oppression or a site of struggle. It is difficult to separate ageist practices from the bodies at which they are directed or in which they are constructed. The social construction of the body in the discursive realm is a historically situated and contested process. Such sites might be for example, the aged division of the labour force, popular culture, the clothes we wear, the state, and even the built environment and the need for and structure of public transport. Ageist practice in discourse spins around the ability to keep up at work, geographical mobility of families, the spatiality of social life, the question of where old people live, the competency and advisability of driving a car. There is a strong proposition that older people alter, restrict and limit their life experiences when they situate themselves in particular environments. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion on the social theories of ageing) But as Bytheway (1995) observes, 'dependency is often a result of a poorly built and inhospitable environment.' (Bytheway 1995: 97) In our society, we have constructed, not only the dependent body, but environments which ensure physical dependency for the aged.

Laws (1995), on the other hand, suggests that identities are not simply imposed by the 'self' upon the 'other'. Oppressed groups for a variety of reasons — conscious and unconscious, strategic and intuitive — often choose to adopt a particular identity. Old people might accept or reject particular stereotypes of themselves, or use stereotypes strategically (for example, to obtain pension cards for public transport or anything which will present older people with an advantage).

Certainly, there is an underlying assumption in our society, that age can appropriately be seen as a determinant of language competence and language behaviour. Our lives are demarcated by age referents. We operate on a system of age specific expectations. If, in a newspaper article, the body being referred to is say sixty-five years old, we add wrinkles, greying and thinning hair to our mental image and at the same time hold an expectation of decrement in physical and mental ability. Age-categorisation processes include disclosure of chronological age. However, the telling of age proves to be unevenly distributed across age-groups, being far more

frequently the self-identifying discourse of older adult people rather than younger adult speakers. Age-telling is mainly of interest because of its interconnectedness, its role in the activity of identifying memberships such as in 'I'm seventy you know', or status or role identification as in, 'I've been a widow for thirty years'.

And for older people, a great deal of self-identifying talk is through telling or narrating the past. Telling life is one important way older people have of maintaining identities outside the role of grandparent or of employment. (See Hemmings 1985; Wallace 1992; Feldman 1995)

As we move through life, we form and reform our self-image, according to our speech community, our activities, our relationships, all of our doing, being and talking. Throughout life, we have ever changing opportunities to identify ourselves in many ways as others interact with us. From the perspective of the 'I', 'you', 'them' and 'us' and ultimately, the inclusive in speech but exclusive in intention 'we', become speech markers of our self-identification and our positioning of our selves within our speech communities.

This idea of identifying the self in relation to what is going on around us and our access to it, our environment, can be extended so that, if we position ourselves throughout our lives, through our talk, then if there is in fact, no communication with others, there could be a diminishing of self-identity, since the identity markers will have disappeared. In the short story *Do you love me?* published in Peter Carey's collection *Exotic Pleasures* (1981), the lack of social value of both goods and of people results in their invisibility or what Carey calls their 'dematerialisation'. As one of the partners in the story becomes attended to less and less in the relationship, parts of the body gradually disappear from view until at last the whole body has dematerialised. This diminishing of identity, or invisibility, then could be the position of older persons who find themselves in the 'silence' of a nursing home where they experience dramatically reduced opportunities for self-identifying and self-affirming relationships and communication (Kaakinen 1992).

Approaches to sociolinguistic research

In the study of language in its social context, Labov (1972b) draws attention to a contradiction between principle and practice in the Saussurean model of language.

Saussure conceived of linguistics as one part of ‘une science qui étudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale’. Yet curiously enough, the linguists who work within the Saussurean tradition (and this includes the great majority) do not deal with social life at all: they work with one or two informants in their offices, or examine their knowledge of langue. Furthermore, they insist that explanations of linguistic facts be drawn from other linguistic facts, not from any ‘external’ data on social behaviour. (Labov 1972b: 185)

This situation leads to what Labov calls the ‘Saussurean Paradox’. As Labov has pointed out, the consequences of Saussure’s limiting of linguistics to the study of langue was ‘to exclude the study of social behaviour or the study of speech’. Labov believes that the basic data for any form of general linguistics ought to be ‘language as it is used by native speakers communicating with each other in everyday life’. (Labov 1972b: 184)

Sociolinguistics then should be concerned with the study of language as it is used in meaningful encounters, in ordinary situations, for it to have experiential value. However, as Labov (1972a) pointed out in his discussion of the ‘observer’s paradox’, the aim of linguistic research is to find out how people talk when they are *not* being systematically observed, while data can supposedly only be collected through systematic observation. The researcher’s aim is to deflect the observed ‘talk’ away from the fact that it is being observed so that a more natural style, what Labov calls ‘the vernacular’ can be observed. Labov found that a question like ‘Have you been in a situation where you were in serious danger of being killed?’ nearly always produced a shift of style away from more ‘careful’ speech toward the more natural style, thereby providing the researcher with examples of language use other than ‘careful’.

Another aspect of the 'observer's paradox', and one which concerns me in this study, is that of shift in style which might occur as the interviewer and the researcher become better known to each other. This could be explained as a shift from the researcher being considered an 'outsider' in terms of network towards being an 'insider' with increased observation time and whether or not there is any empirical means of marking the point of shift.

Kreckel (1981) argues for the code dependent view that:

... the degree of understanding between communicants (in this situation researcher and participant) depends on the degree of conceptual and expressive convergence between addresser and addressee. (Kreckel 1981: 4) (My words in parenthesis)

I observed with one of my respondents, the only one with whom I met in a neutral setting (the public library, rather than her house or mine) maintained a 'careful' speech style where she talked about her children and grandchildren in terms of 'my son', 'my daughter' or 'the boy' and 'the girl'. Over the three meetings we had, she did not shift her speech style sufficiently to me to refer to any of her relatives by their first name although all of the other respondents did. (See Poynton 1989 for discussion on the use of first names in conversational closeness and distancing)

Grodin and Lindlof (1996) suggest that the act of linguistic research which employs natural speech through a researcher means that the researcher is at the same time participant. They state that:

... the inquirer might actually embrace the coeval ontology of the ethnographic situation: that is, the temporarily contingent action of creating and managing a 'project' within the circumstances of the other's life world. By inhabiting a shared dialogical frame, researcher and participant can mutually experience the breakdowns of communicative coherence ... (Grodin and Lindlof 1996: 186)

Therefore:

... the researcher's positioning must be a key part of this learning methodology. Positioning, here, is what Davis and Harré (1991) call 'the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines'. (Davis and Harré 1991, cited in Grodin and Lindlof 1996: 186)

Many researchers today attempt to pay attention to the ethics of the research situation where the researcher can be in a position of power and hold a stance of presupposition which puts the participant in a position of reduced status. Or indeed approach the research topic with prejudicial preconceived expectations. Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) have this to say about linguistic research with older people:

As researchers, we are not immune from societal stereotypes and myths. ... the deficit tradition in language research may therefore be just another branch of cultural prejudice against the elderly, with its selective designs and pervasive concern with linguistic decrement. (Coupland, Coupland and Giles 1991: 13)

Finally, here, I need to mention what Bavelas and Chovil (2000) term 'Visible acts of meaning'. Throughout an interview event where the verbal acts of meaning can be recorded onto audiotape, there are many other 'moves' which add meaning to the interaction. Such moves may be hand gestures, body movement (nodding or shaking the head, bending towards the conversation partner or away from the conversation partner, for example), indicating objects, (such as showing photographs), offering and serving food, eating and drinking. All such moves are completely interwoven with the verbal acts into the total of the meaning and therefore should be included in any analysis of conversational event. Unfortunately, however, with audiotaping as

the method of recording speech events, such paralinguistic moves can not be captured and therefore cannot be included in the analysis.

Conclusion

In Chapter 2 I have examined some of the theories of signs and language and how we use them to express meanings as we communicate our thoughts in our everyday world. The crucial issues in my examination of language and how language expresses the ageing experience and the state of being 'old', arise out of how we see ourselves in relation to our society and express our self-identity. It is important to realise that, from childhood onwards we use language to shape the expression of our individual thoughts and our social ideologies. For it is through language that we communicate these thoughts and ideas and share our social experiences and decide what is of value to each of us in the construction of ourselves and our society.

My focus has been on the ways in which language and social experience are integrated. I have discussed some of those theories which demonstrate that language is a system through which we identify and describe the experience of the self, the society and the self in relation to the society. Crucial to the development of self, is the view of the self in relation to others. This comes to us from childhood when verbal and other iconic representations are negotiated and agreed and the value system is brought into being. In the same way then, the value systems can be renegotiated, deconstructed and reconstructed and political and social attitudes can be manipulated.

The next two chapters will expand on these theories and look at how they connect to the social representations of the ageing experience and our relationships within speech communities and across generations.

Chapter 3

Acts of personal and social identity

I am old;
Age is unnecessary; on my knees I beg
That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed and food.
Shakespeare's *King Lear*

This chapter will attempt to place the concept of ageing in a historical context and trace some of the theories of ageing as they have emerged during the last fifty years including comments and discussion which have resulted from those theories. Ageism and gerontophobia as institutionalised practices will also be examined. I will also look in further detail at ways of representing the self as a body situated within social groups. Finally, the implications of the perceptions of the value of older people and the ageing process will be discussed in the light of political and economic policies which affect the whole community.

The shaping of perceptions

Important scholarship in the last few years has shown that the meaning of ageing, just as the meaning of any social construct, is shaped by a combination of forces such as social institutions, government policies, modern medicine, economic interests, media images, religious beliefs and personal experience. The meanings of ageing and of old age are given definition and expressed through language.

Through cultural and social mechanisms, human beings constitute the world of everyday life. If experience — in this case the experience of aging — is not a given, but an invention or a construction, then by implication, understanding how it is formed can facilitate reinventing or reconstructing it. Attitudes and perceptions of aging, whether expressed by scientific theory, health care policy, or church sermons are based on certain value laden presuppositions that constitute or invent pictures of aging rather than simply respond to a pre-existing and independent reality.

Apart from the truism of chronological age where we accumulate numbers of years of existence, any other 'age' only exists as a result of our disposition to classify and categorise experiences into neat and manageable slices for ease of communication. For example, the term 'middle age' does not refer to any well-defined stage in the human life cycle and it means different things to different people, just as do the other frequently used expressions of young-old, old-old and very-old. Nevertheless, the demarcation of 'ages' is not only convenient for communication but it also points to an important aspect of human thinking and behaviour through our need to identify ourselves as belonging to or being different from particular social groups.

As Humpty Dumpty says, (See the quote in Chapter 2) mastering the games of words or signs is what the speaker/hearer writer reader negotiate between them as they communicate. And in order to achieve the successful negotiation, all participants in communication bring with them historically defined or preconceived expectations of what meanings are to be allocated. Therefore, the meanings of 'old' and 'young' are such that the perception can vary dramatically from the point of view of a child to the point of view of a seventy year old. A child may perceive a twenty year old as 'old' while a nonagenarian may perceive a seventy year old as 'young'. And vague labels such as 'old' and 'elderly' or 'senior citizen' can suggest stereotypes that can be misleading and inappropriate when applied to the individuals within the labeled population.

There are, and it appears, always have been, two opposing views or stereotypes of ageing, one reflecting ugliness and debilitation and the other reflecting wisdom and kindness. The prevalent emphasis on youth as being the most desirable condition to be in, further exaggerates the tendency to stereotype the ageing population and introduces the phenomena of ageism and gerontophobia, revealing the prejudice against ageing and fear of ageing, rather than other possible attitudes such as, respect and awe. The familiar 'social problem' view of ageing identifies elderly people as being overly dependent and unable to contribute generally to the welfare of society nor interested in participating in the principal activities of society. This view focuses on a range of problems, from the material constraints of poverty and disability to

social devaluation, role loss and isolation. As discussed in Chapter 2, stereotypes can only ever represent a narrow band of possibilities for a group, and in the case of ageing, neither stereotypical image which we find convenient to hold, actually reflects the broad range of experiences and characteristics of individual lives.

Historical view of ageing

The dual perceptions of ageing as positive and valuable in terms of wisdom and experience and negative in terms of debilitating, useless and dependent, have existed and been recorded in history in most communities and cultures. (See special edition on ageing in the *New Internationalist*, February 1995 for discussion) Ageing has been perceived as both something to be feared and as something to be valued. In many societies longevity is valued as a form of divine blessing so that we can praise and wish for long life for ourselves and friends while at the same time fear and abhor ageing characteristics in others (Arber and Ginn 1993).

Of all divisions in human society, those based on age appear the most usual or even 'natural', and until recently, the least subject to historical change. The cycle of infancy, youth, maturity and decline has been accepted as an inexorable process. Classical writers tended towards three, or four, or seven stages (as in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*), but as many as twelve have been postulated. More recently, Laslett (1989) has suggested four ages. Participant C suggested that historically there have been three socially recognised 'ages of woman': maiden, mother and crone. However many different 'ages' the lifespan is divided up into, the biblical, nominal 'three score years and ten' remained, until recently (since in many countries, life expectancy has been increasing), the most favoured goal for a 'good' lifespan.

An examination of classical writing shows that most writers and philosophers were preoccupied with the issue of a long life and in most cases considered that old age was a defect and associated with everything that decays, (fitting the downward metaphor I suggested in Chapter 2), as opposed to youth which is represented by everything that grows (the upward metaphor). (See Thompson, Itzin and Abendstern

1991 for a detailed description of the ages of men and women throughout Western/European history)

One of the social views of older people was, and still is, that of the old person as child. Shakespeare said, in his description of the stages of man:

Last scene of all, That ends this strange eventful history, Is second childishness and mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (*As you like it*. Act II, Scene vii)

Mary Vorse, too, in *Autobiography of an elderly woman* (1911), (reported in Thompson, Itzin and Abendstern 1991: 109) reflected on what she expressed as the 'reversal of roles' from parent to child as a part of the ageing process, that left her contriving to get her own way, 'for all the world like a naughty, elderly child', while 'my daughter was worrying about my headstrong ways as if she was my mother instead of my being hers'. 'We mustn't worry mother' or 'She's too old to be bothered with that', may still be the expressions of the conspiracies of silence where older people are denied access to information about what is going on around them. This social perception of ageing as 'role reversal', persists in many cultures where the old people are talked about or talked to as if they were 'the children' and indeed, as I will discuss further in Chapter 4, older people in institutional settings are frequently subjected to types of 'baby talk' or 'motherese' or 'elderspeak' from medical staff and carers.

Thompson, Itzin and Abendstern (1991) claim that historically, (in Britain at least), it was the role of the young to serve and the old to rule. It was assumed that wisdom, as the sum of experience and self-control, grew with age. But while obedience was due from younger to older people and parents, this form of respect did not prevent children from rebelling against their parents and inevitably in the end, old people were burdensome to all; neither their talk nor their company was acceptable.

We should also realise that the terms of chronological age used historically, referred to quite different chronological age from those in use today. Old age, from a historical perspective, apart from biblical extremes, would have been from fifty to sixty, ages (in some cultures a long life may still be much shorter than this) which are now deemed as a part of middle age. What we call 'young' old age would have been seen as the age of senility and our 'old' old age was beyond the focus of conventional likelihood. And how old were the 'Three Wise Men'? In such a situation, what do grey hair, and long beards really signify? Are these the signs that indicate to us that a person is either wise or grumpy, or a contributor to society or a burden? And are these the signs that we base our collective social decisions of care and need upon? These signs more likely signify old age when we are using chronological age as the referent. If we shift to using social age (Arber and Ginn 1995) as the referent, then our picture looks different and our judgements on the abilities and wisdom of the person should be adjusted accordingly.

Perceptions are that old people think and move slowly. They are not creative and they can't learn, change or grow. They dislike innovation and new ideas. They enter second childhood and are egocentric. They become irritable and cantankerous, shallow and enfeebled. They live in the past or behind the times. Their minds wander and they reminisce too much. They are also often stricken with diseases which restrict their movements. They have lost and cannot replace friends, spouse, job, status, power, influence and income. They have lost their desire and capacity for sex. Feeble, uninteresting, they await death, a burden to society, their families, themselves.

Even if all these negative aspects of old age and ageing were valid, (and Chapter 4 will look at some research into these issues) it would not be surprising to find people wanting to avoid ageing altogether, to deny their own ageing, to detach themselves in some ways from themselves as older people, to dissociate themselves from other people who are also old or growing older. The fountain of youth, the bottle of hair dye, cosmetic surgery, Viagra, Age-1 ('Screening the gene that stops ageing', reported in *Weekend Australian* June 24 1995: 27 by Phillips), are all methods that

we, according to our wealth and desire, can choose to employ in an attempt to distance the body, the self from the visible, physical and consequently, the psychological signs, of ageing and thereby distance ourselves from the social perception of being of little value.

There is abundant evidence of the preoccupation with the ageing process in advertising in the newspapers and magazines and in literature. (See, for example, the examination of the psychology of fear of ageing in Oscar Wilde's (1890) *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*) There is also evidence of this preoccupation with age through visual representations of social thought.

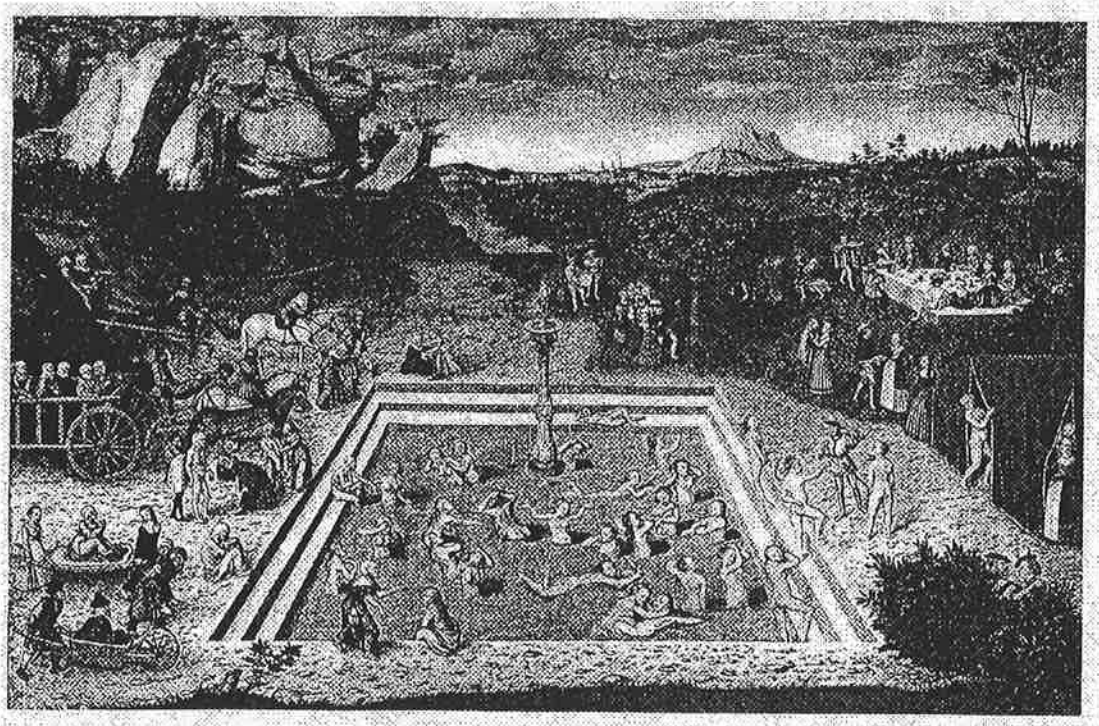


Figure 3.1 Lucas Cranach. *Der Jungbrunnen* 1546. Gemäldegalerie. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

In Figure 3.1, above, *Der Jungbrunnen* (The fountain of youth) Lucas Cranach, 15th century painter, is visual evidence that the fear of ageing and the preference for a youthful appearance is not a modern or post modern preoccupation. This painting shows the ideal vision of the power of the mythical fountain of youth where old women come or are carried to the fountain in barrows or on the backs of their husbands. Significantly, and of importance to feminist scholars, the old women must immerse themselves in the cleansing and rejuvenating waters and cross the full width of the pool in order to be restored to youthful vigour, while the old men merely need to walk around the fountain and appear on the arm of the reconstructed youthful woman in order to be rejuvenated. Nevertheless, the painting reinforces the notion that the force compelling us to retain youthfulness is not an invention of the 20th century.

As A S Byatt (1995) describes in *The djinn in the nightingale's eye*, the fountain of youth works for the external physical identity of ageing but not for the inner, experiential self:

‘You must wish for your heart’s desire’.

‘I wish’, said Gillian, ‘for my body to be as it was when I last really *liked* it, if you can do that.’

The great green eyes settled on her stout figure in its white robe and turban.

‘I can do that,’ he said. ‘I can do that. If you are quite sure that that is what you most desire. I can make your cells as they were, but I cannot delay your Fate.’

‘It is courteous of you to tell me that. And yes, it is what I desire. It is what I have desired hopelessly every day these last ten years, whatever else I may have desired.’ (Byatt 1995: 201)

Ageism and gerontophobia



Figure 3.2 Ageist swine. *Campus magazine*. Adelaide. University of Adelaide. September 1994.

Bytheway and Johnson (1990) developed a definition of ageism which includes the understanding of the concept and its practical application in Western society. I repeat it here.

- 1 Ageism is a set of beliefs originating in the biological variation between people and relating to the ageing process.
- 2 It is in the action of corporate bodies, what is said and done by their representatives, and the resulting views that are held by ordinary ageing people, that ageism is made manifest.

In consequence of this, it follows that:

- (a) Ageism generates and reinforces a fear and denigration of the ageing process, and stereotyping presumptions regarding competence and the need for protection.

- (b) In particular, ageism legitimates the use of chronological age to make out classes of people who are systematically denied resources and opportunities that others enjoy, and who suffer the consequences of such denigration, ranging from well-meaning patronage to unambiguous vilification. (Bytheway and Johnson 1990, reproduced in Bytheway 1995:14)

Ageism differs from sexism and racism in one important respect. We know that, if we survive into later life, we will all be its victims. Most of us are socialised in childhood into a gender and ethnic identity which remain (more or less) throughout life. Age forms a quite different basis of stratification than say education or social status, since we have all been young and expect to grow old. This anticipation should be predicted to lead to a degree of empathy with what we are becoming, to a positive valuation of elderly people. But Kuhn (1977) suggests that it creates a 'we' and 'them' mentality. And this in turn can lead to the dread of becoming old and subsequent distancing and hostility from those who consider themselves young towards those they consider to be old as though old age were a disease which could be 'caught' and 'suffered from'. In this sense, ageism is central to the construction of an ageing identity.

Attitudes and perceptions of ageing, whether expressed by scientific theory, health care policy, or church sermons, are based on certain value-laden presuppositions that constitute or invent pictures of aging rather than simply respond to a preexisting and independent reality. One could ask whether the changing pictures of aging are products of complex forces and motives that interact more haphazardly producing trends and results that may not have been the intention of any of the players.

Ageism affects people of all ages. Ageism distorts and is restrictive. It sets arbitrary age limits for behaviour. It restricts older people's opportunities for employment as we see in the following newspaper headlines. 'Over 60s not wanted in CFS' (Papps 1994) and 'Execs find ageism begins at 45' (Chynoweth 1998) Or, it distorts perceptions of what people should be like according to their chronological age or the

number of years they have lived. It feeds us the notions that only youth can learn, that only youth can be physically active, that only youth can be sexually active, that older people lose their attractiveness, their cognitive capacities and their mobility. 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks' is a commonly used and understood metaphor expressing the uselessness of older people, as opposed to younger people. How relevant is chronological age when we can contrast the social identity of an athlete who, at thirty, is considered to be too old for the championship (See example and discussion in Chapter 6) and a maestro of art, who, at eighty or more can produce a fine work of art, or a politician who is just reaching her/his peak at seventy-five?

There are suggestions that ageism is more a product of modern Western societies as opposed to 'traditional societies'. However I would contend that ageism exists in all societies but the activation of the concept may take different forms and use different forms of language for each culture. From the *New Internationalist* (February 1995) we can gain the sense that in many cultures, with rapidly changing social and economic conditions, the voices of their old people are increasingly being drowned out. In the process, the transmission of culture from old to young breaks down. Ultimately, older people can find themselves repeating their stories and their memories to a bored and disinterested youth. The young know that their lives will never be like that, and therefore they feel they have little to learn from their grandparents. At best, they will collect the old people's stories on tape as curiosities of folk wisdom, of herbal medicine and picturesque archaic practices surrounding birth, sickness or death.

According to Donow (1994), when we hear that the population over sixty-five commands a greater share of medical care per capita than any other cohort and that we popularly though mistakenly, believe this cohort enjoys extraordinary prosperity while at the same time, children and young adults experience the highest rates of poverty, it is understandable why many come to regard the elderly, not as the victims but the victimisers.

Ageism can conceal the social origins of elderly people's circumstances and reinforce our current sense of crisis over the rapid ageing of the population. On the one hand, elderly people have been constructed as a social problem, stereotyped in public rhetoric as frail, politically impotent victims, 'the deserving poor' for whom collective provision should be made through the agency of welfare professionals. On the other hand, a more hostile characterisation has emerged, in which elderly people are seen as either relatively 'well-off' or a 'burden' on the economy because of their growing consumption of pensions and health and welfare services.

Even the more gentle version of ageism, 'compassionate ageism' which reflects the good intentions of some groups in society to tackle poverty and ill health, is an unconscious form of stereotyping or ageism. An emphasis on the problems experienced by elderly people is legitimate, especially for those closely involved in the development of services and provision of care. But where studies focus on the 'problems' of old age, they can contribute to a stereotype of elderly people as weak, dependent, and burdensome. The danger arises of presenting a partial, one-dimensional view, which ignores the fact that many elderly people are in good health, leading independent lives, and making valuable contributions to society. This partial view reinforces the low esteem in which elderly people are held (Ford and Sinclair 1987), reduces them to the object(s) of 'welfare', condescends to them as 'golden oldies' and discourages the understanding of elderly people as human beings possessing a multiplicity of abilities and interests. This is what Arber and Ginn (1993) refer to as the 'pathology' model in which elderly people are seen in terms of disease, disability, poverty, bereavement, isolation and role loss.

Arber and Ginn (1993) argue instead that increased longevity should be viewed as a success story, enabling unprecedented numbers of people to enjoy later life as a 'third age' free from the routine of full-time employment and with a diminished domestic workload. And Mott and Riggs (1992) argue that the elderly should be perceived as the diverse group they are. They claim that at a time in their lives when they exhibit the greatest diversity as a group through the accumulation of the widest and greatest number of experiences, the widely accepted social perception is that

older people behave and talk (and worse, that they should behave and talk) as a homogeneous group.

de Kruyf (1995) asserts that ageing is a positive on-going experience such that:

What is certain about old age, now and in the future, is this and nothing more: to be old is to have lived a long time. There is nothing intrinsically disadvantageous in having lived a long time. (de Kruyf 1995)

And as expressed in the novel for adolescents, *A fox in winter* (Branfield 1980):

They're pretty tough, these ninety-year olds. They've got to be to have lasted so long. (Branfield 1980: 41)

Many researchers talk of the stereotypical view of the elderly which most people ascribe to. Arber and Ginn (1991), in discussing the concept of stereotypes claim that at best a stereotype conveys only partial information. More often it actually conflicts with lived experience.

Stereotypical images do not accurately describe social reality, but are in tension with it, reflecting the values, beliefs and power relations of a particular society. Stereotypes therefore function as propaganda, creating and reinforcing negative attitudes towards a group. More than this, the ideological message of the stereotype tends to be learned (internalised) by the oppressed group, contributing to the social control of its members. (Arber and Ginn 1991: 35)

Looking at the values we have of the older people in our society and as described above, it is usual to find older people described in collective terms. A stereotype is a social construct whereby items can be classified and defined. I've explained the value and purpose of stereotypes as cultural impression in Chapter 2. All cultures hold stereotypes. Stereotypes serve the purpose of representing collective cultural

beliefs. Stereotypes reflect the way the majority of the culture view the world and establish their values. Stereotypes establish roles, castes, classes hierarchies and power structures. Stereotypes are represented through stories, songs, jokes, religious beliefs, and societal laws. Stereotypes are used to manage society and by extension to manipulate groups of people within societies. Holding stereotyped views can be comforting as this helps individuals to share concepts and beliefs with others. To have an established view which is shared by the group and not challenged, and which is indeed supported by rituals and laws, helps to maintain cohesiveness within a group. Stereotypes provide reference points. Stereotypes are both positive and negative. They are also changeable, and in fact are often in processes of mutation. Nor is stereotyping always a problem. It becomes an issue only when a society tries to pin individuals down to the conformity of the stereotype and attempts to remove voice and power from the individuals. To find older people defined according to a certain stereotype is not unexpected.

However, no group of people is composed of identical individuals. Where stereotypes of whole groups are held as givens and where this has societal support, the possibility of the stereotype being used as an argument for the manipulation of power by one group over another is strong. Where a whole group of people within a society is categorised negatively and where the society expresses a collective negative attitude unchallenged, whether through jokes, stories, beliefs or laws, manipulations of power exist and the result is likely to be, at the very least, lack of self-esteem and self-determination for the individuals within the group. It is not difficult to find groups of people within complex societies who are stereotyped or lumped together in some way, often negatively. Very often, deprivation of voice and power is the result. Further, it is not unusual to find that the individuals who comprise such a group may eventually come to see themselves as fitting the negative stereotype. How this works with language through verbal communication will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

Palmore (1990) lists a series of commonly held beliefs about the elderly, beliefs held by younger people and indeed by many older people. His list includes positive

beliefs and negative beliefs. The positive attributes are that they are kind, wise, dependable, affluent, powerful, free and happy. The negative beliefs include: older people are infirm, unable to think for themselves, forgetful; that they should accept the 'facts' of aging, that they suffer from hearing senility, they are sexually overactive (that is, they should not be sexually active at all), cranky if someone disagrees with them and childlike. This negative list corresponds to some degree with the list produced in the story *Featherbys* by Mary Steele, a novel for young adolescents. This list was produced by two of the young adolescent characters in the story. They claimed that they weren't sure how many of these characteristics the two old Featherby ladies had, but anyway this is a list of their general ideas about old people.

Before we really got to know the old Featherby ladies, the five of us kids were rather spooked by them. Sophie and I tried to work out why some old people put you off like that. We made a list of things we didn't like about old people, which we called our Geriatric List ...

They wear black a lot —

They shuffle around on sticks —

They can be crabby and disapproving —

They always think things were better when they were young —

They ask dumb questions about school —

They haven't a clue about computers and VCRs and things —

They are deaf and you have to shout at them, which is embarrassing. And most of them don't understand what you are saying even if they aren't deaf —

They have wrinkled and saggy skin and yellow teeth (or no teeth at all, and then their lips are sucked in) —

Some old people even dribble. YUK!

(Steele 1994: 2-3)

The stereotyping of elderly people, as a homogeneous group who have lost their memory, are too slow to learn new ideas, are dependent, ill, and generally

uninteresting, profoundly affects the way they are perceived and consequently treated at the societal level, the policy making level and as individuals in everyday interactions. Negative attitudes to older people (whether hostile or pitying) can be found in most societies. In Western societies, the elderly appear to have a low vitality status as a result of demeaning and patronising attitudes towards them. This may be deduced from the representation of the elderly in the press, television and literature (including children's literature) thereby giving the negative view of ageing institutional and societal support.

Ford (1979) claims that the problem with collective terms such as 'aged' for example, is that they tempt the unwary to expect the individual to conform to the set of characteristics implicit in the term. If we examine 'the aged' in terms of social function in modern Western society, we will be struck by the fact that the word inescapably carries overtones of senescence and obsolescence. The tendency for collective terms to invite us to form mental images and expectations of the sort of people we are trying to define creates practical problems. More often a real person does not conform to the expectations of others.

Or it could be argued that the theories which have helped shape social policies regarding the needs of the elderly — in particular theories of 'acquiescent functionalism', in fact legitimate ageism in practice in contemporary society. Such theories attribute the causes of most of the problems of old people to the natural consequences of physical decrecence and mental inflexibility or to the failures of individual adjustment to ageing and retirement, instead of to contemporary developments of the state, the economy and social inequality.

In *Immortality*, Kundera is clear about his perception of the value that we, as a community, place on ageing and on older people, bringing the downward metaphor into play.

Of course, the child's rights are above other rights. Why did their mother give preference to Laura over Agnes, when the enemy commander

allowed her to save just one out of the three members of the family? The answer was quite clear: she gave preference to Laura, because she was younger. In the hierarchy of age the baby has the highest rank, then the child, then the adolescent, and only then the adult. As for the old they are virtually at ground level, at the very bottom of this pyramid of values. (Kundera 1991: 278)

But from a political-economic perspective, 'the problem' stems from the social and linguistic construction of ageing. It is not old age (as in chronological age) which is responsible for disadvantages in later life, but a social system in which those defined as having no productive role in the formal economy are condemned to a relatively low standard of living and where, in spite of experiences degrees of loss in terms of physiological change, managing life is made increasingly difficult for them in what Bytheway calls 'a poorly built and inhospitable environment'. (Bytheway 1995: 96) Ferraro (1992) believes that prejudice and discrimination against older people is based on the collective perspective that ageing makes people less attractive, intelligent and productive. And Ford and Sinclair (1987) found in their study on ageism and older women, that older women are regarded at best as 'amiable old ladies', at worst as a group of weak and defenceless pensioners. They claim that the prejudice against older people stems in part from what is seen as idleness on the part of the elderly. A life of leisure is not a socially recognised virtue in our contemporary society. This claim is supported by other researchers (Tsuji 1993, for example). One of the reasons that old age is regarded by younger people as uninteresting and restricted is that we find it very difficult not to continue to judge people in terms of the prevalent 'productive' norms of western society. The important point here is that the value is being allocated first of all by younger people and is then being picked up as a truism by the older people themselves. So that finally the perception is given validity by the very group who is being stereotyped.

Kendig (1986a and 1986b) claims that it is important to recognise that the power of virtually all older people is eroded by two widespread influences. The first is that the ageist label of incompetency can become a self-fulfilling prophecy if older people

accept the distorted reflection of themselves. The second is that older people also may be forced into the difficult position of dealing with others who view them with a 'presumption of incompetence'. (See also Doty 1987; Gething and Fethney 1995.)

Gerontophobia (an unreasonable fear and hatred of old people) takes ageism a further step into expressions of fear for the ageing self and hatred towards ageing others. According to recent reports this attitude is particularly pernicious in the medical professions where older people reportedly receive second rate health care. (Henwood 1990). There is a body of evidence which suggests that health professionals such as medical practitioners, psychologists and nurses report older people as being their least preferred clients. According to a headline in *The Advertiser* (October 23 1997), there is widespread 'Contempt for elderly from those scared to age'. (Hailstone 1997: 19)

In North America and the United Kingdom there has been a vigorous debate in the last decade about whether age should be used as a decisive criterion in the allocation of expensive health care technology. Zweibel, Cassel and Karrison (1993) report a survey on public attitudes about the use of chronological age as a criterion for allocating health resources in The United States. Arguments in favour of the policy considered the ideologies that the old have obligations towards the young, that the old have already had the opportunity to live a natural lifespan and that the old can find meaning in old age by returning to the acceptance of death which was common in earlier times, as can be seen in the Japanese movie *The Ballad of Narayama*, directed by Shohei Imamura (1983) and the Alaskan story of burden and abandonment, *Two old women*, related as legend by Velma Wallis (1994).

Arguments against the policy included the belief that age based rationing is unethical because it discriminates disproportionately against women. Fear of abandonment and the actual abandonment of and violence towards very old people adds the face of desperation to ageism and gerontophobia. A report by Overington in the *Age News Extra* (November 25 2000: 5) marks one such act of abandonment in Australia through the words of one relative of an older woman for whom there is no family shelter, 'I told her we didn't want her. Nobody wants her.'

Ageist and gerontophobic attitudes are most clearly apparent in the words of a former Governor of Colorado in the United States who said 'older people have a duty to die and get out of the way' (reported in Friedan 1994: 510). The practice of euthanasia for the very old is seriously considered as being 'in their best interests' but carries with it an underlying current of expediency for the state. Or is it that the discourse is really about chronological cleansing as can be seen in the futuristic film *Logan's Run* (directed by Michael Anderson 1976) where the young hold power and life is terminated at the age of thirty in order to maintain a limit on the population? Or could we become the type of society portrayed in Kurt Vonnegut's (1964) story, *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*, where older people as a group have arrived at a site of power by the force of numbers as a result of increasing longevity and thereby control the continuity of the human race? In this society, no baby can be born unless someone dies to make way for them.

The old person as exploiter or victim tells only part of the story of the relationship between youth and age. Predicated upon unresolved conflict, both images deny any sense of generational continuity, ignoring those cases where a young person's growth is facilitated by an elder or where an older person's decline is eased by the younger.

Theories of ageing

The first element in any theory about age is, of course, time. We see our lives mapped out on the continuous dimension of time. By numbering and counting years we construct a basic measure of age. Finkel, Whitfield and McGue (1995) claim that theories of aging are typically divided into two major categories: genetic and nongenetic. Genetic theories of aging emphasise that ageing occurs as a result of a genetic program which produces both physical and mental deterioration in late adulthood. Nongenetic theories emphasise environmental influences on functioning, suggesting that accumulation of environmental damage over the lifespan is the source of physical and mental deterioration. In either case, we see here that the focus is on ageing as detriment rather than an accumulation of experiences which give value to the individual and to the society.

Arber and Ginn (1991) distinguish between at least three different aspects — chronological age, social age, and psychological age — and how they interrelate. They suggest that chronological (or calendar age) age is essentially biological, but needs to be distinguished from physiological age, which is a medical construct, referring to the physical ageing of the body, manifest in levels of functional impairment. Social age refers to the social attitudes and behaviour seen as appropriate for a particular chronological age, which itself is cross-cut by gender (Arber and Ginn 1991 and 1993).

Since chronological age refers to age in years, ageing in this sense brings changes to one's structural position in society, due to the various responsibilities and privileges which depend on chronological age. Some of these are enshrined in law; for example, leaving school, marriage, eligibility to vote and eligibility to claim state benefits all depend on chronological age. Arber and Ginn (1991) suggest that defining a social group as 'dependent' purely on the basis of chronological age ignores the wide diversity among older people, in terms of their employment status, (their skills), material resources, their physiological age, their health, their lifestyles and social networks; their past contributions to the economy in working and paying taxes and their unpaid contributions to society both in earlier life and in later life, in terms of grand parenting and volunteering.

It can be argued that in postmodern society, social age is becoming more fluid and the norms as to the timing of work and education have become more flexible (Laslett 1989). According to this view, normative expectations about appropriate lifestyles among older people are weakening as improved health enables more people to experience a Third Age of active leisure between retirement and the onset of very old age. (Laslett 1989)

In his Theory of the Third Age, Laslett (1989) attempts to construct a more positive image of ageing in contemporary societies. The extent of these changes in the age structure of modern populations, requires, according to Laslett, a fundamental rethinking of prevailing (and historic) concepts of ageing, he suggests four ages:

First comes an era of dependence, socialization, immaturity and education; second, an age of independence, maturity and responsibility for earning and saving money; third, an era of personal fulfillment; and fourth an era of final dependence decrepitude and death. (Laslett 1989: 4)

Although Laslett's 'ages' are not strictly related to chronological age, it is clear that they coincide with certain age-related structures and institutions. From Laslett's viewpoint, it is the Third Age which represents what he calls the 'real novelty', both in the sense of referring to the new demographic realities, where the bounds of working life and retirement depend more on wealth and desire rather than the previously legislated retirement age demarcation, and as a challenge to developing new ways of living. The Third Age is seen as that 'apogee' of life, a period of creative fulfillment, freed from the constraints of the Second Age, but not yet under the shadow of the Fourth.

Seedsman (1995) picked up this idea, espousing the value of leisure, recreation and education for the aged. The meaning of life, however, does not assume less importance because one becomes old. He says:

Much of the malaise inflicting people in modern society can be traced to a lowered sense of personal direction and well-being resulting from feelings of obsolescence and despair that life has lost its purpose or direction. Health and well-being are shown to be dependent on three psychological processes, namely, self-concept, locus of control and self-efficacy. An attitude toward life that is optimistic and open to opportunities actually enhances the potential to experience leisure — a form of self-permission to action a range of novel and interesting risk undertakings. Staying vital during older age requires rejection of those negative stereotypes and myths that place unrealistic limitations on vital living. (Seedsman 1995: Abstract)

Another way to theorise age is through reference to the physiological ageing process. Although this is also related to chronological age, the medical construct of physiological age cannot be simply read off from age in years. Physiological age relates to functional ability and the gradual decline in bone density, muscle tone and strength which occurs with advancing age. However, the speed and timing of these physiological changes varies according to position in the social structure, especially gender and class (Arber and Ginn 1991 and 1993). Both Laslett's (1989) discussion of the Fourth Age as characterized by 'dependence, decrepitude and death' and use of the concept of 'deep old age' (I have referred before to 'very-old age') are marking these categories of older people based on physiological decline. Laslett argues that the Fourth Age is increasingly becoming separated from the Third Age and is stigmatised and made the subject of fear and taboo.

Many gerontologists feel that there are a variety of 'ages' that exist in the same individual, and that multiple patterns of age-related changes can be identified. Functional age (also referred to as biological age and measuring neurological processing and cognition) is used by some gerontologists to represent the ageing process in a meaningful way, as opposed to simply relying on chronological age.

Non-genetic theories of the process and effects of ageing only appear to have been the focus of study from the 1960s. The first serious theory was that of Disengagement Theory (Cumming and Henry 1961). This theory argued that the process of social and psychological withdrawal was a model for the ageing population and that this process was both intrinsic and inevitable and that the disengagement process was not only a correlate of successful ageing but also probably a condition of it. This theory gave rise to much critical evaluation the most significant of which came from Maddox (1964) who questioned first of all the definition of 'successful' ageing and secondly whether or not the research methods had satisfactorily explored environmental factors such as health, education, employment and so on, as opposed to what Cumming and Henry had labelled an 'intrinsic' desire for withdrawal.

This theory, however, has some recent support. In a survey carried out in an academic institution by Rosenman and McDonald (1995), the older respondents surveyed said that they thought it was fair for them to 'move on' to give younger people a chance. Several voiced their concern that if older people did not 'move on' younger staff would by necessity, be recruited on a contractual rather than on a tenurial basis. A debate carried out in the May, 1994 issues of the *Adelaidean*, the newspaper of the University of Adelaide, on the merits or otherwise of compulsory retirement according to age, would support this notion.

Two of the volunteer participants claimed opposing views on the subject of compulsory retirement or the usefulness of individuals in the workforce after a certain age. W said:

'Oh I think there's got to be a limit. I don't think you can go on working. You've probably still got a brain and still doing your work quite well, but I don't care who they are — how clever they are — you get to sixty-five, you're not as sharp as you were you know. They should come down and give the unemployed a better go.'

And B said this during a discussion about retirement and unemployment:

'Yes that's right. And let's face it, people with that experience, it's a shame to lose them. I feel sorry for the young people coming up because we should have apprenticeships where they're being taught by these men who have the knowledge.'

Role theory, in contrast, suggests that maintaining an active role in the community is a stimulating and attractive way of life for even 'old-old' persons, which can foster a positive, regenerative cycle. The more active and involved we become, the healthier we are; the longer we remain healthy, the more active and involved we can remain. Involvement in the community can be achieved through paid work, (McIntosh and Danigelis 1995), or unpaid work such as volunteering or working within the family

through child/sick relative/older relative care. In fact, Kendig (1986a and 1986b) found that older people are more likely to give rather than receive support. For example, older people are twice as likely to give money and time to their family than families are to give money and time to older people.

Closely aligned with role theory but with a different emphasis is life course theory. For Cole (1995), the life course is commonly understood as a pattern of rules, expectations, and events ordering activity over a lifetime. McCallum (1986), in a discussion on retirement and widowhood transitions, stated that transitions are not only individual experiences but as well bring about network changes (including changes in communication networks). Widowhood, retirement and institutionalisation (which can include relocation) are three role transitions that commonly occur in old age. The nature of these transitions is considerably influenced by the social context in which they occur, for example, through relocation (and the need to make new friends) and the subsequent adjustment which might be required following divorce or the loss of a spouse or long term partner.

Mugford and Kendig (1986) and Dykstra (1995) have raised the issue of the changes in social relations such as in friendship networks and family ties. For example, for individuals who have never married the potential kin ties are reduced. As people grow older, ties with age peers are lost and the pool of relatives with whom the elderly can interact inevitably diminishes, particularly through deaths of members of the same generation: spouses, siblings, friends and long-time neighbours. The consequences of such social alienation can include restricted opportunities for further friendships and subsequently opportunities for sharing conversation and life narratives .

Wenger (1988, 1989, 1990) suggest that the functioning of one's support network is related to the quality of life. For example, longstanding same sex friendships are important. Women tend to continue to make new friends throughout the life course, whereas men are less likely to replace lost friendships. Social class has an effect on networks as a result of differential resources and geographical mobility.

Hone (1995) claims that there is ample documentation in regard to the importance of socialisation in maintaining the well being of older people. Research into depression in ageing reveals that older people generally have smaller social networks which is reflected in positive or negative self-attitude. Social relationships influence the individual's self-perception and manifest in their ability to be 'in control'.

Garfein and Herzog (1995) look at positive and robust ageing — referred to by various other terms such as 'successful aging', 'productive aging', 'maintenance of functioning', or 'aging well', and propose that no longer is older age viewed as necessarily a phase of waning health and declining resources, in which the absence of such detrimental declines is the 'best' that we can hope for.

Continuity Theory (Havighurst, Neugarten and Tobin 1968) contends that personalities, lifestyles, values, and behavioural patterns present in an adult's younger years play an important role in the adjustments to old age. They suggest that central personal characteristics become even more pronounced and core values even more salient with age. Individuals age 'successfully' if they maintain a mature, integrated personality while growing old. As an adaptive mechanism for aging processes, elderly adults will attempt to preserve and maintain internal and external continuity processed as a method of providing a benchmark by which to judge new data, experiences, and phenomena. When individuals are able to make coherent and satisfying connections between what they know from past experiences and what they are experiencing now, it is suggested, they are able to adapt quite well to new environments and experiences.

Continuity Theory is appealing since the past is not expected to be forgotten but rather, it serves as a reference system. Several studies have shown that elderly adults are able to interpret and successfully deal with their current situation when links to the past are made in appropriate ways. The elderly recognize that as long as change is justified in the light of past experiences, they are able to adapt. It is, therefore important for older individuals to retain a sense of their past in order that they can rationalise future changes. Knowing that their present ability to encode and decode

nonverbal behaviour may be different from before (as may occur with diminished sensory skills), older individuals can find ways to adapt that will provide confidence and success in communication situations.

There is some concern however that these positive realisations of ageing may be creating a new dualism that is impossible to achieve with the increasing images in the popular press of older people involved in amazing, usually difficult and often dangerous physical activities such as jumping out of planes, riding motorbikes or walking across the desert. (This will be explored further in Chapter 6.) A new industry has emerged in the book publishing world, with books entitled 'How to look twenty years younger', 'The search for youthful ageing', 'Avoiding old age', for example. Where on the spectrum between the old person as 'past it' and the superfit older person (for example) do ordinary people fit? Where are the images of older women and men doing average things? Not everyone needs or desires to be either a fuddy-duddy or a super person. And there is an ideological overlap here with the concept of 'fountain of youth' where one must maintain the outward perception, at least, of the self as not ageing.

Acts of identity

As explained in Chapter 2, people think of their identity or who they are in terms of what happens to them and around them. The events in their personal lives, their working lives, their interactions and relationships with individuals, networks and communities help them to understand themselves. These events help them to create a personal definition of their lives and their identity. It is the narrative of a life that gives an individual self-identity. This view is supported by many, including Coates (1993) and Chappel and Orbach (1986). The process of self-definition in relation to others does not stop in old age but continues throughout life. It can be a developmental process.

However, with the passing of time, older people can be caught up in the negative feelings that society has about being elderly. Having grown up with the norms, the

typical standards and beliefs of their culture, they can hold the same views about themselves as society does about them. As we endorse ageism, the negative ideas and statements about getting old, in turn we can see and think of ourselves as diseased, deteriorating, disabled, disengaged, dependent, and distant from others and what will be experienced through a shift in environmental context.

Watts (1991) believes strongly that status is clearly linked to that power. He uses the term status to refer to an individual's position in the structure of social relationships with respect to other individuals. Position may be determined in a number of ways. For example, it may be determined through such features as age, sex, education level, wealth or by the possession of special mental or physical abilities. In any society, status is dependent upon the set of values attached to these features by the members of the society and, claims Watts, it is crucially involved in systems of social hierarchies which help determine who possesses what degree of power in which situations and activities. Power exists throughout all levels of relationships within societies, whether within small close-knit family groups, or as a form of institutionalised power within complex societies. Negotiation for power is a primary goal for the members of a society. Power is negotiated through verbal interaction. Issues of power can be located in most verbal interactions.

It is through social interaction, and in particular, verbal interaction, that we construct a sense of ourselves, a self-image or what Goffman (1995) calls 'face'. The sense that we develop of ourselves is crucially dependent on the ways in which we come to define ourselves in relation to others, that is, within the complex structure of social relationships into which we enter and which we also help to constitute. (Watts 1991: 54)

Feldman (1995) in *Older women — rewriting their future*, describes how the women in her study expressed anger at being categorised as a group with the metaphorical 'past their use by date', as being seen as non-productive, rather than contributing members of society. In one of the narratives produced in the group, a story

'Consigned to the bin' and 'priced to clear' or 'past their use by dates' one of the women made this point strongly.

If there's one thing that irritates me a lot it's the expression 'use-by date'. Nothing annoys me more than when my children come home, take over the kitchen (and) study the 'use-by' date in every item they pick up before devouring it or consigning it to the bin accompanied by rude remarks about aged products. We never had all this nonsense before 'use-by dates' were invented. They don't want to know anything about the pleasure of ageing wine, or brandy-ripened fruit cakes, putting down preserves or storing rich plum puddings. Some of the most delicious tastes in life come after the 'use-by' date. (Feldman 1995: no page number)

One common way that some people have of coping with an ageing self and an ageing image is to accept the stereotype in respect of others but to deny one's own old age. Becoming old is then a misfortune that befalls other people. A false sense of self, which rests precariously on the avoidance of any sign of ageing, such as forgetfulness or fussiness, is thus constructed and maintained. People do internalize an idea of what they 'should' be like at certain ages, and are then surprised to find how poorly it fits their own experience and the way they feel. What older people are denying is not their age, but a derogatory stereotype of incapacity and encroaching senility in which they do not recognise themselves or most of their peers. In a society which penalises old age severely, and pensions off wisdom and experience, any effort to avoid the appearance of ageing may be a rational response to the prevailing prejudice, a means of escaping the consequences of age discrimination.

Humour and ageing stereotypes

The Doonesbury cartoon featured below (Figure 3.3) encompasses issues of social identity which occur frequently in conversations or discussions about ageing. The first issue is a positive one; that of the value for older people of being survivors

(having lived a long time) and having solidarity and conversational strength through topics based on shared experiences. This 'group solidarity' or 'homodynamic network' concept is further emphasised with 'What's on the mind of kids today?' which is expected to be different from the topics on the minds of older people or, 'as an older person, I can't be expected to know because spending time with kids is outside of my experience' or they are not in the same speech community or in Labov's (1972b) terms they are 'outsiders'.

This second issue, the one of group identifying visual differences and distance in preoccupation of concerns or conversational topic between younger and older people, often results in reinforcing the negative stereotype. For example, the signs of youth are presented through hairstyle, (orange hair in the coloured original), the clothes (in disarray as though from purposeful carelessness), lively/modern stance and beard together with the slimmer body as opposed to the 'pot belly' stance of the older man.

The older man does not know what's on the mind of kids (younger adults) today, therefore he may be out of touch with modern news and views and the younger man presumably does know what is on the mind of 'kids' today as he is one of them. The bodies and the words tell the story.

The third issue is the ubiquitous belief that older people suffer from frequent loss of memory, in particular frequent loss of memory for names of things, people and places. These last two issues can be considered representative of the negative stereotypical views/identities or presuppositions which society holds towards older people and which are assumed to reflect the reality of the ageing process. This view of older people can reinforce the belief in the reality of a conversational distance between younger and older people. These negative stereotypes may subsequently help bring about stereotypical views, ageism and even gerontophobia as discussed above.

Doonesbury

BY
G. B. TRUDEAU



Figure 3.3 Doonesbury. *Nation Sunday Comics* May 25 1997.

The cartoon illustrated in Figure 3.4, below, gives another example of presupposition at work. This cartoon presupposes an earlier discourse which may not have existed as specific text but which is expected to exist in the minds and understandings of the readers. Understanding the joke then requires several mental projections. The first one is that a mardi gras is a theatrical street parade which celebrates a festival and usually involves costumes, music, dancing and fun. The second presupposition is to recognise the activities being performed by the participants in this street parade are stereotypical activities of older people having fun: watching television, (lawn) bowling, gardening and baking. A third presupposition is in the bodily construction of the participants. The fourth is the apparent lack of energetic movement.

Finally, the comment in the caption is being made by younger people. The degree to which the older people are being stereotyped as not being energetic or festive (their 'costumes' are portrayed as the normal dress of older people) is from the perspective of the younger people. In order to understand the joke, it is necessary to understand the underlying social perceptions that a younger person might have of the kinds of activities which give pleasure and fun to older people. As is the cartoon in Figure 3.3, above, this cartoon is from a weekly mass circulation magazine. The cartoon has been placed in what appears to be random manner in so far as there are no other news items of references to ageing within the surrounding pages so that without contextual support, the reader must bring prior knowledge or social preconceptions and a belief system held in common with the creator of the cartoon.

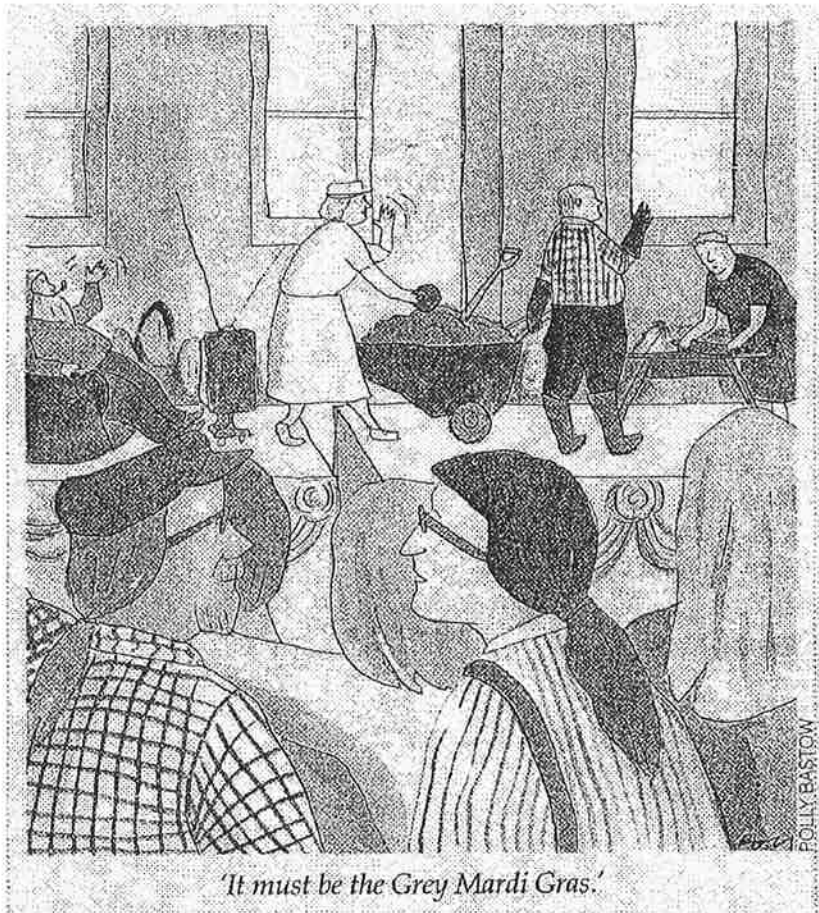


Figure 3.4 It must be the Grey Mardi Gras. *Australian Magazine* February 11-12 1995: 8.

These cartoons — jokes! — are fairly typical of jokes about ageing which may vary in location or topic (aged home, sexual innuendo, or use of metaphor) but which invariably suppose some form of cognitive or physiological decrement. Witness the following:

Why is it good to have Alzheimer's disease?

You can hide your own Easter eggs.

Or this one:

A couple of dear old ladies were sitting on a patio in their twilight home. Both were very, very bored. One turned to the other and said, 'Nothing happens here. All the men are half dead. There's no fun'. The other said, 'Okay, let's do something to liven the place up.' So they agreed to streak along the verandah to attract the attention of the old blokes who were sunning themselves. One of them looked up and said to the other, 'Did you see that?' The other said, 'I think so. Couldn't say for sure. My eyes aren't too good these days. What were they wearing?' 'Couldn't say for sure. But whatever it was, they needed ironing.' (Both these jokes come from *The Penguin book of jokes from cyberspace*. Adams and Newell (eds.) 1995: 394-395)

These are typical exemplars invoking images of ageing such as wrinkled skin, failing eyesight as bases for humour. And the people are in the 'twilight home', metaphor expressing the ending of their days. The second joke, also invokes the taboo topic of sexuality in older people. In this sense, humour can often be a way of invoking taboo topics.

The following joke, on the other hand, apparently reflects the positive or counter stereotype of ageing. It is also possible, however, that this joke would be found humorous because of its factor of 'impossibility' or 'incongruity' or marked shock value, since everyone knows that an old lady cannot shinny down a drainpipe.

An old lady who lived on the second floor of a rooming house was warned by the doctor, as he placed a cast on her broken leg, not to climb stairs. After several months he took off the cast. 'Can I climb stairs now?' she asked. 'Yes,' he replied. 'Good. I'm sick and tired of shinnying up and down that drainpipe'. (Palmore 1986:115)

In his study, on ageing and humour, Palmore (1986) concluded that attitudes toward ageing (as towards most social beliefs) are often revealed through humour. He also found in his study of ageing as humour, that, overall, more than half the jokes on

ageing reflected a negative view of ageing or the aged, that is most of the jokes upheld the negative stereotypes we have of the ageing process. There is also an element of anxiety relief as we laugh at what we see as the ageing predicament but our laughter can act as a distancing technique. We laugh at the joke as we, at the same time, distance ourselves from the possibility of experiencing the context of the joke.

Nahemow (1986) asserts that 'humour is a key element in the human communication repertoire — so much so that many consider it a defining human attribute'.

(Nahemow 1986: 3) The success of humour as a way of sharing discourse, depends on such diverse contextual factors as whether people consider themselves to be among friends or strangers, whether they feel that laughing is the right thing to do, who is telling the joke and whether they are relaxed or tense at the time of telling or hearing the joke. There is always a need to understand the cultural assumptions, metaphors and the shared knowledge and presuppositions which construct a joke in order to respond to it and thereby participate in the communion of it.

The following two jokes, as do those above, depend for their humour value, on our acceptance of the stereotypes of ageing (the cognitive and physiological decrement) that we share and uphold. Without the stereotypical view, there would be no humour.

My bifocals are the best you can find
My teeth fit and don't bind
My earplug's o.k.
And so's my toupee
But I sure do miss my mind.

and

Three things age does to you
First you forget who's who
That's not so bad

What makes me sad
I can't recall the next two.

(Both from Reggie the Retiree (1982) *Laughs and limericks on aging in large print*.
Cited in Nahemow 1986: 9-10)

Weakening eyesight (the assumption is that we need to read in large print!) and hearing, thinning hair, and failing memory are depicted here. Can such negative expectations of the cognitive and physical changes in ageing, as displayed in these jokes, reinforce the strong social beliefs that memory, language and communication decrements come 'naturally' with ageing. Even though we may laugh at such jokes publicly, they can contribute not only to the maintenance of the stereotypes but also make us wary of and anxious about our own acts of forgetfulness and language miscues.

How far do these representations of ageing through cartoons and jokes reflect the reality of the social, cognitive and physiological processes and changes and indeed of the reality of most people's experience of the ageing process? The next chapter will look at some of the findings from studies which explore the changes and the subsequent effects the changes have on people's feelings about themselves, how they talk about themselves and their lives and how they experience communication.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined an historical view of ageing and explored various theories of ageing and the relationship they share with social stereotypes commonly held on the ageing experience and the status of older people in our society. Different stereotypes (positive, negative and counter) have been examined in greater detail as have ideologically based acts of ageism and gerontophobia. I have also explored, the socially prevalent act of identity commonly known as 'the search for the fountain of youth', for the outward appearance of being young which is believed to ward off

attitudes of ageism from younger people towards older people. I have also looked at humour as a socially identifying act of communication.

Stereotypes of ageing affect how we value older people and indeed how we experience our own ageing. Such stereotypes lead our community into ideological positions where the aged as a group can be viewed negatively in terms of personal identity and social contribution with the consequences that social policies which reduce support for older people can seriously be suggested. How these attitudes fit the reality of personal declarations of the experience of ageing are examined and we see that many older people while sharing the understanding of ageing and indeed attributing the experience to other people can at the same time deny it for themselves. Older people can either come to identify themselves with the stereotypes or rage against them.

Recent research of how ageism and personal acts of identity are revealed through language, will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Literature review

This chapter presents an overview of areas of research into language and ageing, of how older people are perceived and talked about, of how older people talk and who they talk to and of how they are talked to, which have been documented during the past few years. Since the concept of stereotypes is pivotal to this study, I have presented this section first so that the foundation is clear. The other sections will show connections between social stereotypes and what empirical observations about language behaviour in older people which may reflect physiological and cognitive changes in ageing. I discuss the idea of verbosity, in particular what is termed ‘off-target verbosity’, and the use of narrative as self identifying activity. I then look at cross-generational conversation and models of The Communicative Predicament of Ageing (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986) and Speech Accommodation Theory (Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood 1988). And finally I discuss some aspects of ‘expectancy biases’, where the commonly held stereotypes of ageing, such as poor hearing and declining memory, have an effect such that older people can fulfill these expectations. I then examine the underlying question of whether such expectancies about elderly individuals have an impact on actual social interactions with others.

Stereotypes, ageism and gerontophobia

As I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, language categorises and organises experience. Old age has been associated with certain negative characteristics such as failing performance, poverty, poor health, and physical unattractiveness, and these are the qualities that attract prejudice. That social attractiveness influences evaluations is an observable phenomenon. Many people have given me verbal anecdotes of experiences of negative attitudes towards older people in service contexts. I have described two such personal stories in Chapter 2. Such negative attitudes towards older people would appear to stem from negative stereotypical images which bring in to play, merely by observing grey hair and wrinkled skin in an

adult, the expectation of associated performance decline in terms of memory and language.

Strong support for the fact of social stereotyping of elderly people comes from research by Braithwaite (1986) whose study required respondents to describe the typical old person and/or the typical young person on a set of rating scales. This study found that negative responses for perceptions of the elderly, 'linked old age with being useless, old fashioned, senile or nutty; a nosey, old bag, an old maid and cranky' and that the positive comments referred to the aged as, 'mature, experienced and considerate.' (Braithwaite 1986: 356) Braithwaite also reported other research which showed that positive comments about older people, in this case comments from children, referred to the aged as kind and friendly. Overall, however, Braithwaite's findings support the prevalence of old age negative stereotypes of 'frailty, slowness, irritability, dependency, withdrawal, vagueness and stagnation'. (Braithwaite 1986: 358)

Palmore (1986, 1990) also asserts that we hold two opposing stereotypes about the elderly. And, he claims:

Many, if not most, of the problems of aging, stem from, or are exacerbated by, prejudice and discrimination against the aged. (Palmore 1986: 101)

Bytheway (1995) traces the history of both positive and negative stereotyping of ageing and cites many studies which indicate that most of western society's perceptions of ageing follow the negative stereotype with a small percentage of perceptions upholding the positive stereotype. Bytheway strongly suggests that all research into ageing should steer away from using either stereotype as there is ample evidence that the ageing experience follows an individual's own life course and not that of either stereotype.

Hummert, Gartska, and Shaner (1995) investigated the relationship between stereotypes and beliefs about language performance based on the hypothesis that stereotypes of the elderly may lead to beliefs about their communication competence. They found that elderly respondents reported more language problems than did the middle-aged and young. However, contrary to expectations, middle-aged respondents reported no more problems than the very young, and elderly respondents showed no advantage in skills shown to improve with age. Hummert, Gartska and Shaner (1995) concluded that negative beliefs about the language performance of older adults are presumed to emerge from a negative stereotype of ageing. Beliefs about one's own communication competence may also influence communication behaviour or at least influence one's perception of that behaviour. In the case of older adults, anticipation of problems with hearing, memory, or conversational processing may lead to withdrawal from interaction, with potentially negative effects on their social support system and their self-esteem. These findings support the hypothesis offered by Palmore (1986) above.

According to Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory, simply the act of categorising an individual as elderly (using the physiological cues of grey hair and wrinkles, for example, or by stating the individual's age in news reports) can invoke stereotypical perceptions of negative physical, social, and psychological inferences leading to 'over-accommodative speech'. (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986: 9)

According to Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk (1995), speakers, particularly in nursing homes and other care institutions for older people, have been observed to employ a special speech register, sometimes termed 'elderspeak' or 'secondary baby talk', when addressing older adults. These researchers believe the use of 'elderspeak' or 'secondary baby talk' may arise from negative stereotypes of older adults rather than from their actual communication needs.

Although older adults may find it to be positive and supportive under some health care circumstances, Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood (1986) have also argued that in fact, 'elderspeak' may reinforce negative stereotypes of older adults and

therefore constrain older adults' opportunities to communicate and even contribute to their cognitive and physical decline. In their investigations Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk (1995) found that the younger speakers did use accommodative speech towards the older people by varying their fluency, grammatical complexity, semantic content, and use of 'elderspeak' markers. The younger speakers also used more instructions and repeated their instructions more often for the older listeners. Although the younger speakers did not use diminutives, they did use more tag questions when addressing the older listeners. Young and old listeners differed in how they responded to the younger speakers. The older listeners repeated instructions more often, produced somewhat more requests for clarification, and produced dramatically more expressions of confusion when listening to younger speakers than when listening to older speakers. In contrast, older speaker addressing both younger and older listeners, did not appear to vary their speech at all. Their fluency, prosody, grammatical complexity, semantic content and discourse style were uniform for both younger and older listeners, although characterised by simpler and shorter sentences.

Some researchers believe that while such 'elderspeak' simplifications (shorter and simpler sentences, more directive and controlling statements) can be experienced as demeaning by elderly recipients, they also can at times convey warmth and caring (Caporael and Culbertson 1986; Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986; Ryan and Johnston 1987). More likely, however, such speech patterns are associated with a stereotype of language incompetence in older people which can consequently have an impact on social communication processes, and may also be part of a complex set of views of the elderly person as less capable and child-like, both by those who address them and perhaps by the older people themselves (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986). Caporael and Culbertson (1986) also observed that there had been no research undertaken on how older people in nursing homes or care institutions actually talk to each other, that is, how the older people networks within institutions do conversation.

To what extent are such language stereotypes about the elderly justified? Do older adults show poorer skills in communicating fluently? Is their talk more difficult to understand than that of younger adults? To what extent are difficulties in social cognition responsible for any such age differences? For example, the elderly storyteller, repeating the same episodes for the umpteenth time to a listener, could be an example of a failure to monitor audience knowledge or partner participation and ‘feedback’ appropriately. On the other hand, a number of writers have argued that older adults may show especially good skills in narrating that is telling life stories or what Opler (1980) refers to as using more ‘elaborate’ language such as longer and more complex sentences involving elaborate time sequencing. The rest of this chapter and the analysis of ordinary conversation given in Chapter 8 will attempt to answer these questions.

Physiological changes and their impact on language behaviour

There are clear physiological signs of ageing, such as changes in hair and skin, which occur and are externally visible and mark us as ageing. These changes occur at different stages in different individuals. Such visible signs do not necessarily mark a person as ‘old’, but nevertheless we perceive them as ageing identity markers. While these changes play an indirect but strong role in the identification of and attitudes towards older people — often expressed through ageism and gerontophobia, there are other physiological changes, such as those experienced in vision and hearing, which may actually affect the linguistic strength of older people more directly.

It is suggested that decreased eyesight may contribute to the inability to recognize familiar faces as we see in the Doonesbury cartoon Figure 3.3, or learn the faces of new acquaintances while the loss of distance acuity reduces one’s visual field. Such loss could contribute to levels of anxiety, which in turn can lead to reduced conversational confidence.

Wingfield, Tun and Rosen (1995) suggest that as an individual experiences increased hearing loss, there is an inability to discern certain sounds important in language

processing such as tone (emotion) and stresses, and we perhaps miss cues important in 'getting the message'. Nevertheless, most of the evidence regarding the comprehension of language sounds across adulthood generally suggests that healthy older adults do as well as younger groups on such tasks under optimum conditions (Emery 1986).

Ryan and Capadano (1978) carried out a study relating age perceptions and evaluative reactions towards adult speakers. They found that there was a tendency to rate the younger speaker more positively than the older individual. Nevertheless, they identified what they call a 'centering tendency' of evaluation, that is, the fact that none of the speakers was actually perceived to be elderly. Even though some of the speakers were between sixty and seventy-one years of age, no speaker was perceived on the average to be more than fifty-four. Thus, the characteristics attributed to the older voices are probably more related to stereotypes of middle-aged individuals than to those of the elderly. More recently, the results of a Flinders University longitudinal study on changes in voice quality with aging showed that there was normally no change in voice quality until over the age of seventy five. (Penny 1996)

The validity of the cognitive decline/decrement in ageing paradigm

The case for the reality of cognitive decline and decrement in normal ageing is very difficult to pinpoint. Many clinical studies in the past reveal decremental changes in such cognitive activities as memory, learning, inhibition and attention. Gillund and Perlmutter (1988); Howard (1988) and Emery, Huppert and Schein (1995), for example, claim that age-related impairments in cognitive functioning have been well documented in past empirical reports. Studies have found a number of cognitive changes associated with age, including slower reaction time, decrements in visual-spatial problem-solving ability, and impairments in learning and memory retrieval.

On the other hand, many other studies have concluded that there is very little evidence of declining cognitive ability in normal ageing. For example, another Flinders University study, on initial letter fluency and excluded letter fluency (Bryan

1996), concluded that there was little evidence for cognitive decline in age. Since many of the clinical studies which reveal decline have been conducted in 'non-real life' environments (laboratory-like contexts) and using cognitive tasks which don't appear to be related to 'natural' language use, the results can be called into question. More recently, studies (Ruscher and Hurley 2000) have been carried out under what could be called more realistic 'real life' conditions, and have revealed that while changes can occur, they are not necessarily decremental and indeed there is evidence that given certain conditions, some cognitive functions can be improved.

Wingfield, Tun and Rosen (1995) say that of the more striking patterns that have emerged from research on age differences in memory is the discrepancy between older adults' memory for unrelated verbal materials and their memory for natural speech. The proficiency with which the elderly process speech is particularly interesting in view of the fact that speech involves on-line processing of input at a rapid rate, with little control on the part of the listener, and no opportunity to go back and review. These are factors that should place a heavy burden on memory resources and processing speed, two areas in which the elderly are thought to be vulnerable. Yet, barring serious sensory deficit or neuropathology (aphasia), the recognition, comprehension and recall of natural language remains among the most robust of functions in adult aging.

Charness and Bosman (1990) also question why older adults perform so poorly with typical laboratory tasks, yet appear to do so well in professional and everyday performance. They suggest that anyone reading the results of the laboratory experiments could be forgiven for imagining that any person who achieves the age of fifty will have become slow, forgetful, half-blind, half-deaf, palsied and of little use for anything. In fact, many older men and women hold down jobs with complete satisfaction to their employer and themselves, with great expertise and pleasure, as well as achieve many other new skills.

Charness and Bosman (1990) posit that there are several reasons for this discrepancy between laboratory tests and real life activities. The first is that laboratory tests are

not really interesting to older adults who subsequently lack motivation to exert themselves. The second is that cross-sectional studies of age are confounded by cohort differences. These cohort differences may include educational differences and whole of life experiences. A third reason is that laboratory tasks don't successfully tap everyday types of behaviour and that therefore, the tasks lack ecological validity. A laboratory situation does not reflect the normal day-to-day arena or domain of activity of any individual, but that often clinical or laboratory experiments testing for cognitive abilities pit university students against older people (for an age discrepancy) and that university students may well be more at ease with a 'testing' or 'laboratory type' environment. A fourth is that in cross-sectional research, samples of young and old are not representative and are positively biased for the young, since most of them are university students. For example, one such study, (McCalley, Bouwhuis and Juola 1995) claims that differences among age groups could exist in either selective aspects of attention (the ability to separate relevant and irrelevant information (speed and/or effectiveness with which attention can be focused onto a relevant stimulus and irrelevant stimuli filtered out) or in attentional capacity (referring to the amount of processing resources that can be allocated to task performance). Their study explored the selective aspect of visual attention exploring the question of whether or not younger and older adults are able to allocate attention over the visual field in similar ways. If age differences in selection patterns could be found to vary when sensory factors, such as visibility, are changed, then attention could serve a role as a compensatory mechanism for sensory decline. However, the simple factor of declining vision in the older participants was not considered and could have influenced their performance.

Neely and Backman (1995) also believe that concerns about deteriorating memory abilities are common among elderly people and claim that numerous studies have demonstrated that younger subjects perform better than older subjects across a wide variety of memory tasks. Neely and backman (1995) report from other studies which have been carried out contrasting language behaviour and cognition between older people and college students are for example, from Cohen (1988) who noted that older readers of texts more often attribute characteristics and actions to the wrong



people. Such problems may indicate that the interpretation of referential phrases in these texts is more difficult for older adults. It appears that older readers and listeners find it more difficult than young adults to comprehend linking pronouns, but only when the pronoun and its preceding referent are widely separated by intervening sentences (Light and Albertson 1988). It is suggested that this is due to greater limitations in older adults' capacities to keep previous information actively in mind as they proceed through a text, perhaps due to greater processing resource limitations.

Kynette and Kemper (1986) and Kemper, Kynette and Norman (1992) showed errors in performance in using various grammatical forms and overall use of anaphoric reference in stories told by older (seventy to eighty-nine year old) adults. Again, these studies were conducted comparing the language competence of older people with university students and 'middle-aged' cohorts, where variables such as educational background, levels of anxiety, familiarity with task and context need were not considered.

There is extensive evidence from psychometric testing regarding age differences in listening vocabulary knowledge in adulthood. In general, cross-sectional evidence suggests that listening vocabulary knowledge remains stable or even increases into later adulthood, particularly among those whose occupations encourage continued high levels of literary exposure, such as teachers (Salthouse 1988; Obler 1993). Longitudinal evidence also indicates little loss of standard vocabulary knowledge, at least until very late adulthood (Schaie 1980). These findings of little or no adult decline in listening vocabulary competence suggest that there is little basis for vocabulary simplification when speaking to healthy older adults.

However, some research findings suggest that some difficulties in word retrieval appear in even healthy older adults. Older adults report more problems than younger adults in word and name retrieval in everyday life (Burke and Harrold 1988). This failure of episodic memory or what many people refer to as 'tip-of-the-tongue' experiences, when the person feels that he or she knows the word but cannot retrieve

it, were more likely to be reported in the older group that these investigators studied, and were particularly more likely to involve reasonably common but little used names for objects. It is suspected that this failure to retrieve is sometimes only temporary and that retrieval takes place within a short time with or without prompts. However, little research has been carried out to verify this in real life conversational situations. (See Chapter 8 for comments on my observations of acts of episodic memory failure and subsequent successful and unsuccessful repair during conversations with volunteer participants.)

Pratt and Norris (1994) have detailed many studies of cognitive abilities and language competence in older people. Generally, they relate that age appears to have little effect on semantic memory such as linguistic knowledge or competency. Age does not appear to have an adverse effect on an individual's phonological knowledge nor does knowing how to meaningfully combine words as syntactic knowledge. They report that a number of questionnaire studies have shown little evidence for deficits in the memory of general knowledge among older adults and that younger and older adults did equally well in detecting problems in texts that would lead to difficulties in understanding meanings (termed 'comprehension monitoring'), though more highly educated individuals in both age groups did better on this task. Older adults are generally as good at judging the correctness of their responses after producing them and older adults were equally likely to detect and correct confusing pronouns in their retelling of stories as were younger adults, suggesting that they were monitoring the quality of their productions for listener comprehension as effectively as younger adults. However, it is clear that older individuals generally *perceive* themselves as having poorer memory capacities than younger people, a belief shared by the young.

It must be pointed out, however, that there is little indication that cognitive problems of weakening memory significantly disrupt comprehension of everyday conversation. Indeed, older adults typically do not complain of comprehension problems in everyday language situations (Burke and Harrold 1988), in contrast to their frequent concerns over word-finding difficulties. Burke and Harrold's evidence probably provides little support for the belief that speakers should engage in syntactic

simplification processes when addressing healthy older people, except under the most extreme circumstances, such as very complex or technical communications.

Hill, Wahlin, Winblad and Backman (1995) believe that the extensive research literature on ageing and episodic remembering has resulted in several consistent empirical findings. Perhaps three of the most well documented findings are that episodic memory performance deteriorates from early through late adulthood, that there are multiple individual difference variables within demographic (education), life-style (activity and exercise) and that cognitive (mental speed and working memory capacity) domains contribute to the level of episodic memory functioning in old age. Hill, Wahlin, Winblad and Backman (1995) also suggest that older adults are able to utilise various types of supportive conditions at encoding and retrieval. Such conditions include increased study time, directed instructions, organisational structure, and retrieval cues, all of which, it is suggested, can improve episodic memory performance.

It has been pointed out that many researchers have used the 'decline is expected' paradigm in their studies. Gault and Reeve (1982) suggest that it is commonly believed that failing memory is a characteristic of older people. Most current models of memory and forgetting (whether of the information-processing or levels-of-processing kind) have in-built an age decrement hypothesis for ageing populations — an analogy with observations of physiological decline such as, for example, motor, visual, auditory functions. They argue that this kind of methodology can be questioned on grounds of lack of consideration for cohort effects and sample specific effects such as self-selection, mobility and health and mortality variables. For example, experiments are designed to detect decrement, rather than stability or gain.

In fact, it is highly likely that age will be positively associated with experience and practice. That is, older adults will have had more opportunity to build up knowledge than younger adults. Indeed, it is possible that the language of older people is semantically rich and unless the experiment is designed to produce such language this will not be recorded. One example of the 'gain' factor is in vocabulary, where

psychometric investigations typically reveal a positive correlation between age and word definition knowledge. The tension between knowledge possession and its successful activation and management underlies what is called 'the compensation' argument. Charness and Bosman (1990) and Hultsch and Dixon (1990) suggest that experience and practice in a particular domain of activity, such as preparing to deliver a public lecture (as practised by most of my volunteer respondents) may be associated with continued high levels of performance on cognitive tasks. They also say that age, familiarity of the task and performance, appear more complex than simple tests of episodic memory would reveal.

Indeed, it could be that the one ability that does *not* usually form a part of the 'declines with age' stereotype, is communicative functioning. We do not expect to be unable to communicate when we are aged, and generally that expectation is valid. Although no researcher has studied the question of deteriorating schemata in normal healthy ageing, clinical experience suggests that schemata remain intact throughout adulthood. That is, we remember and 'know how' to do the talk at the dentist and at the bank, in spite of the expectation by others that we do not. If there is deterioration, the deterioration is insufficient to interfere with daily living. As Salthouse (1990) noted:

... there is a kind of paradox in the apparent fact that older adults function quite well in the real world, often in positions of influence and importance, despite the evidence amassed in the laboratory for cognitive decline! (cited in Pratt and Norris 1994: 29)

Again it is posited that the laboratory findings describe processes that are simply irrelevant to real-life thinking and communicating. In addition, it should be pointed out that many of the investigations reported above, which took place under laboratory-like conditions, do not make any reference to educational, social, employment or economic background of the older individuals who participated in the research. Many of the findings could well be attributed to factors or variables not considered or reported in the literature.

Environmental effects on language change in ageing

Wenger (1988, 1989, 1990a 1990b) and Wenger and Shahtahmasebi (1990) have looked extensively at the issues surrounding older people and distance from family and friend networks and community support and mobility (access to cars and public transport and so on). Loneliness and morale are affective factors which have an undermining effect on the communication opportunities for older people and therefore on self esteem and on the opportunities for self-identification and dynamic interpersonal exchange.

Wenger (1988) found that while the older adults (what she refers to as eighty plus years old) in her study (in Wales) generally preferred to live independently (this finding is also supported by Kendig (1986a and 1986b), it was important to them to maintain regular contact with their middle-aged children. Wenger (1988) reported that within the families she visited, the concept of burden did not surface. Rather, concepts of mutual support were the norm as follows:

... it is the reciprocal nature of the interactions which leaves the greatest impression. Although expectations of help existed, these were seen primarily as part and parcel of the taken-for-granted give-and-take of family commitment. Accounts of help received or given were woven naturally into the more important accounts of visits and news of the child's family or were only volunteered in response to my specific question. (Wenger 1988: 10)

Wenger (1990) also relates that older people can experience degrees of isolation resulting from, first of all reduced access to cars and second to reduced effectiveness of communication by telephone if hearing loss occurs.

Bytheway (1995) cites from another source that:

‘if it were not for a poorly built and inhospitable environment older people would be able to manage fairly well, in other words we manufacture their dependence.’ (Bytheway 1995: 95)

He indicates that this refers to distances we need to travel for services in large cities, the difficulties of using public transport and the subsequent isolating consequences when older people lose their mobility and access to family, friends and interests. I have reproduced relevant comments from the volunteer participants on this aspect of ageing in Chapter 8.

‘Off-Target Verbosity’

One finding which has been repeatedly reported in the literature is that older adults tend to be more talkative or verbose than ‘middle-aged’ individuals in (for example) narrations (telling life stories), conversations and descriptions (Opler 1980). At the extreme end of the experience of verbosity is what is called Off-Target Verbosity (Gold and Arbuckle 1995). Off-Target Verbosity is characterised not only by copious speech in older people but also by lack of focus. Typical off-target verbosity is an extended series of loosely connected recollections, which become increasingly unrelated conceptually and therefore tend to display insufficient sequential coherence to maintain interest for the listener. This pattern contrasts with everyday verbosity or talkativeness in which speech may be abundant but retains a narrative or logical coherence. Gold and Arbuckle (1995) maintain that such off-target verbosity appears only in the speech of a minority of elderly adults. Chapter 8 has a discussion of off-target-verbosity in relation to the volunteer participants in this research.

In a recent study, Gold and Arbuckle (1995) examined the nature of such verbosity in an older adult group. They found consistent patterns of individual differences in the context of talkativeness across several distinct linguistic tasks. It is sometimes argued that such ‘over-talking’ by the elderly may be linked to loneliness and a lack of social contacts. Another explanation is that it could be due to misreading the needs of the communication partner(s). This explanation sounds somewhat parallel to Piaget’s

(1955) notion of 'egocentrism', a failure to pay enough attention to the other person's 'share' or 'turns' in the conversation. It has also been suggested that declining contacts and increasing isolation in later adulthood may negatively influence individuals' communication skills. Off-target verbosity is also frequently reported in the specific case of older people with sensory impairment such as a hearing loss (Bayles and Kaszniak 1987).

The results of the studies into off-target verbosity appear to indicate that highly verbose adults find their social support networks less satisfactory possibly due to the great demands on attention and patience that such individuals make upon their listeners. However, because highly verbose individuals do not seem to consider themselves especially talkative, they are probably not aware of the extent of their demands on the attention of others. These demands may be sufficient to violate the 'cooperative principle' (Grice 1975), which is assumed to underlie the sharing of conversational input and requires the inhibition as well as the giving of responses. Violation of the cooperative principle is likely to make the daily functioning of these highly verbose individuals less effective.

There is also an indication that verbal competence per se does not contribute to verbosity. This does not support the hypothesis that the excessive speech of verbose people is due to their having more adequate linguistic tools to express themselves. It also negates the opposing hypothesis, that subjects with poorer linguistic skills who have difficulty in finding appropriate words to express themselves are more verbose.

Inhibition-related abilities, such as the loss of ability to screen out irrelevant or off track information (Salthouse and Mainz 1995), could be at work here with off-target verbosity, as could various indicators of stress, such as poor health and less satisfaction with social support, all of which have been associated with the expression of greater amounts of speech. It is highly likely that the experience of stress leads some individuals to respond with higher levels of irrelevant talk as a way of coping with uncomfortable levels of anxiety which in turn could be one of the effects of reduced hearing ability, for example. It could also be related to a factor of

reduced possibilities, through regular contact with networks, to self-identify through day-to-day chat or discourse.

Ruscher and Hurley (2000) found off-target verbosity evokes a very strong negative stereotype from younger people towards older people. They found that while verbosity alone was not enough to evoke the elderly stereotype in younger people, since on track talkativeness can be perceived as friendly and companionable and indicate speaking competence:

... off-target verbosity is one speech cue that can evoke negative stereotypes of older adults, particularly attributes associated with mental competence. (Ruscher and Hurley 2000: 47)

Narrative, self and identity

There are suggestions that narrative is a powerful textual resource through which we orient our selves and our identities, that narrative language contributes to the construction and display of our sense of who we are — our own personal being as an integrated whole, with properties of stability and continuity over time. Narrative structure is a way of arriving at an understanding of the self as a whole. Our actions and experiences gain meaning through their relationship to one another, as well as their relationship to general themes or plots. It can be argued that we eventually become the narratives through which we tell about our lives. One reason that narrative can have this self-transforming role is that narrative language reveals our presuppositions (our implicit meanings), permits multiple perspectives (different glasses through which we can view the world), and allows subjectification.

Other scholars (Gergen 1991; Harré 1987) believe that the discursive display of the self through narrative is but one instance of a more general and compelling process by which the self is constructed through virtually all discourse. Harré and Gillett (1994) suggest that we actively structure our discursive activities in light of prescriptive norms and validations of self. Not only do we respond in anticipation of

how we wish to be understood, but we verbally locate ourselves and position ourselves in relation to discourse contexts, thereby defining ourselves through what we say, how we say it, and to whom we say it.

Narratives are one important type of larger, multi-sentence discourse forms that play a central role in everyday life and thought. Research on narrative skills tends to support the common notion that this may be an area of considerable strength for older adults. Schriffrin (1996) claims that, in general, sociolinguistic studies have focused largely on oral narratives that recount personal experience, although recently, Feldman (1995), has looked at written narratives of older women in particular and how they help shape self-images.

Feldman's (1995) subjects revealed the many 'selves' they had experienced through long lives and used semantically rich and humorous metaphors to tell their lives. The experience of identifying the self through the writing helped the women to see how different they were from the stereotypical view that their society positions them in and which they themselves had subconsciously contributed to. Coleman (1989) affirms that the ageing reminiscence processes and self-reflexivity plays an important role in allowing individuals to self identify away from either of the dual stereotypes (sick/fit in Feldman's terms) we normally have of ageing.

As can be seen from the discussions above, it is difficult to find evidence for declining communication abilities in normal ageing. And yet, self-reporting, popular belief and societal attitudes, indicate that there is some sort of 'real' effect on the abilities of ageing people with respect to communication success. While this may be the result of expectations based on mythology, the resultant fulfillment of those expectations or the result of a choice to withdraw from customary roles and social relationships, the end result is that many people do indeed experience difficulties at least in verbal exchange with older adults.

Language and power in cross-generational encounters

Hosman (1997) describes a powerless style as one which 'includes elements such as hesitations, hedges, intensifiers, and polite forms, whereas a powerful style reflects the relative absence of these elements'. (Hosman 1997: 70) (See also Bradac 1982) Compared to a speaker using a powerful speech style, a speaker exhibiting powerless speech is generally evaluated less positively, that is, he or she may be attributed socially undesirable characteristics such as incompetence, unattractiveness, uncertainty and submissiveness. The paradox is that while many people have negative connotations for control and power they positively evaluate or attribute positive characteristics to speakers using a powerful speech style.

According to Williams (1996), it has more recently been argued that many interactions between younger and older people are inter-group in flavor rather than inter-individual (Giles and Coupland 1994; Harwood and Giles 1996). Inter-group and inter-individual interactions are almost certainly qualitatively different (Giles and Coupland, 1991 and 1994). For example, perceiving someone as a group member rather than as an individual involves heuristic cognitive processes such as stereotyping, which occurs when typical group-based trait characteristics and behaviour are ascribed to someone regardless of whether such traits and behaviour are warranted in reality. In the case of age, older and younger people may treat each other as members of age groups such as old, middle-aged or young. Many interactions between younger and older people involve strangers or acquaintances, a condition that is particularly open to inter-group communication. More often than not, such interactions are particularly vulnerable to communication difficulties, misunderstandings and even conflict.

The 'Communicative Predicament of Aging'

Ryan, Hummert and Boich (1995) claim that as individuals age, the social rules, social structures and interpersonal relationships influencing their interactions are continually being negotiated, shaped and reshaped. Communication is the dynamic process through which such negotiations take place. Communication success is often

threatened in later life because inter-generational communication partners engage in exchanges that are based on stereotypical expectations related to age.

As I have described above, research shows that both young and old share less positive expectations of communication competencies in old age. Similarly, young and old have different expectations related to how the other generation interacts in a conversation, and these differences can restrict satisfaction with inter-generational interactions due to the negative traits which may be associated with being older even in unconscious, automatic processing. These negative expectations about older persons' abilities may lead conversational partners to use communication behaviours such as oversimplified speech, 'baby talk', or by ignoring by invoking silence or employing other paralinguistic behaviours.

The Communicative Predicament of Aging (CPA) model was originally presented by Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood (1986) and has been subsequently revised (Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Harwood 1988). One version of the model (See Figure 4.1 below) attempts to describe particular processes in a cross-generational interaction that might lead to negative consequences for the elderly participant.

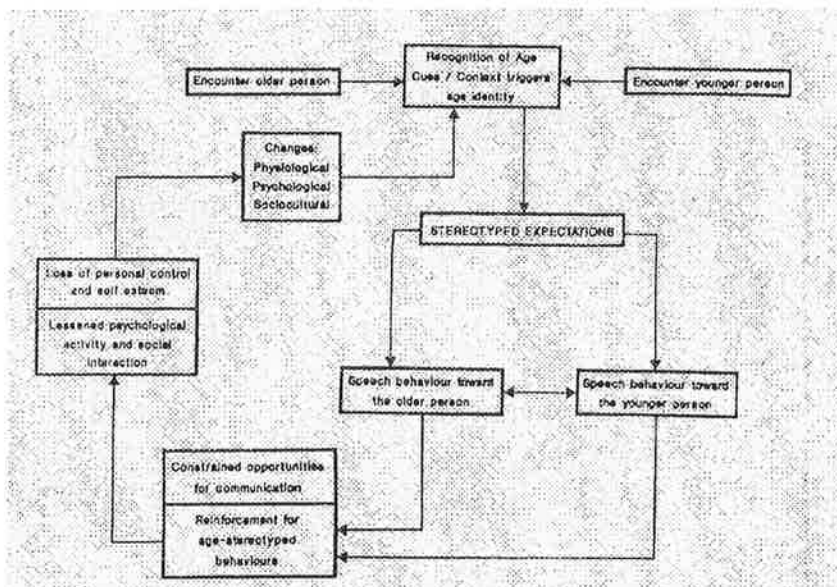


Figure 4.1. The Communicative Predicament of Ageing model. After Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood (1986) Revised in Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Harwood. (1988)

This model suggests that modifications of communication based on stereotypes are seen as reinforcing age-stereotyped behaviours and constraining opportunities for satisfying conversation, with negative consequences for the self-esteem and psychological well being of the older people involved. The communication predicament occurs when the age cues (grey hair and wrinkles) elicit negative stereotypes. A conversation partner is then likely to assume the existence of memory and hearing problems that require speech adaptations. Such modified talk and behaviour threaten the self-esteem and social identity of the older person and feed into a negative cycle that further limits opportunities for satisfying and meaningful communication through conversation and relationships. Indeed, it is possible that age-based modifications in the behaviour of others can be a major contributor to the shift in a person's social identity to an 'old' identity. Furthermore, miscommunication, patronising communication or both can eventually influence physical and mental health. Over time, the repetition of this cycle creates a negative downward spiral, with potentially severe consequences for older adults in terms of health, social functioning and emotional satisfaction.

The model above suggests that at the outset of an intergenerational encounter, particular cues will lead to the generation of particular stereotyped expectations for the encounter and then argues that these stereotyped expectations will lead to particular communicative behaviours, including patronising speech. Patronising talk from young people can be seen as one strategy by which control over elderly people is maintained or enhanced (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986). As such, it serves to reflect, and potentially construct, a derogatory cognitive representation of older adults in the mind of the young speaker. As Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood show, evidence is growing that the production of patronising speech is, indeed, influenced by stereotypical conceptions of elderly people as I have discussed above.

Speech Accommodation Theory

Patronising speech is one example of over-accommodation defined by Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood (1988), as a mis-communicative process where at least one participant perceives a speaker to 'go beyond' a sociolinguistic style judged necessary for attuned talk. When it is directed from younger to older people, it is thought to be problematic particularly in caring and institutional contexts. Many of us modify our speech when we are addressing small children, people with disabilities, or older adults. According to the proponents of Speech Accommodation Theory, we modify our speech to achieve satisfactory interactions. However, we often base these modifications on incorrect assumptions and stereotypes about the communicative needs of our conversational partner (Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood 1988). The speaking style that underestimates the interpretive abilities of the recipient has been labeled over-accommodative speech in Speech Accommodation Theory. Distinct characteristics of over-accommodative speech include slower speech rate, exaggerated intonation, use of high pitch, increased loudness, more repetitions, tag questions, altered pronoun use, and simplification of vocabulary and grammar.

One setting in which over-accommodative speech may be particularly salient is in medical interactions. Health care professionals have been found to be more likely than non-professionals to have a negative view of aging. (Greene, Adelman, Charon and Hoffman 1986)

Although these studies are suggestive of a link between speaking style and recall performance, they have dealt only with selected aspects of over-accommodative speech. Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk (1995) carried out a study of language comprehension that used a more complete form of over-accommodative speech. Younger and older adults carried out a referential communication task in which one dyadic partner reproduced a route drawn on a map or an array of dots based on directions from the other partner. Younger adults were found to accommodate to their older partners, and the older partners' performance on the referential task improved as a result of this simplified speech.

Given that (younger) health professionals may use a particularly extreme form of over-accommodative speech, it is possible that some characteristics of over-accommodative speech (for example, high pitch, exaggerated intonation) will frustrate or anger recipients, and this negative effect will influence comprehension and recall performance. Indeed, Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk (1995) found that older adults reported receptive language problems when they were partnered with younger adults, even though their performance on the referential task was superior with these young partners.

Proponents of Speech Accommodation Theory and others concerned with language and power in particular in care institutions (See Gibb 1990a and Gibb 1990b) have suggested that speakers who adjust their speech to the perceived needs of their conversation partner may often have very good intentions. They wish to improve the ease of comprehension — and presumably recall — of the information presented. Accommodation in speech, however, may also transmit the message that the older person has declining cognitive capacities. Thus, decreased social, emotional, and possibly cognitive well being may be the ultimate consequence of these good intentions (Ryan, Hummert and Boich 1995).

Should speech containing the characteristics of exaggerated prosody and simplified vocabulary and syntax be used in medical contexts, particularly when providing medication instructions? On the one hand, the over-accommodative speech can increase recall performance for at least some older adults (Ryan, Hummert and Boich 1995), however, messages can communicate both a patronising and supportive meaning simultaneously. Tag questions, exaggerated pitch, and simplified vocabulary are all features that could be both helpful in terms of cognitive processes and offensive as perceived by the older (or younger) recipient. And ‘secondary baby talk’ has been shown simultaneously to convey both nurturance and a lack of respect. (Caporael and Culbertson 1986). But the role of over-accommodation in lowering self-esteem and well being also has been highlighted (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986; Ryan, Hummert and Boich 1995). These factors may overwhelm the

memory benefits of using over-accommodative speech when, for example, providing medication instructions to older patients.

Greene, Adelman, Charon and Hoffman (1986) found that physicians are more supportive, tolerant and respectful of younger patients than of older ones. Also physicians are less responsive to the conversational topics initiated by older patients. They list several types of nonverbal behaviour which are commonly used in care situations towards older people. These include paralinguistic features such as gazing, proxemics, facial expression, gestures and touch (for example a pat on the back) They suggest that this type of nonverbal behaviour serves the functions of being patronising, showing disapproval or even not paying attention.

And Candlin (1996) claims that there is a difference and imbalance in cross-generational relationships. In a medical situation for example, where there is also a difference between power and authority, the relationship is not reciprocal. Health professionals or caregivers do not normally talk about their private lives but it is frequently part of the exchange to ask patients to reveal theirs.

In a medical setting, Gould and Dixon (1997) tested the effectiveness of over-accommodative speech as a way to improve comprehension and recall of diagnostic and medication instructions. Forty younger (mean age twenty-one) and eighty two older (mean age seventy-one) adult women watched a videotape of an actor presenting medication instructions in either an over-accommodative or a neutral speaking style. Only older women with high working memory performance levels benefited from over-accommodative speech. All groups had similar subjective reactions to the two types of stimuli. They preferred the speech attributes in the over-accommodative speech but preferred the person attributes of the neutral speaker.

This research raises a few important points. First, a problematic issue with patronising talk is that it is welcomed and enjoyed by some elderly recipients, who view it as nurturing, and in some contexts appropriately attuned to their conversational needs. On the other hand, others view it as demeaning or controlling

and inappropriately attuned to a stereotype of their (in)competence (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986). Second, there is evidence that patronising speech may be functional in terms of obtaining understanding and recall in certain elderly people (Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk 1995)

In fact, patronising speech in institutional settings such as nursing homes, may be only one part of a world in which dependence is shaped through rewarding behaviours. It may be that there is a strategy of 'dependency as care' which exists in some institutions. This shaping of dependency is an integral part of many long-term care settings and some elderly residents may have learned that increasing their dependence on staff is the only way to elicit any social interaction at all. Such reinforcement of dependence can even occur in contradiction to the particular overt purpose of care. Edwards and Noller (1993), in their observations of over-accommodation used by nurses in communication with the elderly, conclude that inappropriate or mismanaged communication can contribute to psychological and physical decline among the elderly. This then is 'The Communicative Predicament of Aging'.

Inter-generational communication within other networks

Patronising speech and over-accommodation are, however, not confined to caring and institutional situations, being observed in the community too (Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung and Gubarchuk 1995). According to a recent newspaper article in *The Advertiser* (Quigley 1996: 1), 'Australian teenagers think the elderly are, among other things, boring, ill-tempered, uncool and set in their ways'. These findings come from a study which was carried out after a group of teenagers had completed a course on ageing. The survey revealed that the teenagers knew little about older people but nevertheless held negative feelings towards them. The researcher suggested that one reason for the lack of understanding from younger to older people was that today, in our society there is little contact between, for example, adolescents and older adults.

The amount of contact between different generations of family members is one of the issues surrounding intergenerational communication within families. According to Millward (1994), the current debate about the place of public versus private supports for families brings into question the role of inter-household and inter-generational family support. Some gerontologists would argue that old people withdraw from wider community relationships and that this can put more pressure on family bonds as these become the main remaining social ties for the elderly. (See discussion on Disengagement Theory in Chapter 3) De Vaus (1995) suggests that theories that relationships pass through predictable and uniform changes throughout the life cycle, while neat and appealing, ignore the complexity of human interaction. Relationships have histories, and these histories, mediate the effect of any stage in the life cycle.

Australian research on elderly parents shows that parents want independence. (See also studies by Wenger (1988) in Wales discussed above) At the same time both generations want to maintain contact in the form of visits and exchange of services. As Millward (1994) points out, intergenerational ties can form part of a social support network, but such cross-generational ties can also be troublesome.

Referring back to Figure 4.1, it can be seen that a neutral (or cooperative) response to patronising speech is seen as likely to lead to a reinforcement of age-stereotyped behaviours, and constrained opportunities for communication. Constrained opportunities might mean a reluctance to engage in interaction (given, perhaps, negative experiences), or repeated experiences of superficial interactions where a younger individual does not engage complex or challenging topics (Ryan, Hummert and Boich 1995). This would be the case for all types of cross-generational encounter, whether medical, institutional, in the exchange of goods and services or within the family.

Feldman (1995) found that primarily on the basis of written conversational scenarios, it has been shown that young adults using a patronising style, as compared to a more neutral style, are evaluated by adult observers as less competent and less

respectful of their older conversation partner. The elderly people being patronised are inevitably less satisfied with the interaction, in fact, they often feel insulted.

Over-accommodation is not the only problematic feature of inter-generational communication. Besides over-accommodation, in their typology of old-to-young strategies, Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood (1986) suggested that young people frequently perceive older adults' talk as under-accommodative (defined by Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood, 1988, as occurring when some style or quality of talk is perceived to be underplayed relative to the needs and/or wishes of at least one interactant). Until recently, there have been little empirical data to support this largely theoretical claim. A starting point was provided by Coupland, Henwood, Coupland and Giles (1990). In their study, young women (thirty to forty years old) were invited to view and discuss videotaped snippets of intergenerational conversation between thirty to forty year old and seventy to eighty year old women. In these discussions, the older (seventy to eighty year old) women's talk (which often included disclosure of painful life events) was described quite negatively by younger women and largely in under-accommodative ways as interrupting, inattentive, and rather self-centered, even egocentric. Young women also reported a sense of powerlessness in the face of such talk in that they felt unable to control the topics and the development of themes. Some of these younger women seemed to take a sympathetic and benevolent stance, characterising the older speakers as rather harmless, sweet, and deserving. This would confirm the dual stereotypical response at work. Similarly, a speaker evaluation study by Ryan and Capadano (1978) revealed that, among other things, young people judged older women speakers as more 'out of it' and inflexible than young women speakers (that is, as under-accommodative). Such under-accommodation within inter-generational conversation can be observed in some television soap operas and series as for example, shown in the television series *Frasier* described in Chapter 6

Results indicated that the dimension most frequently associated with satisfying conversations was socio-emotional support, whereas old under-accommodation was the dimension overwhelmingly associated with dissatisfying conversations being

mentioned by almost three quarters of respondents. In this study, under-accommodation was characterised by the older partner's inattention, non-listening, interrupting, and off-target attention as when older people dominated the conversation with their own agenda as would occur in extreme cases of off-target verbosity.

The findings suggest that younger people have lower expectations overall for inter-generational conversations that are problematic for them. In particular, comments and evaluations indicate that young people may see themselves negotiating or accommodating more than the older people. As a result, both younger and older persons may avoid inter-generational interactions. Assertive responses rate higher and more positively. Patronising communication is a two-way phenomenon. Hence there is an inherent risk when there is a narrower range of appropriateness for assertive responses for older adults, whose competence and emotional stability are frequently stereotyped.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the research into physiological and cognitive changes with age which may affect both actual linguistic function and perceived or expected linguistic function. Physiological changes such as impaired sight and hearing can have effects on successful linguistic function and social interaction. While there appears to be some evidence for the existence of cognitive decline, there is also strong support for the theories that cognitive decline depends on many factors other than age. These include levels of physical health and depression, general life attitudes, levels of education, the ongoing use of cognitive abilities, the use of learning and remembering strategies and other factors such as relationships, mobility and motivation. It may well be that the expectation of cognitive decline is itself the primary factor which brings about decline and the subsequent reduced opportunity for conversational participation. However, there is no evidence that conversational abilities decline with age. In fact, semantic, lexical and organisational abilities as

needed for narrative and story telling appear to remain rich and powerful or even to improve in old age.

The issues of dissatisfaction in conversation in ageing centre around over- or under-accommodation. These powerful/powerless positionings of a conversation partner appear to arise, not because of loss of conversational ability, but because of expectations of conversational decline with ageing based purely on stereotypical perceptions of ageing.

Finally, it appears that most of the research into aspects of language in ageing (apart from a small amount dealing with narrative and ageing), specifically research into cognitive issues, has been carried out inside the paradigm of 'loss and decline' in contexts which may be 'domain unfriendly' to the older person and where variables such as education background and socio-economic background have not been considered. Little research has been done on how older people talk to each other in familiar and relaxed surroundings.

Ryan, Hummert and Boich (1995) claim that as individuals age, the social roles, social structures and interpersonal relationships influencing their interactions are continually being negotiated, shaped and reshaped. This shaping of self through communication and negotiation is something that is taking place continually, from childhood through adolescence to maturity and into old age. Communication is the dynamic process through which such negotiations of relationships take place. It is often suggested that communication success is often threatened in later life because during cross-generational communication, partners engage in exchanges that are based on stereotypical expectations related to age. Some researchers report that both young and old share less positive expectations of communication competencies in old age than in young adulthood. These lowered expectations are based on the stereotype that older people cannot function as well cognitively as younger people and that because they have slowed down in mind and body, their lives are uninteresting and of low value and therefore their conversation appears to be of low value. There may be other reasons why these low expectations prevail. Similarly,

young and old have different expectations related to how the other generation interacts in a conversation, and these differences are likely to restrict satisfaction with inter-generational interactions. The negative expectations about older persons' abilities in particular may lead conversational partners to use communication behaviours such as oversimplified speech, baby talk, or even silence and ignoring. These behaviours are examples of patronising communication. This can lead to a communication predicament which begins with the recognition of old age cues on the part of one or both interactants, when age cues elicit negative stereotypes. Anyone entering dialogue with a perceived older person is likely to assume the presence of memory and hearing problems that require particular speech adaptations. For many young people, talking to older people is perceived as a time-consuming duty and a necessary therapy rather than a relational development.

There are many gaps to be filled in the exploration of discourse and ageing and how older people construct their identities and how they are represented through discourse.

Reiterating my research questions of how ageing and older people are represented in varieties of discourse and how they represent themselves, I have selected and examined examples of how older people are represented in the media (news reports and advertisements from print media and soap operas and films from electronic media) and through fiction (for children, adolescents and adults). I also interviewed and taped many hours of interviews with volunteer participants from the local community. Two of these interviews are with family members and the four other interviews can be described as conversations with a new acquaintance. The transcriptions of these interviews are examined for speech markers and other ageing identity markers and for markers of communication success. In the analysis of both representations and actual speech I look specifically at instances of talk which reflect stereotypical images of ageing and older people and how the reality compares or contrasts with such stereotypes. Chapter 5 describes my methodology and approach in greater detail.

Chapter 5

Sources of data, methods of data collection and framework for analysis

The previous three chapters have laid the foundation for the theoretical orientation and social focus of this research. This chapter will describe the method of primary and secondary data (examples of discourse) collection, the techniques used in analysing this data and relevant background and contextual information.

In selecting primary data for this research I have kept in mind the three research questions. The first is: What are the linguistic markers of self-identification of the elderly? This question explores how the elderly use language to identify themselves as either belonging to a group (identified by age) or as distinct from other groups (identified by age). The second question is: Does stereotypical representation of the elderly match the observed data? This question explores the many language representations of the elderly as demonstrated specifically by the media and through fiction. The third question is: Does the language of the elderly reflect their position in selected communication networks? This component is concerned with the observation and analysis of communication behaviour of the elderly. It involves the examination of the inter- and intra-group communication networks which engage the elderly, with observations of any differences in discourse between these networks.

To seek responses to the first question, I chose to collect data through the taping and transcription of interviews with a number of elderly volunteer participants from the local (Adelaide) community. To gather data in response to the second question, I have selected a quantity of examples of representations of ageing and the elderly from actual sources such as media (news and advertising), fiction (both children and adult), jokes, representational art, television and film. To gather data in response to the third question, I again utilised the transcriptions of the interviews with volunteer participants, specifically focusing on markers of self-identity and on inter-generational talk. The following section describes the various data collection activities in more detail.

Selection of participants in response to research questions 1 and 3

In most societies, chronological age is accepted as the identifying point of reference for all people at all ages, and as such is reported (and self-reported) with respect to any activity of the individual.

There is an assumption that the elderly are a homogeneous group whose speech abilities are failing along with general health. Many studies have been carried out within this deficit/decrement paradigm (See Chapter 4). Nevertheless, Schaie (1980, 1988) states that:

... chronological age per se cannot 'cause' or be the direct antecedent condition of anything. (Schaie 1980: 8 and 1988: 3)

Or to paraphrase the words of a song sung by Tina Turner 'What's 'age' got to do with it?' A person's chronological age merely defines a time span from birth to the point of interview. It has also been observed by many researchers (See Chapter 3 for a discussion on this) that there is no such entity as a homogeneous ageing group.

It has also been noted that there is a paucity of research into changes in language behaviour with ageing. Most studies have involved small groups of people, who have been interviewed or had examples of interactional speech taped in cross sectional (two interactants, one elderly and the other younger) dyadic verbal interactions. In these studies, carried out at one point in time, the language, memory or cognitive abilities of individuals are compared from two or more age groups. Clearly, subjects in such studies, by definition, must belong to different birth cohorts and therefore, have had vastly different life experiences. In many of these instances, there would also have been differences in other variables such as educational background, marital and family status, employment experience, social and economic background. Normally, but not exclusively, these verbal interactions have taken place within institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes or domiciliaries, exploring interactions between medical staff

or carers and older patients, or often situated in experimental 'laboratory' like contexts where there is a marked power imbalance between the interactants. Such situations call for specific language use which reflects various relations of power and therefore the language in use in such situations reflects these unequal power relationships.

Many of these studies have taken the observed language behaviours of the older people in care as representative of all elderly language behaviour. However, as statistics show, only about 6% of individuals over the age of sixty-five (in Australia at least) live in care situations at any one time, (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1998, reported in *Issues in society* 1999: 30) although this figure is higher (13.4% for men and 22.8% for women) at age eighty or over. The examination of language behaviour in care contexts then is unlikely to reflect the same patterns in the wider community where older people experience different life circumstances and language behaviour reflects a wider range of relationships, domains and functions. As has also been pointed out in previous sections, not all old people are institutionalised, in ill health, dependent or foolish. Since the greatest levels of self-esteem and consequently of linguistic strength, arise out of the positive effects of belonging to a group, whether it is a family group, a network of friends or an interest or activity cohort, it is likely that language performance is at its most dynamic and healthy in such interactions. An analysis of samples of language from verbal interaction between same age communities or cohorts, for example, should yield valuable data. Very little has been done to investigate language behaviour in older people through their various speech communities (Labov 1972a) or networks (Milroy 1987), or inter-group conversations involving elderly people where the power balance is more even such as between older friend cohorts, or between family members of the same generation.

Kimmel and Moody (1990) support these observations and suggest that anyone embarking on research which involves the elderly as subjects should evaluate how they use age as a variable in the study. Researchers should examine any hypothesis that implies that age or ageing is the cause of changes or differences. Researchers should

consider whether chronological age is the most relevant variable and whether the interaction of, for example, age, sex, culture and other variables such as educational background, income, duration of marriage or marital status, retirement status, generational position, cohort and historical effects which co-vary would be more relevant.

If only 6% of the elderly in Australia are in care situations at any one time, that indicates that 94% live independently or with friends or family members. Consequently, in considering my selection of participants for this study, I chose to go outside of the institutional context. In an attempt not to approach this study through the deficit/decline paradigm, and to observe language use under different social contexts, I called for volunteers for participants from the wider community.

I inserted an advertisement (see Appendix A) in the newsletter for the University of the Third Age¹. Four people responded (all female). In addition I asked two elderly relatives (both female) if they would be prepared to be participants. One older male was recommended to me as a willing participant in this study. However, in spite of agreeing to meet me and 'chat' for an hour and have the conversation taped, he did not wish to sign the consent document (Appendix B) giving me permission to use extracts of the interview for analysis and publication purposes. (See below for my discussion of ethics in research). I therefore could not make use of his contribution. Consequently, the total number of elderly participants (all female) was six. Inter-generational language behaviour was observed from the interactions between the participants and myself, most dynamically between the two elderly relatives and myself.

¹ The University of the Third Age was founded in Toulouse, France, in 1972, to improve the quality of life for older people by bringing them into contact with academic programs run by a university. This movement is now worldwide. It is a voluntary, self-help organisation which taps the great reservoirs of knowledge, skills and experience which can be found among older people and which is often undervalued and indeed overlooked. (U3A (Adelaide) Newsletter, Third 1994 Session). The title, University of the Third Age, is usually abbreviated to U3A and I have used this abbreviation as appropriate throughout this dissertation.

Milroy and Milroy (1991) claim that most judgements about language ability are based on a very narrow range of linguistic performance, and are made without much firm knowledge of the nature of spontaneous speech. Furthermore, most analytic comments about language, tend to be applicable mainly to 'planned discourse', (such as in the interview situation) which, they suggest, has close affinities with written language. They suggest therefore, that the interview is likely to be a very poor instrument for eliciting an individual's best linguistic performance. The implications of this fact are very wide indeed.

More recently, however, different methods of collecting examples of spoken discourse for analysis have been tried. Coates (1993) gathered her data by taping conversations over evening get-togethers with her own friends. Nordenstam (1993) collected data for her study on women's language by taping groups of women at leisure, at gossip, and at their business. (She asked them to tape the session themselves and send her the tape.) Eiggins and Slade (1997) and (Coupland, Coupland and Giles 1991) have also analysed taped examples of conversations taking place in a wider variety of discourse domains outside that of question and answer interview.

All verbal interaction (and associated non-verbal) is a highly structured, functionally motivated, semantic activity. Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampston and Richardson (1993) claim that:

... positivists, then, are mistaken in their belief that there is some pristine social reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered by an investigator who is herself neutral and detached from it. (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampston and Richardson 1993: 87)

And they go on to suggest that:

... if positivists are thus mistaken, the problem of validity loses its centrality; the scope for introducing a different kind of research is dramatically widened. (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampston and Richardson 1993: 87)

Milroy (1987) took the individual as the starting point of her analysis to avoid the problem of defining group boundaries. It can be taken that a sample is a small part of anything, although generalising from the individual to the group cannot be assumed. This is particularly true where older people are concerned due to the extreme diversity of experience of the individuals who comprise the group.

Therefore, since my sample is small, and not entirely random, there can be little expectation of generalisability into the wider community. Nevertheless, as experiences of language interaction, the extracts I have selected to analyse are examples of discourse which fall loosely within the domains of 'chatting to a new acquaintance' as in the case of the participants volunteering from the University of the Third Age and what Eggins and Slade (1997) refer to as 'casual conversation' in the case of the kinship interactions. As such, all the discourse holds contextual veracity and there is value in analysing such extracts.

Labov (1972a), Milroy (1987) and Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) among others, have all raised the issue of the 'observer's paradox', where the very presence of an interviewer or even a tape recorder affects the language performance in some non-measurable way. Milroy (1987) believes that the observer's paradox is of 'great importance in that it influences the kinds of data available for analysis, and hence knowledge of the range of a community's repertoire' and that:

... language in the community can be studied only by collecting large volumes of natural speech on good quality recordings. Yet, a stranger who

attempts to obtain these dramatically changes the character of the phenomenon being recorded. (Milroy 1987: 40)

The degree to which the observer/interviewer and the presence of the tape recorder affect the spontaneity of the interaction is a contentious issue. I found that my participants were keen to assist in the study and therefore wanted to 'do the right thing' with their language. One of my participants asked, 'Is this what you want?' halfway into the first taping session, which indicates that there could also be an unmeasurable effect of participants striving to do their best with language and providing non-spontaneous language behaviour or by over-accomodating their language to some perceived expectation of 'right language'. On the other hand, another participant, explaining her lack of concern with the process, said 'After awhile you forget the tape's there. I just gab on.'

Coupland, Coupland and Giles (1991) comment that an interview conducted in a supportive manner and where there is a high degree of trust or rapport between researcher and subject or researcher and those being taped, nevertheless yields data of value for linguistic study.

Candlin (1993) urges that at least the language of an interview should be a language which the interviewer and interviewee share, and that it is important that the cultural and environmental context be comfortable and familiar to the interviewee. Kimmel and Moody (1990) suggest that the participants should be informed of the procedures to be carried out, the likely results in terms of benefits to the area of knowledge and the likely benefits to the community.

The principle of respect for persons in our society involves acknowledgement of individual autonomy: that is, individuals may not be subjects in treatment or experimentation without their free and informed consent. (Kimmel and Moody 1990: 490)

They also suggest that individuals may have feelings of self-worth enhanced through their participation in a research interview. Such participation is after all both an affirming act of identity and an opportunity to talk about the self and self-identify to another individual through personal narrative.

Milroy (1987) thought to overcome the observer's paradox by controlling the character of her relationship to the individuals she was observing. She suggests that the researcher must be able to establish an 'exchange relationship' with the informant, that is, there must be some obligation on the part of the informant to provide her with services, in this case, linguistic data, free of charge.

In addition to placing importance on the value of establishing trust and rapport as part of the interview process, I have considered the ethics of making private conversations of private individuals available for public scrutiny. According to Eggins and Slade (1997):

We problematize the casualness (of conversation) simply by focussing on it. Casual talk is exactly the kind of talk which we do not expect to have taped and transcribed and frozen in written form. When we engage in casual conversation, we assume that anything we say will not be held against us. (Eggins and Slade 1997: 18)

In consideration of these issues, with each of the volunteer participants, I took the following steps to develop rapport and trust between the participant and myself and to ensure as far as possible, that each was aware of the purpose of the research and what would be required from them. I first asked for the advertisement to be published in the newsletter. Subsequently, the four volunteer participants telephoned me and we arranged to meet. It is important to note that all four were female. As I have mentioned, I was unable to arrange for any male participant to agree to the process. The initial meeting with each of the participants from The University of the Third Age took place in a venue of their choice, as did all the subsequent meetings since the value of each subsequent

interview, if it was to gather as much spontaneous and casual language use as possible, relied to a great extent on trust and a sense of communicative comfort from each participant towards me. Therefore, at each of the initial meetings I did not carry a tape recorder. On that occasion we chatted at the level of new acquaintances and I attempted to begin building trust and rapport. I explained the background of the research, what I would need from them, that the conversations would be taped and that extracts from the conversations would be used for analysis and possibly for publication. I assured them that their names would not be used in the publication and that all the conversations would be confidential and that anything they said would not be used for any other purpose than for this research. And of course, their decision to participate, useful and helpful suggestions, and their interest in the project, all contributed to their individual and personal act of self-identity.

At the end of these initial meetings, each of which lasted about forty five minutes, I asked the volunteer if she wanted to continue her participation with the study and whether she would object to the conversations being taped. All of the volunteers agreed to participate and signed the consent form (Appendix B). As we had agreed, all subsequent interviews were taped.

There were at least three taped interviews with each participant. Each interview lasted at least one and a half hours with some carrying over into two hours. Each meeting was an opportunity for friendly interaction over cups of coffee, cake and on three occasions, the participant cooked lunch for me. Bearing in mind the notion of observer's paradox, the participants appeared to be relaxed and eager to talk about their friends, their families, their lives and about themselves. Topics covered ranged from family matters to books and writers, to politics and current events. The four participants who responded to the advertisement from U3A, talked at length about the courses of study they were doing there and indeed one of the participants was a lecturer at U3A.

Each of the interviews with the volunteers from U3A, was based on an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C) which allowed for the collection of the same kinds of personal data (family background, education, hobbies and interests, employment history, travel experiences) from each. Following Labov's (1972a) notion of including an emotionally framed question which would be likely to draw out a possible style shift, I included questions about happiest and saddest days. However, the participants were also encouraged to talk 'freely' on any topics they wanted to and indeed to choose to shift the topic. The interviews or 'chats' with the four volunteers from U3A can be described according to Kreckel's (1981) definition of heterodynamic interaction since the interviewer was not previously known to the participant and therefore had no expectation of shared subcodes. The interviews with the older relative on the other hand would fit Kreckel's category of homodynamic interaction since there would be a kinship shared background and therefore, more likely, shared subcodes.

The following are profiles of each of the volunteer participants. To maintain confidentiality, only the first initial of the first name of each participant has been given. In addition, it must be noted that in the transcriptions of the discourse (See Appendix E for two complete transcriptions), wherever another person has been discussed or had their voice reported, the transcription shows only the first initial of their name where it was used.

Participant B

B was seventy-four years old at the time of the interviews. She lived by herself in a unit in a complex of independent housing for the elderly. She had been married once and was widowed. She had two children and two grandchildren. She had completed three years of high school after which she had had to leave school in order to help look after her family. She had lived in various places in Australia including country towns and had traveled overseas. She enjoyed entertaining friends (cooking) reading and attending courses at U3A. She claimed to have no problems with mobility or health. She was able to walk unaided and to drive her car.

Participant C

C was seventy-two years old at the time of the interviews. She lived by herself, in her own house. She had been married twice. She had three children and three grandchildren. She had achieved a Bachelor of Arts (including the Tennyson Medal for English) an MA and had been a university lecturer. She had lived and worked in different cities in Australia and had traveled extensively overseas. She was a lecturer for U3A and for WEA during the interview period. She drove her own car but not in heavy traffic. She had difficulty walking which was beginning to reduce the number of activities she could participate in.

Participant L

L was eighty-one years old at the time the interviews took place. She had been married once and was now widowed. She had four children and one grandchild. She lived alone and cared entirely for herself including carrying out vigorous gardening. She had been a secretary for a few years before she had married. Now she volunteered her time for two different charity organisations. She was a driver for Meals on Wheels once a week and she was the secretary of a local branch of the organisation supporting the Women and Children's Hospital. She had been awarded an Order of Australia Medal a few years previously for her years of community work.

Participant P

P was eighty-four at the time of the interviews. She had been married and was now widowed. She lived by herself in her own house. She had two adult children and two grandchildren. She had matriculated from high school but not attended university because at that time it had been too expensive. She had had various jobs as a secretary after one year at a business college but, by her own admission, had not been very ambitious. She had lived in different cities in Australia and traveled extensively in Australia and overseas. During the period of the interviews she traveled to The United Kingdom and took a canal boat trip in France with two generations of family members, her children and grandchildren. She was a peace activist, a gardener, enjoyed reading

and writing letters and she attended courses at U3A. She also belonged to a group called Minerva, for which she prepared and gave talks twice a year. She was still driving her own car but thought that she would not continue doing that for very much longer. She claimed good health, wore glasses only for reading and claimed to have good hearing.

Participant S

S was seventy-nine at the time of the interviews. She had been married once and was divorced. She had three children and five grandchildren. She lived with a daughter and two granddaughters. She had achieved a BA and had been a high school teacher for more than twenty-five years. She had lived in many different places in Australia and had traveled extensively overseas. She attended and enjoyed courses at U3A and also belonged to a group called Beta Sigma Phi (sic) for which she researched, prepared and delivered a talk once each year as well as enjoying social activities. She read a lot and wrote letters, being the principal correspondent keeping an extended family in touch with each other. She also frequently visited and provided moral support to a retarded (her expression) daughter. She had health problems and had given up driving her car. She relied on public transport and in spite of experiencing walking difficulties, managed to travel long distances to participate in her chosen activities.

Participant W

W was eighty-two years old at the time of the interviews. She had been married once and was widowed. She had three children and twelve grandchildren. She lived alone in her own house. She had had to leave high school at the end of the first year. She had been a dressmaker and had been able to use this skill until recently as a volunteer for Red Cross. She had lived all her life in South Australia but had traveled extensively in Australia and overseas. She had never driven but was in good health, walked a great deal and was accustomed to using public transport.

As can be seen from the profiles of each of the participants, they are within the chronological age range from between seventy years old to just over eighty years old.

Consequently, two of the participants fit the chronological age group which has been isolated by many researchers as the young-old group, and the other four fit the category isolated as being old-old. (See Chapter 1 for explanation) All of the participants were female, widowed and all lived in and maintained their own homes. (One participant shared her home with a daughter and granddaughters) All participants had grown children with whom they were in regular communication. Two of the participants had reached tertiary level in education and all had traveled extensively both in Australia and overseas. We may deduce from this that all participants share at least a socio-economic level of life experience. Beyond this, there has been no structured attempt to control the variables.

It is also clear that language and communication are integrally tied to the context in which they occur. The challenge for researchers therefore, is to take explicit account of the contexts they have created, a task that has only occasionally been addressed in traditional research methodology. In my quest for the conversations with volunteer participants to be as 'natural' as possible in order to elicit the most casual conversation, I allowed them to choose the venue so that they could be at ease at least with the spatial and environmental context. All but one chose to meet me in their own home and this meant that, since I was a guest in their home, they were 'at home' in all senses and it was they who offered and prepared coffee, cake and meals.

In the context of this study, all participants were volunteers and the activity of establishing a relationship, through preliminary meetings, participant's choice of venue and time of meeting enabled the rapid and easy formation of exchange relationship. Labov (1972a) used a set of socially related questions for each subject to allow each one to develop the subject as they wanted but still retain the theme so that the narrative could involve the same type of speech act for each participant. Such questions as: 'Tell me what was the best day of your life. Tell me about it.' (This type of question allows for past self-identifying narrative.) Or, 'Tell me about your children and grandchildren and

how you get along with them now. Tell me what you did this week.' Or, 'What do you think is the best thing about how you live now?'

The methodology of researcher's observation of her (in this case) own interactions with participants is, of course, a restricted one. It does not allow any degree of generalisability and risks skewing so-called natural behaviours through the intrusion of research interests. Nevertheless, as analysis of actual speech events, what is learned remains valuable. According to Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993), lifespan change does not merely 'happen'. It is experienced by and enacted by people. There is no guarantee that recordings of people 'doing lifespan discourse' will produce 'correct' versions of individual experience, let alone 'authoritative' theories or generalisations. But it is surely wrong to ignore such data, when so much of our self-positioning in relation to society is achieved through talk, and when so much of talk orients to lifespan concerns.

The basic data for any form of general linguistic study ought to be, according to Labov:

... language as it is used by native speakers communicating with each other in everyday life. (Labov 1972b: 184)

because:

... it is difficult to avoid the common-sense conclusion that the object of linguistics must ultimately be the instrument of communication used by the speech community: and if we are not talking about that language, there is something trivial in our proceedings. (Labov 1972b: 187)

One important issue that needs to be clarified before embarking on a collection of natural language data involves the research context and, related to context, the amount of intervention by the researcher into the language studied in terms of control over topic,

structure and development. In this sense I was a participant in the exchange, so that turn taking, selection of topic and other cooperative discourse conventions applied. Of course, regardless of the degree of intervention by the researcher, all such language is 'natural', in the sense that it reflects acceptable discourse on any given topic in the context, and thus it represents a valid language text for study.

I have selected age-salient examples of discourse to use wherever relevant to linguistic discussion and argument throughout the dissertation. In addition, I have selected many small extracts from each of the participants, from the many (approximately thirty) hours of taping for the purpose of more detailed analysis and examination for markers of ageing identity and how the 'talk' in these extracts reveals dimensions of social identity, social class membership, subcultural and group affiliations about each of the participants.

I have employed the conventions of transcription as devised by Eggins and Slade (1997: 5) and which are reproduced in their summary form in Appendix D.

Selection of representations of ageing from media and fiction in response to research question 2

In order to gather data for analysis in response to the second research question, I turned to a variety of media sources and to a variety of works of fictional and visual representations. Newspapers have provided me with my major source of data for representations of ageing through the news and advertising media since the visual and print expressions are much more easily reproduced within these pages. Newspapers allow for an examination of representations of ageing as marks of social identity, of ageing as news and of ageing in advertising. However, it is most likely that the news and advertising representation of ageing found through print media are not markedly different from representation we would find in other forms of media such as electronic (internet and television). Since my principal research focus is language and ageing

within the Australian experience, I have used a variety of Australian newspapers as major sources of data. However, I have also used newspapers published in English in other countries, and these demonstrate similar representations of ageing between the Anglo-Australian culture and some other cultures. In addition to an examination of how older people are represented in news and advertising through the print media, I have included some examples of representations of ageing from film and television soap operas.

I have then selected several works of fiction for analysis. First of all, I chose various works of fiction for children. All are picture books where the central characters are young children and older people (grandparents or older neighbours). I have also selected short novels for older children in order to examine the language interaction between the young teenage protagonist and an older person. My selection of fictions for adults traces language by and about ageing from classical to modern literature. I examine both the language used in the fiction and the accompanying visuals (in the case of the children's fiction) for their match to the declared self-identification of the six volunteer respondents discussed above. All of these are discussed at length in the following two chapters.

Language analysis

Chapter 2 has introduced some theories about language which lay the foundation for discussion on the social and linguistic construction of ageing. The argument for following theoretical discourse on ageing is that it will explain the discourse which surrounds and constructs the ageing experience, that is, verbal and written and visual representations of ageing including social constructs of ageing, self-disclosure or construction of self, cross-generational interaction, cohort interaction, and arenas of negotiation where issues of relative power are at play. The analysis will concentrate both on how the older social identity is constructed and represented and how the older individual identity is constructed and represented. I intend to use the elements from

Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's (1993) description of six broad strategies for identifying age-salient discourse in my discussion of the participants' discursive acts of identity presented in Chapter 8.

Verbal and written language both actively symbolise a social system, metaphorically representing patterns of social variation and thereby characterising human cultures. Language has evolved in such a way that our interpretation of experience (thinking with language) and our interpersonal exchanges (acting with language) are coded into semantic structures that are plausible; and with these a lexico-grammatical system has evolved that extends the plausibility principle one step further so that we can understand the sense that lies behind the forms.

The central focus of this thesis is how the individual views herself (in this case) in relationship to society and how the society views the relationship with the individual. Halliday (1970) distinguishes three main functions of language: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. The interpersonal function refers to the function of language as it is used to establish and maintain relationships and to influence people. It is the interpersonal function of language, therefore, which will provide the core of this investigation of the relationship between language and society.

Language serves to establish and maintain social relations: for the expression of social role, which include the communication roles created by language itself — for example, the roles of a questioner or respondent, which we take on by asking or answering a question; and also for getting things done, by means of the interaction between one person and another. Through this function, which we may refer to as interpersonal, social groups are delimited, and the individual is identified and reinforced, since by enabling him to interact with others language also serves in the expression and development of his own personality. (Halliday 1970: 143)

The textual function will also be brought into the discussion as it impinges on the identification of voices within texts and the intertextuality of visual and written discourses within fictions and media texts. Any text contains, is part of and is constituted by, the society which produced it and that society's history and is:

... the intersection of a heterogeneous array of texts and semiotic practices in the process of which people's identities are constructed. (Talbot 1995: 45)

Other linguistic markers which will be sought in the analysis of the discourses presented here are those exhibiting aspects of language behaviour as they define, or are salient to the ageing experience or to being old, for both the individual and the society, such as metaphor, metonymy, presupposition, background knowledge, forms of address, power and lifespan discourse, all of which have been discussed as theories in Chapter 2.

Audio recording of verbal interaction, unfortunately, is limiting and only goes part of the way in observing the discourse in action. In paying attention to the non-verbal 'visible acts of meaning' (Bavelas and Chovil 2000) which occurred during these visits, I have, where possible, included them in the transcriptions. However, all other nonverbal expressions such as facial expressions and hand gestures, were not recorded and therefore their role in the movement of the discourse has to be set aside.

The next three chapters will discuss how the individual and social identity of ageing is realised through visual and verbal media texts, through visual and verbal texts from works of fiction (secondary data) and how these match the observed texts from the transcriptions of recordings of the actual discourse between myself and the volunteer participants (primary data).

Chapter 6

Media representations of ageing

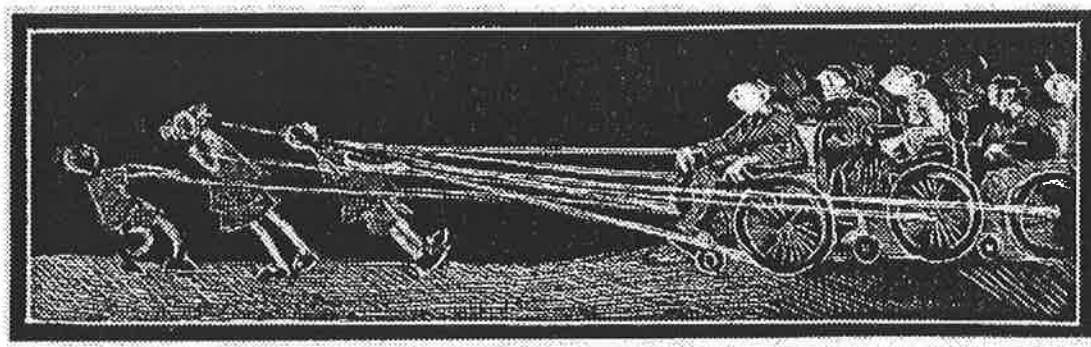


Figure 6.1 The burden. Illustration by Kaye Healey. 1994. *Issues for the nineties. Ageing: everybody's future*. Vol. 21: 17. Sydney. The Spinney Press.

Barely a day goes by without some reference to ageing in the media. Reference is usually in the form of human interest stories, news headlines involving issues connected with ageing, editorial or political commentary on the health, financial status or other issues of ageing or the care of ageing people or advertising for products or services. This chapter will examine different representations of ageing found in the media and look at how these contribute to the social identity, the stereotypes and social expectations of the ageing individual. I will examine a variety of newspaper headlines, short news items, cartoon, and advertisements which feature various perceptions of ageing.

I have selected most of my examples from print media as they come most easily to hand and are more directly reproduced in print. However, I have also explored some texts from television (soap operas) with texts and discourse about ageing and by and with older characters which will reveal the same ideation in the representation of the ageing reality.

I examine my selections of texts, of images, both verbal and visual, for how they reveal the experiences, both of ageing and of being old, through metaphor and through markedness, for how they operate within the paradigm of the social constructs of 'burden' and 'victim' that I have foregrounded or how they are marked through atypical language and for whether or not there are contradictions in our expectations of what older people do and say.

Ageing is newsworthy

Published statistics on the increasing ageing populations around the world, (See Chapter 1 for background statistics) have generated a socio-political image of older people as the 'burden' metaphor and younger people as noted in an article protesting such an image which appeared in the *European* (November 7-13 1996):

... a shrinking band of workers who will refuse to shoulder the pensions burden condemning the old to poverty and exclusion. (Helgadottir 1996: 5)

This public portrayal of ageing in media discourse is not unique to any one newspaper or any one society. Texts placing older people in the context of burden, problem or dependency are common enough so that the pictorial text at the beginning of this chapter reflects a popular public image of the condition of ageing and of the condition of the burden the increasing percentage of 'non productive' older people will place on the younger 'working' populations.

The role of the media in identity formation and confirmation in the public sphere is potent. Because of their prominence in contemporary societies, media texts can tell us a great deal about the ideation of our society. The relationship of discourse to extra-discoursal structures and relations such as social identity of any group, is not just representational but constitutive. The way we think and the values we hold, our ideology, has 'material' effects, and discourse contributes to the creation, the

constraint and the maintenance of this ideology, in our relations, and the subjects and objects which populate our world.

When we use language we are constantly involved in extending the meaning of words, in producing new meanings through metaphor, word-play and interpretations; and we are consequently involved, wittingly or not, in altering, undermining or reinforcing our relations with others and with the world. Language in turn influences us, as the 'practical consciousness' of our society, merging with our ideology and taking on the same systematic bias, with the result that 'any text is determined by the ideological sub codes of its writer. (Thompson 1984: 6)

In any act of communication, the choice of lexis aligns us into positions or attitudes in our society. According to Halliday (1978), 'If the media only inform, as is often claimed, vocabulary should be as core (or neutral) as possible'. Expressions such as 'burden' and 'demographic doomsday' are not neutral. These value-laden expressions have been chosen specifically by writers to present the news with a high degree of illocutionary force. The function of these expressions is to demarcate differences between what the public view is of both younger people and older people, and, at the same time supports the generally accepted and promoted belief that young is beautiful and vibrant and old is ugly and useless, as in the following examples:

...the growth of elderly has raised fears of a demographic doomsday, with retirees drawing heavily on the nation's health and community services ... (Bogle 1994: 1)

and 'Living longer takes its toll' and 'Greying may put society in red', both headlines in *Weekend Australian*, special edition on the family (August 16-17 1997; 1-8). And according to McGuinness (1994: 2) our economic woes are due to 'The blight of the baby-boomers' as a generation ages. Newspaper reporting also presents the elderly as victim and powerless as portrayed in 'Bag thief preys on the elderly'

(Papp 1996), all illustrate how the choice of and use of lexis work to create the image or to reinforce what is embedded in the public psyche as 'truth' or reality. The above examples reflect a strong negativity in the reporting of the social ideation of ageing.

Gibb (1990b) carried out a survey on images of old age in the media, (four Australian publications) and concluded that '...only the most salient vicissitudes are highlighted'. (Gibb 1990b: 15) She comments that:

This discourse about the aged is largely a product of what Watts (1984) has called the practice of social ventriloquism. In this case the powerful, largely professional groups (journalists, doctors, nurses, administrators and planners) talk about and define the elderly and their needs. (Gibb 1990b: 14)

Schramm and Porter (1982) and Poynton (1990) see the media as gatekeepers for reporting the news in that the editors select what they want to be published as newsworthy topics and then control the image of the way it is represented, ultimately controlling agendas of which themes and topics become social and political issues. The selection of items of news and the lexico-grammatical choices of expression decide for the public view what is 'reality' and what public meaning should be interpreted from it. The 'gatekeepers' choose news items of social value and in doing so, claim to speak for the reading public. Some of these choices can implicitly ascribe massive legitimacy to the discourse. Talbot (1995) claims that:

The construction of an implied reader puts writers in a powerful position, in the sense that they can assume all kinds of shared expectations, commonsense attitudes and even experiences. (Talbot 1995: 29)

Fairclough (1995) believes that there is a set of 'potential principals' for the texts of the news media and that this is very much a socially contracted set.

In so far as principalship is mystified, the news media can be regarded as covertly transmitting the voices of social power-holders. (Fairclough 1995: 63)

He suggests that newsgivers (news selectors, writers and secondary agents/TV or radio news speakers) appear to the public as:

... reliable sources who act as mediators of the news and who cultivate characteristics which are taken to be typical of the 'target' audience and who claim a relationship of solidarity with it, and they therefore have the legitimacy and authority to mediate newsworthy events to an audience in the latter's 'common sense' terms. (Fairclough 1995: 62)

Coupland Coupland and Giles (1991) believe that:

Linguistic construction is most pernicious when it is the prerogative of the privileged and powerful in society, whether they be news reporters, politicians, or authority figures who subtly determine our perceptions of events and 'truths' by the language they adopt. (Coupland Coupland and Giles 1991: 23)

However, isolation from the audience is a characteristic of mass communicators and some research has shown that in fact the more 'mass' the medium, the greater the isolation between writer/presenter and reader. Bell (1991) cites Burns' (1977) research which suggests that mass media communicators 'are not just ignorant of the nature of their audience, they are uninterested'. He also cites from Donsbach (1983) who found that 'British and German journalists held a very low opinion of their readers'. (Bell 1991: 71) Mass communication, where the listeners/watchers are technically removed in 'space' and 'time' from the writer/speaker, is very different from the interpersonal situation where speakers are continuously adjusting their language production as they monitor their interlocutors' reactions and production and evaluate their own production as in face to face communication. With some

exceptions, the audience does not generally 'talk back', so that the text is closed, that is, no divergence, accommodation or style matching takes place.

Discourse is produced and interpreted by specific people in specific institutional and broader societal contexts. Since most media content is not ad lib speech, but is scripted in whole or in part (with perhaps the exception of talk-back radio) there is an implied but unknown reader or hearer. The construction of this implied reader puts news writers and entertainment scriptwriters, such as dialogue writers of soap operas, in a powerful position, in the sense that they can assume all kinds of shared expectations, commonsense attitudes and even experiences. The interaction is asymmetrical and writers are in a powerful position to place all sorts of beliefs and perceptions presented as givens into the public mind.

Conventions used in writing the news necessarily have an intertextual quality or as Fairclough (1989) claims, various schemata, frames and scripts which provide 'stereotypical patterns against which we can match endlessly diverse texts'. (Fairclough 1989: 164) Such conventions contain the accumulation of past actions or known people histories and social practices which can be assumed to be shared with the readers/hearers.

This intertextuality can also be described as presupposition. By using presuppositions a writer can postulate an audience with shared interactional histories. Fairclough (1989) observes that the use of presupposition provides producers of mass media discourse with an

... effective means of manipulating audiences through attributing to their experience things which they want to get them to accept. (Fairclough 1989: 159)

For example, in advertising, one way of promoting a commodity is to establish the need for it by placing this need in intertextual context, as in the following advertisement for a community service to older people.

You can bring happiness to someone who is aged and lonely

The City of Unley has residents in nursing homes who are in need of a friend to visit them.

For half an hour each fortnight you can make a real difference.

Become a volunteer visitor with the

Community Visitors Scheme

A Federal Government initiative - sponsored by the City of Unley

Volunteer visitors welcome from ALL areas.

For further information contact
Rosa or Bronwyn, on 8372 5191

"Friends for Older People"

Figure 6.2 You can bring happiness to someone who is aged and lonely. *Eastern Courier* August 30 2000: 17.

Figure 6.2, is a community service advertisement which addresses the reader directly as 'you' and as the possessor of happiness as opposed to an aged person who (in this context) does not possess happiness and is lonely. The presuppositions here are that the aged person, as we might expect, necessarily in a nursing home, is not happy but that the reader, who is probably not aged, and is happy or at least happier than the aged person, by inference has the possibility of providing the aged person with what they don't have but need, which is both happiness and the alleviation of loneliness. This situation is presupposed from the context of the nursing home and this would be a shared understanding for readers implicated by the writer.

There is also presupposition of shared background history implicit in the next example, figure 6.3. To understand the deep meaning of the heading of this article, the reader is expected to be able to make metaphorical associations with the activities

and experiences of war through lexical items such as ‘guerrillas’ and ‘digging in’ which indicate that the older person has, from a known past, acquired determination and the ability to fight, that is, participated in a particular experience. However, other lexical choices in this headline such as the expression ‘Grandad’ and the mocking humour realised through alliteration and punning (Grandad’s greying guerillas) reduce the positive ideation attributing qualities of strength and determination to older people.



Move over Swampy,
grandad's greying
guerrillas are digging
in for the winter

Figure 6.3 Move over Swampy, Grandad’s greying guerillas are digging in for the winter. *Observer* November 2 1997: 9.

Syntagm and paradigm together provide the meaning of the text. The expressions (signs) ‘aged’ and ‘ageing’ while signifying process and state in chronological time, also carry other meanings. In news reporting we can find examples of ageing or aged lexically applied to situations in order to represent something or someone or an ideology which signifies finished or outworn. For example, Lisa Curry-Kenny reporting herself as in her ‘advancing years’ returning to competitive swimming (*Advertiser* August 31 1995: 43) and figure 6.4, below, reported in the *Age on Saturday* (August 12 2000: 15) that a victory for the ‘aged’ describes the unusual possibility that two swimmers who are old at thirty years of age are expected to win

medals and have been selected for the Sydney Olympics. The visual signs here do not match the verbal signs. So the meaning of 'aged' in these texts has to be other than chronologically advanced years. The markedness of this news report, that is, the sense that there is something atypical here where the lexis 'aged' is being applied to two young women who do not bear the physical markings of 'aged' as in wrinkles and grey hair, is that the two swimmers are unusually 'old' to be sports heroes. The expressions 'aged' and 'golden oldies' used here, nevertheless are synonymous with the socially accepted presupposition of 'past it'. Both of these news items construct a perception of ageing as synonymous with diminished usefulness in a nominated context.



Figure 6.4 Golden Oldies. *Age on Saturday* August 12 2000: 15.

'We're still a state of grey hairs', (*Advertiser* January 20 1996: 8) figure 6. 5, reports that the population of South Australia is, by percentage, older than it once was. However, the metaphor at work here is that not only are older people identifiable by the physical change in the colour of their hair, but the headline employs the expression 'grey hair' to act here as metonymy for 'problem', as understood in the

popular meaning that it is the problems and difficulties in life that cause our hair to turn grey.

We're still the State of grey hairs

By MARK STEENE

South Australia's population is still the nation's oldest.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures issued yesterday revealed SA had a median age of 35.1 years, a rise from just over 33 years in 1990.

Our median age at June 30, 1995, was one year older than the populations of both New South Wales and Tasmania.

Victoria had a median age of 33.9 years, Queensland 33, Western Australia 32.9 and the Australian Capital Territory 30.7 years.

The Northern Territory was the youngest State or Territory, with a median age of 28.3.

At the other end of the scale, SA had one of the lowest birth rates, with a growth of .002 per cent in the 0-14 age group.

The statistics also revealed SA had the second largest percentage of dependants in the country - 51.7 per cent. Of those, 31.1 per cent were children under the age of 14, while 20.6 per cent were 65 and over.

Only Tasmania, with 53.8 per cent, had a higher population of dependants.

Women made up 50.35 per cent of SA's population of 1,469,371, leaving a ratio of 98.58 men to every 100 women.

There were 731,707 men compared to 742,259 women at June 30 last year.

The bureau said declining mortality rates and the resulting increase in life expectancy was fuelling the trend toward an older population.

Nationally, 190,000 people were aged 85 or over compared to 79,000 in 1975. There were 133,300 women, compared to 56,700 men, in the age group.

The population of 85s and over is growing at a fast rate, with 10,100 more people expected to fit this age group by June 30 this year.

Figure 6.5 A state of grey hairs. *Advertiser* January 20 1996: 8.

Figure 6.6 is taken from the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 16 1998. The heading 'Arthritic Nation' which leads in an article about the economic woes of Japan, does not refer to the fact that the ageing population of Japan has arthritis. The lexis 'arthritic' is used here as a metaphor for lack of (economic) vibrancy and health. However the choice of the word arthritic obviously underscores the fact that the unhealthy economy is partly due to the ageing population who we expect are not only physically slow but also have become economically slow and conservative. Older people are represented here as conservative in both actions and ideas.

COVER STORY

JAPAN

Arthritic Nation

The greying of Japan isn't a worry for the next millennium: It's already a problem. Conservative habits of an ageing population have a lot to do with why Japan can't seem to restructure its economy.

Figure 6.6 Arthritic nation. *Far Eastern Economic Review* July 16 1998: 10.

Figure 6.7 is a letter to the editor of the *Bangkok Post* 29 May 1998. The letter expresses objections to the term 'grumpy old men' the expression which had been used in an earlier article in the newspaper to describe British ex-POWs protesting the state visit of the emperor of Japan to Britain. The writer of the letter objected to the term which was used to reflect again that the freedom to disagree and express disagreement worked differently for older people who were perceived as grumpy for doing so rather than vibrant for holding, expressing and justifying opinions. The expression 'grumpy old men', as has been pointed out in Chapter 2, is one of the expressions which is socially conceived as a stereotype and would often be expected to carry a humorous/pejorative intended meaning, depending on the context of production and the paradigm shared and understood by writer/reader or speaker/hearer.

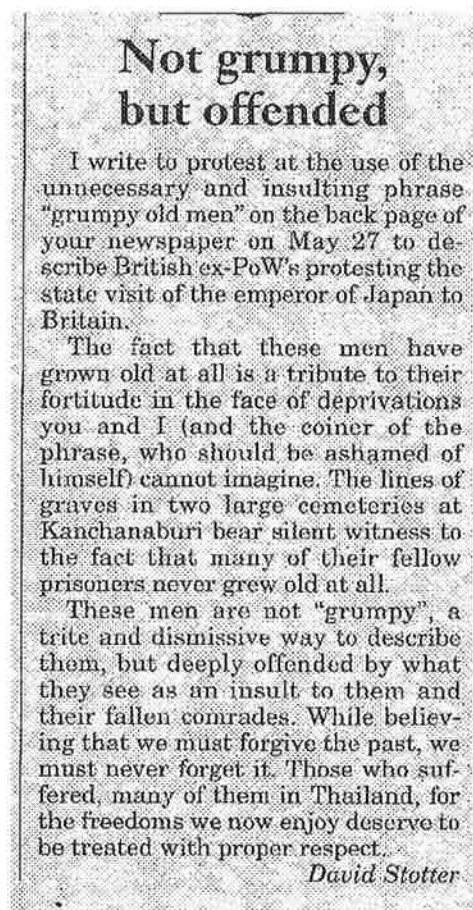
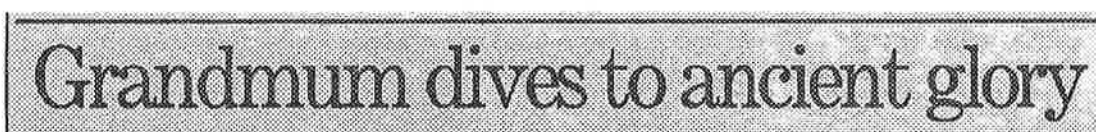


Figure 6.7 Grumpy old men. *Bangkok Post* May 29 1998: 21.

When an older person is the subject of a ‘human interest story’, as opposed to a news story, it is the uncommon presentation of the social identity which renders the story newsworthy. The next three examples explore the representation of ageing from this perspective of marked or atypical behaviour. In the first example, ‘Grandmum dives to ancient glory’, figure 6.8, tells of a sixty-three year old woman who scuba dived to discover a treasure. The headline is presented to the reader as though the usual role of the woman is as a grandmother and a reader would presuppose meanings from this where it is socially ‘unusual’ for a grandmother to be involved in such activity.

Closer reading of the text reveals that in fact this story foregrounds the role of this woman as a professional archaeologist and diver. The choice of lexis (grandmum, in itself a possibly patronising diminutive. See Poynton 1989) for the headline leads the reader to imagine that there is something extraordinary about this woman and indeed something extraordinary about a grandmother who dives. In fact, the woman’s identity as grandmother is not relevant to this story. It also reiterates my statements in Chapter 1 that lexical variations of grandparents, carry a significance of ‘old’ but grandparent are not necessarily old. However, the expression ‘grandmum’ is meaningful in this story for we are expected to imagine an ‘older’ person for whom scuba diving would be an eccentric activity. This story would not have the same headlines if the scuba diver were a twenty-four year old man. Other lexical choices are also interesting here, as the collocation of ‘ancient’ and ‘glory’, carry extra illocutionary force reinforcing the reader’s understanding that there is something extraordinary about ‘oldness’.



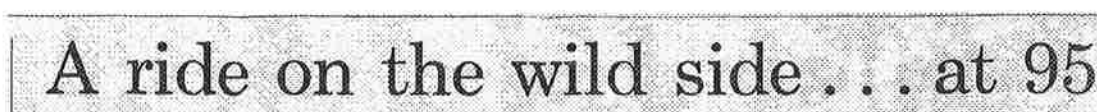
Grandmum dives to ancient glory

Figure 6.8 Grandmum dives to ancient glory. *Weekend Australian* October 7-8 1995: 5.

Bytheway (1995) argues that the journalistic convention of signifying the age of the person featured in articles is necessary for us to apply social values to what we read. He claims that in our ageist society, when reading the newspaper, we need to know the age of the hero or anti-hero so that we can position ourselves in some way with the story. We should be engaged as sympathetic, disbelieving, horrified, amused or whatever the intention of the journalist may be. Or we need to know whether to believe the opinion or the story:

... it is the dominant values of the society in which we live, values which have emerged over the decades, if not centuries, that oblige us to be age-conscious and age-alert if we are to understand (the implications of) ... what we read in newspapers, and if we are to sustain meaningful communication with the social institutions around us. (Bytheway 1995: 8)

Another example, shown in Figure 6.9, 'A ride on the wild side ... at 95', tells of an older man who still enjoys riding a motorbike. The reader is expected to assume that the interest in this story is its atypical image of an older individual — people who are 95 years old are not expected to ride motorbikes. The newsworthiness is that the image of motorbike riding is usually associated with the active young and this is underscored by the use of the word 'wild' in opposition to the noted age of the man.



A ride on the wild side ... at 95

Figure 6.9 A ride on the wild side ... at 95. *Advertiser* April 25 1996: 5.

And figure 6.10, 'Little old ladies with rose tattoos', an article about older people choosing to be tattooed (a visually self-identifying mark at any age), presents a very stereotypical expectation of ageing as understood by younger people. There is a strongly marked concept here that a tattooed body is a place inhabited by youth and the idea of older people entering this arena is humorous/ strange. So that the

discourse from the younger people in this article who are the suppliers of the service, expresses surprise and amusement. Wearing a tattoo is socially accepted as the cultural possession of youth rather than for older people. Much of the article is presented in a patronising manner using direct quote from younger people including such context stereotypical expressions as 'old bugger', 'oldies', 'grannies', including the often heard self-disclosure of older people 'I'm too old'. According to the younger female tattooist, seventy year old year grannies say 'What is my daughter going to think?' They are voicing the shared expectation that having a tattoo is eccentric and atypical behaviour for a seventy year old who should exhibit more constrained behaviour 'at her age'.



Figure 6.10 Little old ladies with rose tattoos. *Eastern Courier* December 10 1997: 8.

Two noteworthy messages are shared by these three news stories. One is the contradiction inherent in the presentation of elderly peoples' lives. Each individual described above is depicted as personally exceptional in some way, that is, they are atypical of the socially constructed ageing paradigm. The socially accepted view of

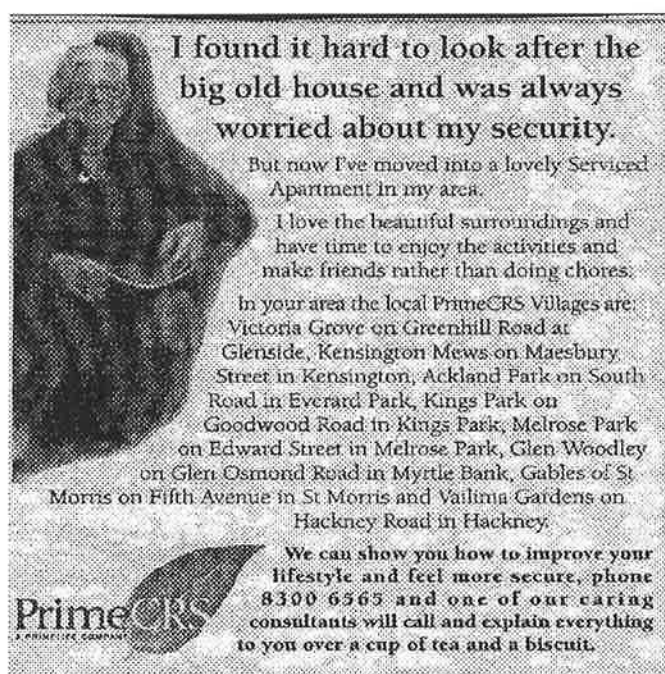
older people is not as active, able or adventurous. These articles make news only because the baseline for exceptionality among old people is perceived to be very low. Such stories would not be newsworthy if the 'supposed' readers of the news were to share a different 'reality' of ageing. The other notable message is the humour and derision which is a feature of each article. There is something comical or weird or not quite 'right' about the behaviour of older people who are presented as not acting their age. In this sense the articles can be interpreted as carrying patronising messages. The 'reality' of older lives being independent and with an abundance of choices, sits uneasily on the shoulders of a youth oriented society, so that an increasing image of ageing reported in the media surrounds the reality of either 'growing old gracefully' or 'disgracefully' (as in figure 6.11 below, from the *Eastern Courier* April 23 1996: 2) and what kind of behaviour society should expect of older people.



Figure 6.11 Growing old disgracefully. *Eastern Courier* April 23 1996: 2.

Ageing in advertising

Little advertising in any media depicts images of older people. There is a strong demarcation between what kinds of goods and services are advertised for the consumption of older people and that of younger people or even 'middle aged' people. Where advertising for goods and services for older people is featured, it is in journals and magazines such as *Looking Forward*, which is an advertising feature of *The Advertiser*, or occasionally in the free-to-reader suburban weeklies, so that it appears that advertising to older people is an act highly contextualised for a discrete readership, separated out from what is seen as marketable to the 'rest' of the population.



I found it hard to look after the big old house and was always worried about my security.

But now I've moved into a lovely Serviced Apartment in my area.

I love the beautiful surroundings and have time to enjoy the activities and make friends rather than doing chores.

In your area the local PrimeCRS Villages are: Victoria Grove on Greenhill Road at Glenside, Kensington Mews on Maesbury Street in Kensington, Ackland Park on South Road in Everard Park, Kings Park on Goodwood Road in Kings Park, Melrose Park on Edward Street in Melrose Park, Glen Woodley on Glen Osmond Road in Myrtle Bank, Gables of St Morris on Fifth Avenue in St Morris and Vailima Gardens on Hackney Road in Hackney.

We can show you how to improve your lifestyle and feel more secure, phone 8300 6565 and one of our caring consultants will call and explain everything to you over a cup of tea and a biscuit.

PrimeCRS
A PRIMEFEE COMPANY

Figure 6.12 Worried about security. *Eastern Courier* August 30 2000: 17.

Figure 6.12, above, an advertisement for security and aid for the elderly in the form of elderly community housing, is from one such weekly and can be studied in conjunction with figure 6.13 below, from the *Weekend Australian* September 10-11 1994, which indicates that this commodity (retirement homes) is a growth industry for business. The message found in these two advertisements is that as there is an

ageing population the expectation is for an increase in the numbers of dependent elderly people. The advertisement for the sale of the business of the retirement village (Figure 6.13) was found in a national daily newspaper with general circulation and was probably not targeted at the older reader. The advertisement for the sale of the apartment in the retirement village (Figure 6.12) was found in a local weekly newspaper which is more likely to have older readers. This advertisement, targeted at the older person, is also accompanied by a visual image, the socially perceived ideation of an older woman, grey-haired and not apparently active.

GROWTH INDUSTRY

RETIREMENT VILLAGE
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
FOR SALE

A rare opportunity to secure an ideally located Retirement Village in a well established residential suburb of Perth.

This medium size village comprises a variety of accommodation styles, excellent village community centre including dining room, lounges, offices, kitchen, laundry, associated medical suites and separate caretaker unit.

As this popular village is fully occupied with a proven track record and excellent reputation, it represents an ideal opportunity for operators to enter or expand their business in the growing Western Australian market.

For information and inspections contact Patrick Lilburne.

GREGSONS
PROPERTY DIVISION

250 Beaufort Street,
Perth, 6000
(09) 328 7044

Figure 6.13 Growth industry — retirement village for sale. *Weekend Australian* September 10-11 1994: 12.

Advertisements are a means of representation and as such construct and maintain ideology which use codes and signs already existing in the language of a society and therefore understood by the society. An advertisement will use language, images and concepts which already exist in a culture to rework an ideology producing new meanings. Greer (1992) argues that with the ageing of the population a new rich

market exists for new services and new products, retirement homes, pension plans, fiscal services of all kinds, health products, treatments, tourism, and so forth but suggests that the problem is how to sell them.

Old faces, old bodies sell nothing, if only for the reason that most people perceive themselves as essentially younger than they are. A car advertised as specially suitable for a senior citizen would not be bought by senior citizens, none of whom want to be stereotyped in that way. No old person wants to go on a tour that has only old people on it. (Greer 1992: 272)

We can agree with Greer when we examine the most common advertising within the ageing paradigm which is in fact for *anti-ageing* products, that is, any product or activity which will stall the dreaded physical signs of ageing. Such products, (See figure 6.14 below, from the *Australian Women's Weekly* January 1996) are not usually targeted at very old people and are not usually located in the types of newspapers mentioned above. Rather they are targeted at middle-aged and younger people, such as the young woman featured in this advertisement, who do not want to physically show the physical signs of ageing and still perceive themselves to be in a position to stall the appearance of the ageing process. Such products or activities, comprise a suggested 'life-style' which will work as a 'fountain of youth' and give us the physical signs of youth for all eternity.

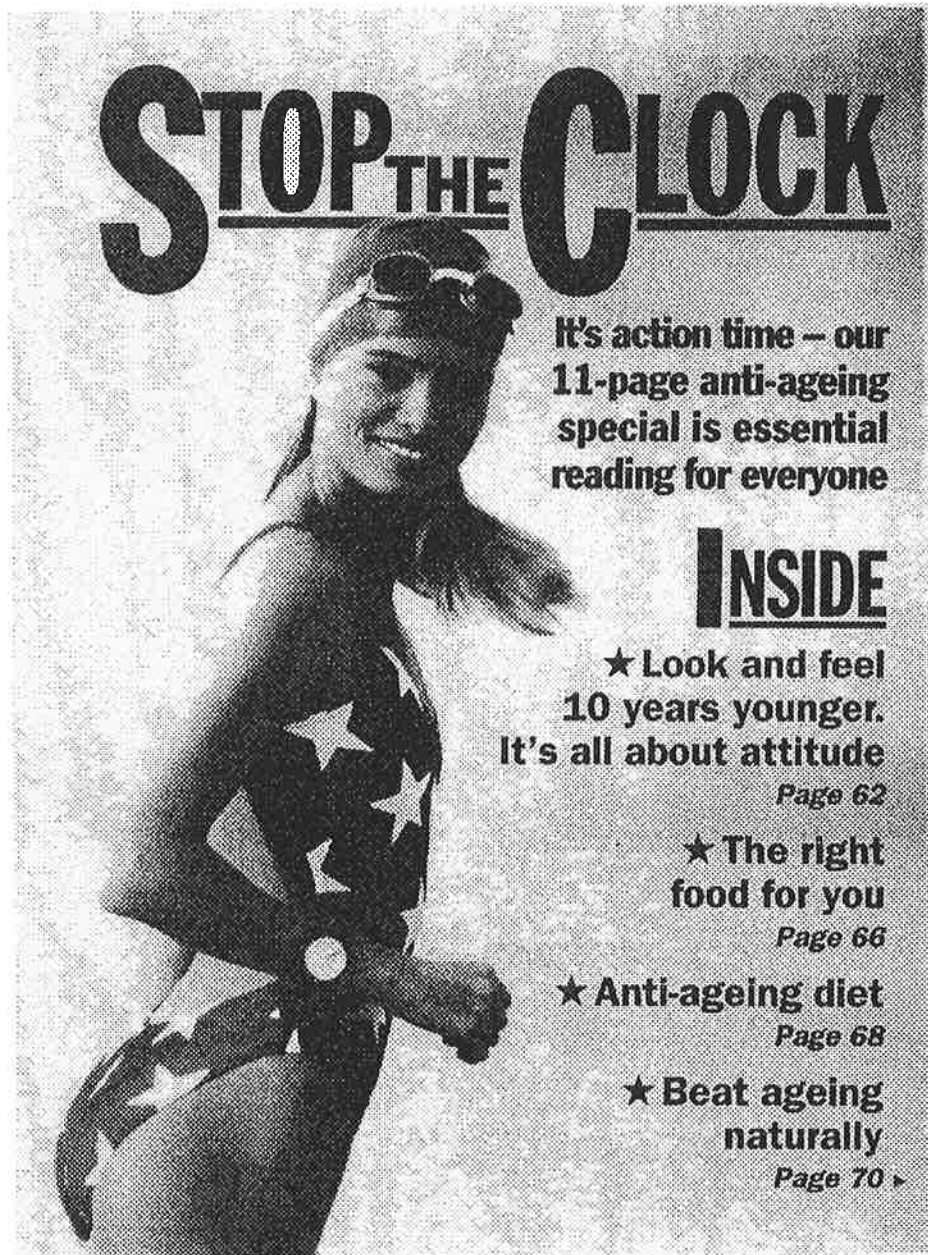


Figure 6.14 Stop the clock. *Australian Women's Weekly* January 1996. Front cover of special feature insert.

Figure 6.15 an advertisement for an investment company in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, April 4 1994, is worth examining because it dares to target a commodity for the older person and does so with an interesting visual image positioning of an old (at least over 50) and wise (clever enough to make money) head on an

attractive/healthy and strong youthful body. The visual image here carries the potential for the reader to share both the benefits of ageing and the benefits of youth. It reinforces the verbal message 'over 50' is still 'young enough' to make money (implying that we make money when we're young as a projection for the future rather than when we're old when we have no future) and therefore in the ideology of our society, to be useful and independent. As I proposed in Chapter 1, the constructs of 'age' can be manipulated to support whatever meanings the communicators negotiate. In this case, the verbal and visual signs of 'age' are crucial to the advertising message.

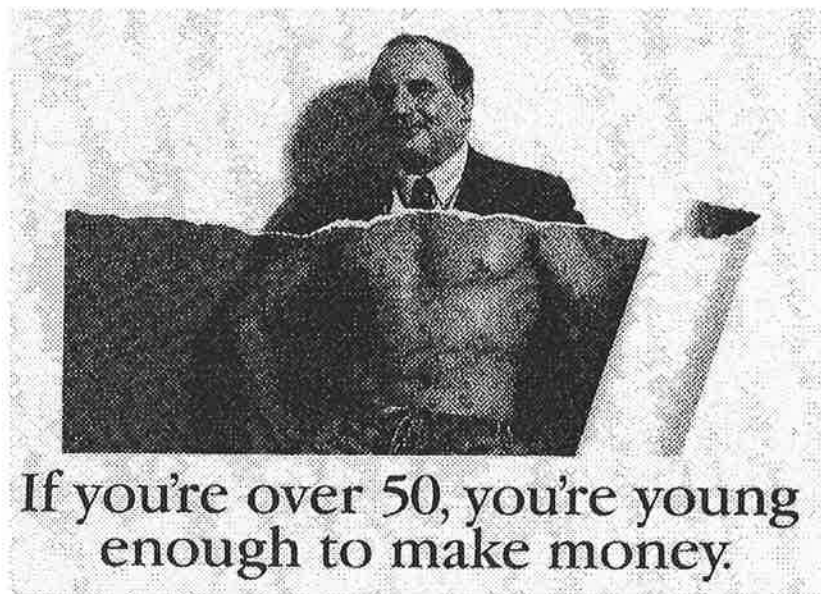


Figure 6.15 Young enough to make money. *Weekend Australian Magazine* April 4 1994: 12.

Figure 6.16, which shows an advertisement with limited circulation and possibly targeting only older people (found on a calendar of events for seniors, 1995) is purely visual, with the images of older women, one surfing and the other para-gliding above her. These two very active images reflect a non stereotypical or counter stereotypical view of ageing which more closely resembles the realities of the varieties of ageing identities presented in the three human interest stories above and which relate more

closely to theories of ageing such as robust ageing and healthy ageing or Laslett's (1989) Third Age as has been discussed in Chapter 3.



Figure 6.16 Calendar of activities for seniors. Department of Sport and Recreation South Australia 1995.

One curiously bold visual image of the older body (Figure 6.17, below) comes from an advertisement for women's clothes for the fashion store Jacqueline Eve. The advertisement, in the context of young female models' bodies selling the latest clothing fashions, clearly with the younger reader in mind, has two photographs where the young female model is engaging conversationally, actively with an older man and an older woman who appear to have a familial relationship with each other. In one of these photographs, the two older people are animatedly engaged in talking to the young model. They are wearing swimsuits revealing clearly physically ageing bodies. The young model is fully clothed in presumably the costume being advertised. While the positioning of the younger/older bodies could be seen to purposely contrast and enhance the look of the younger, in fact the two older bodies are seen as active and animated, not immobile and weak. There is also a clear sexual ambience between the two older people which would contrast with the stereotype commonly held of older people being asexual.



Figure 6.17 Older bodies and fashion. *Jacqueline Eve promotional brochure* Spring 1995.

Fairclough (1995) claims that we:

... live in an age of great change ... in which the forms of power and domination are being radically reshaped, in which changing cultural practices are a major constituent of social change, which in many cases means to a significant degree changing discursive practices, changing practices of language use. (Fairclough 1995: 219)

Since one reality of our collective identity is that the populations of many countries in the world are becoming increasingly 'older' in chronological years, then we should expect that the force of the representations of the signs of this change would be reflected in media news and advertising since it is the media which has a dominant role in reporting and shaping our social realities. Such signs in the media of the proposition that as our societies age, so the representations of the reality of older lives will change, can be seen from the final two examples I have selected to discuss. In both of these, the images are of older people (albeit not old-old or very-old) who are active and independent. Indeed, the metaphors, through the visual images of active older people, support the theories (discussed in Chapter 3) of healthy and 'positive' ageing.

An article in the *European* 7-13 November 1996, reports that a European Commission funded television campaign was being developed at that time with the expectation of subverting society's negative images and preoccupations with old age:

Viewers will see a Picasso lookalike being turned down for a job at an advertising agency, on the grounds that he is too old. A young man seems to be leading someone old across the road; a close-up reveals that the youngster is blind and it is actually the pensioner who is providing the helping hand. (Helgadottir 1996: 5)

This television advertising campaign shows that a growing number of older people are refusing to be cast in the role of dependent and useless. Most are still healthy and

fit, and they want to be seen as an 'asset' rather than a 'burden'. And while the expression 'Grey power' could be seen to be replacing 'little old lady' and 'silly old bugger', nevertheless, it is also seen as a pejorative expression 'with half-menacing, half-comic overtones'. (Nuessel 1985: 18)

Entertaining older images on television and in film

Harwood (2000) claims that older people, given the increased percentage represented in our society, are under represented in the mass media, especially in television particularly 'popular' soap operas. I suggest the same is also true in films. Where older people are portrayed, research suggests that there is ambivalent portrayal, some showing negative characteristics and some showing positive characteristics or as Harwood expresses it 'stereotypical' or 'counter stereotypical' characteristics. (Harwood 2000: 112) In his qualitative examination of the dialogue in one episode from a popular situational comedy, he also suggests that the focalised presence of older people is foregrounded in a periodic rather than episodic manner, which indicates that the context of older portrayals, is constituted to foreground 'ageing' issues, rather than as integrating older identities into the regular framework of the series.

The scripts for the dialogue should reveal to us how age is considered in the culture and the attitudes towards ageing held by other generations. As I have suggested, the mass media play a central role in constituting and maintaining our collective perceptions. Gibb (1990b) asserts that:

... the media may be considered to reflect attitudes and views already present in society. However, its potency as a shaper of social attitudes lies in the fact that it **selectively** activates images about a social group. Those images generally reinforced are the stereotypical representations of characteristics of that particular group. (Gibb 1990b: 4)

In his analysis of the dialogue in *Frasier*, a popular and award winning comedy series from the United States, which introduced issues of ageing in one particular episode, Harwood (2000) found that the stereotype presented, what he terms 'lurking incoherence', introduced in the punchline of the dialogue thereby dismantling the viewers' positive image of the older person and reverting to the stereotype of older person with failing memory. The older person is initially presented as active (white-water rafting) and alert to technology (hacking into computer programs), both of which help to maintain supportive conversation between the older woman and younger woman conversational dyad. However, the conversation ultimately loses the thread when the older woman's memory falters and the younger woman needs to accommodate to her speech and, ultimately finding that tiresome, finally distances herself from the older woman by closing the conversation. Harwood suggests that the 'lurking' deficit is more dangerous to stereotype than simple stereotype. Lurking incoherence or confusion, which may be present in even the most agile and alert older adult, puts the entire picture at risk and the younger person's view collapses. In this context, it serves to reinforce the stereotype, since it is the punchline which remains with us as the force of the interaction. Age is made salient because younger viewers would retain the view as one they would normally be expected to associate with an older person.

Rarely do shows feature an older adult who is part of the plot or narrative without serving some function explicitly linked to their age. Older adults tend to play the part of older adults, not just in age, but in narrative function. ...because research has shown that contact between older and younger adults who are not family members is relatively rare. (Harwood 2000: 134)

A recent episode of the popular serialised program *Sea Change* (Australian Broadcasting Commission television program, episode 34 October 2000) also focused on issues of ageing. Three major stereotypical images of ageing were presented within the story in this episode. The first is that older people (nominalised as geriatrics by one younger player) are poor drivers, since several elderly drivers

had been 'caught in the recent, unexplained traffic crime spree.' (ABC *Seachange* website) There is a stereotypical view of older people at work here, and the work is done through, not only the acceptance of the ideology that the older people of course can't manage on their own but also the use of the expression 'geriatrics' which carries a negative stereotypical loading in the culture and certainly could be understood and accepted and affirmed as such by the viewers. Of course, as viewers we will nod our heads and agree because yes, we all share in the understanding that older people are bad drivers.

The second thread is the development of the relationship between the lead male character, Max, and his father. Max is involved in a project of videotaping older members of the community as they narrate their life stories. He is doing this as a way of building the history of the small town. The older people have the stories. This provides the image of older people as keepers of history and as storytellers. It is also, of course, that stories are not just about the past. They are parts of the self and therefore parts of the individual's identity. Max explains what he is trying to do to his father who asks:

'What do you expect to get from a bunch of old fogies rabbitting on into a microphone?'

To which Max responds with a sardonic laugh:

'Oh not too much. They're all pretty boring, aren't they?'

Nevertheless, the father is shown as an independent person with a diverse accumulation of life experiences and identities. He is the 'wise' adviser of life, since he has a life independent of his son and friends to 'natter' about it with. This shows that there is a speech community to which old people belong which can exclude younger people. Older people have shared experiences and enjoy talking about them to each other without having to membership or accommodate to any younger person.

However, the principal thread of this episode is the relationship between the 'older' couple, Harold and Meredith. It's through their interaction that we see the identification of ageing most clearly. The husband is presented as 'in the grip of old age' as he laments his ageing body and mind. In a conversation with Meredith we see the contrast between each person's image of the self. Harold (who, as a lawyer, is to represent the 'geriatric' drivers in their court appearances) says:

'Won't make a sod of difference. Just one old fart standing in court defending another'.

This statement of belief is doing two things. First it is rendering both or all 'old farts' powerless within the judicial system because of their age. The second thing it does is to state how Harold sees himself. He identifies himself (and at the same time all the other older people in the town) as old and useless. There is no nominalisation 'I' here. Harold has surrendered his agency.

Meredith counters with:

'Is that how you see yourself Hal?'

And he responds:

'Well look at me love. Career, such as it was, all but over. Nothing to show for half a century of work. They might as well put me in Bob's museum'.

To which she counters:

'Might as well go straight to the grave'.

He is voicing that his life and his identity lie in the past. And again, agency is removed. Harold has ceded his power to act for himself. He is content to be acted upon with:

‘They might as well put me in Bob’s museum’.

And later in the episode, when he refuses to go to a party with her, declaring,

‘I’m not having dinner with a whole lot of old people’,

he is distancing himself from being categorised with the social group of the town he perceives as ‘old’. While he identifies with his own ageing, nevertheless ‘old’ is an undesirable, lamentable attribute. This attitude reflects a common reporting of self-identification where we see ourselves as not ‘like’ other old people through the negating of one’s own ageing experience. It also underlines the point that chronological age is not the reality of age. That chronological age is merely numbers of years and self-reporting age is how we identify ourselves with our experiences.

Meredith explains his absence at the party with:

‘I’m so sorry Harold couldn’t come. He’s at home arranging his funeral’.

Harold sees himself as old but really doesn’t want to be associated with other ‘old’ people. He is having difficulty seeing the positive aspects of ageing, whereas Meredith is full of the ‘counter stereotype’ including that of acknowledgement of her sexuality. She has a nude photo discreetly taken of herself, as her body is now, as a gift for Harold and gives it to him with:

‘But hey Hal. I think I look pretty damn good here and now.’

She is expressing her view of herself in the present. She claims her own identity and gives herself the agency to deliver it.

There is also a great deal of discourse in this episode about how individuals perceive the ageing process and the self's ageing body. Laura's mother has come to stay and has a chat with her grandson. He asks her why her hair has changed colour from blue to grey. She gives him a little homily about acceptance of self as opposed to exhibiting vanity and pretending that one isn't growing older. All the stereotypical elements are there. The child asks:

'How come your hair used to be blue and now it's not?'

'Cause I just don't dye it any more. You know I spent years trying to pretend it wasn't grey.'

'By making it blue?'

'One's idea of fashion gets caught in time. '

One interesting outcome from this episode which foregrounded both stereotypes and counter stereotypes of ageing, was the positive audience participatory comments it received. While I only accessed two comments through the ABC *Seachange* website, they were both positive and directed specifically at the episode focusing on the representations of ageing. One viewer commented that:

Also I felt that the story line involving Meredith last week was fantastic! I feel that many relationships would be saved by a little ingenuity and spontaneity as displayed by Meredith ... (Chrissie, ABC *Seachange* website November 21 2000)

And another said:

But I would like to say that for me one of the great fascinations I have with *Seachange* is the depth and strength of the secondary characters, like ... Meredith For me a lot of the satisfaction I feel after a corker episode (eg. the one on older people) is the quality of the writing and acting around the supporting cast. (Mary G, ABC *Seachange* website November 20 2000)

Clearly, these viewers identified with the images of older people as they are portrayed in this program and in particular in this episode, and perceived them as reflecting their own view of the realisation of the ageing process and what ageing is to different people.

Similar themes are foregrounded in the movie *Daisies in December* (directed by Mark Haber 1995) The title *Daisies in December* employs metaphors from nature and seasons so that with December we have the image of the winter of life (northern hemisphere winter) and the image of the sun going down on life. Daisies flowering in December is an anomaly but this image carries implicature of the anomaly of the flowering of sexual interest and sexual activity in old age.

The older male character has been 'abandoned' by his family while they enjoy an active holiday in which it is assumed he could not participate. Because he had experienced an unfortunate 'lapse' in memory and caused a house fire, they cannot leave him alone but 'have him placed' in a hotel while they are away. He says:

'I made one simple mistake and it brands me as a menace to society.'

He rages against his condition saying:

'I don't want to be with a load of old people'.

I have already commented on two other films which portray the dilemma and tensions within the competition between older and younger people for control of and use of resources. The first one is *Logan's Run* (directed by Michael Anderson 1976) where all people must die (voluntarily or otherwise) at the age of thirty-one. In this film, where the physiological signs of ageing (grey hair and wrinkles) do not happen, wrinkled skin and grey hair, once discovered, are in fact the novelty. The young couple manage to escape and encounter a very old man who escaped many years before. The young woman observes his aged appearance and remarks:

‘I’ve never seen a face like that before. That must be the look of being old. Is that what it is to grow old? Those cracks in your face — do they hurt?’

And, in this society, the grey hair becomes the valued prize.

In *The Ballad of Narayama*, old people (at seventy) ‘go to Narayama’ which is both a metaphor for ending life and the literal meaning of the action taken to do this. Narayama is the mountain where old people must go and remain to die in order to make room for the next generation. In this film, even though the old woman has ‘strong teeth’, the marker of strength in this society, she must ask her son to take her to the mountain as this is expected of her. Without her death, other sons cannot get married and have children. She has lived her allowance of life.

Conclusion

There is a paucity of images of ageing in the media. Older people and their faces are greatly under-represented in newspapers, in advertising and in media entertainment. My selection of images and examples for discussion in this chapter, reflect this situation. There was only a narrow selection of images to choose from.

What I have tried to illustrate here is that there is a public perception of ageing and how it is shaped by the media and how far it represents the reality of the life experience of older people. I have selected examples of media representation from a range of Australian and international newspapers, from newspapers which are intended for older readers and from a popular Australian women’s magazine. Writers and presenters of media discourse select and use images and stories of the older individual in ways that will underscore or foreground the stereotypical image of what society expects of the ageing person. Very often this image is presented as if in opposition to the public image of youth. The images of ageing presented by the media are varied, and this variation depends on where the news item, article or advertisement is to be located and who the supposed readership is likely to be.

What I have found is that the primary image of ageing is of the dependent, inactive, non-dynamic older person denigrated into uselessness. This image is achieved through the writer's choice of lexis, through juxtaposition of an ageing ideation with a youth ideation, through humour, puns, through the use of metaphor and metonymy which all call into play the reader's experience and an assumed social history shared between the writer's ideal of the reader and the actual reader. Images of older people as burdens and dependent on younger generations, as illustrated through the visual which I chose to place at the beginning of this chapter, are realised through the discourse as the cause of future economic disaster. This type of imaging plays into the social perception of ageing as negative and undesirable. This is in opposition to the role of youth who will have to bear the financial and care burden of the older people.

Since the media plays a strong role in shaping public reality the perceptions of older people as active and contributing to society are confined to the 'we barely believe it' category of reporting or to the sections of the media which are not normally distributed to a general (all age) readership.

The increase in the percentage of older people is a reality according to demographic figures from many countries. What should be of concern, is the prevalence of imagery of older people as decrepit rather than actively maintaining interesting and independent lives. That older people are active, independent and useful should be reflected in both linguistic and visual images. Expressions such as 'burden', 'little old ladies' and 'grumpy old men' should give way to expressions which realise sites of power and strength in older people so that the chronological age of a person is not the marked attribute of interest or concern.

We should remember that the media and its audience are part of a complex social structure and are not stimulus-response mechanisms. Advertisements are part of a flow or pattern of culture and are certainly not the only influences on people's lives. The 'audience' is not a homogeneous mass; different audience members belong to

different social and class groups. Factors such as a person's class or family relationships act like filtering mechanisms or protective screens around an individual, and any potential influence of much of the output of the media is therefore somewhat limited. In general the optimistic research argues that the media reinforce rather than change a person's prior dispositions and are capable of satisfying a plurality of needs. In addition, audience members are held to be active and involved in their understanding/interpretation of the media and are not, as has been suggested, totally passive.

Chapter 7

Representations of ageing in fiction

In this chapter I examine how older people and the ageing experience are represented in various works of fiction such as picture books for young children, short novels for adolescent readers and novels and poetry for adult readers.

In Chapter 2, I explained how social practices, including discourse, are both enabling and constraining, providing the social conventions within which it is possible to act. For the writers of works of fiction, this dialectical view of social practice, as both enabling and constraining, underlines the limitations of originality and creativity. Individual writers are only able to create certain social preconditions which make the activity of creation possible. Those preconditions are the complex of social conventions that govern the writing of fiction. Fiction as social practice enables the creation of new texts but only within constraints.

Acknowledging this dialectical relationship between language and social structure, Fowler (1981) claims that there is no reason to believe that 'literary' texts are different from any other texts in their realisation of a culture's repertoire of language varieties. This means that the linguistic analysis of literary texts helps us understand how the text constitutes its own theory of reality and under what constraints it models the writer's perceptions of reality and is consequently understood by the reader.

In his discussion of fiction for older children/adolescents, Stephens (1994) claims that texts are confined to a narrow set of socio-cultural values, so that literature is complicit in the ideological construction of (Australian) childhood and adolescence. Fiction is one of the means through which children are socialised. The contents and themes of fiction are representations of social situations and values, and such social processes are inextricable from the linguistic processes which give them expression. He suggests that most pieces of fiction for children are closed texts, that is, texts

where the possible interpretations fall within a narrow band of parameters. Texts tend to become closed when readers are encouraged to adopt a stance which is the same as that of either the narrator or the principal character. This would, of course, be true also for traditional stories or folk tales and most stories written for adolescents. Texts may tend to be more open when there is a separation between narrator-perception and focaliser (principal character) perception as may occur where a reader acts as interpreter between a young child and a read aloud text.

Stephens suggests that the notion of 'doing good' to the child reader is never far away although what constitutes 'good' for the child may vary from period to period. More recently, however, this notion of 'good' in fiction for adolescents has been questioned through the discussion of the writing of John Marsden and Libby Hathorn, for example, whose themes of teenage suicide, child incest, child abandonment and teenage homelessness have introduced a nihilistic element to adolescent reading choices. Hathorn, quoted in Dean (1995) believes that

Every book has a message, whether it's intended or not. Of course, we want our children to have happy lives but we need them to experience vicariously; we want children to have the opportunity to feel a gamut of emotions. (Dean 1995: 61)

Nevertheless, there is an assumption that there are general truths about human life and human nature which are communicated by the discourse of fiction. Stephens (1994) nominated five principal ideological presuppositions which he claims determine the meaning of all children's books. As far as Australian children's fiction is concerned, these principles are self-evident truths summing up what Australian society ideally strives to become. Stephens identifies these as the basic tenets of Western liberal humanism. They are:

- Autonomous selfhood is necessary to quality of life, and it is desirable, if not essential, for individuals to strive for it.

- Such a selfhood is intersubjective, not solipsistic; altruistic, not self-serving.
- Democratically organised political and social structures are preferable to overt or implicit socio-political oligarchies or forms of tyranny.
- The emotional health of human beings, especially children, is best served by life within some, perhaps broadly conceived, version of the nuclear family.
- Human sexuality operates most satisfactorily within heterosexual relationships grounded on sexual equality. (Stephens 1994: 133)

Of course the major characters in every book will not in themselves be seen to fulfill all five conditions as in the table in the one story. Rather, the five constitute a loose ideological matrix of which the individual components are expressed as topics or as schemata and are given narrative shape in fictions, but at the same time the matrix functions as an explicit or implicit measure of the legitimacy of narrative outcomes. So that the book/the fiction always serves the function of bringing the child and adolescent into the social world.

Stephens also lists what he calls prevalent themes occurring in fiction for adolescents. These themes are:

The development of attitudes toward existence and experience which are part of the transition to adulthood; personal growth, self-knowledge and self-reliance; responses to peer group pressure; ideas about family life; relationships between pubescent children and adults; teenage rebelliousness and challenging of adult authority; issues to do with broken or unhappy families; pressures to grow up prematurely; problems of class and cultural prejudice; problems relating to the development of sexual interest, awareness and maturity; displacement; concern with ecological values. (Stephens 1994: 134)

Any work of fiction generally deals with whole bundles of these themes, rather than just one or two.

I must also stress that in fiction, as in the real world, the social construct of the state of being 'old' and that of the process of 'ageing' are different for different writers/readers according to the context. First of all, the perception of 'old' held by young children in particular, does not bear the same social meaning that it does for adults. The words 'old' in text do not necessarily carry a relationship to any specific age for children. For a child, 'old' can refer to an older sibling as well as to a grandparent. It is the combination of visual and written texts (and the interpretative voice of the 'other' reader in the context of the child being read to). So that when we look at the picture books, the visual is possibly the point of reference that the child uses to identify different ages in the social world of the book. The work of the visual is extremely important in children's picture books, because, as Ventis (1986) claims, since attitudes and stereotypes are formed early, the visual representation is paramount for the child reader. If the character in the book is to be presented as 'old' there is usually some visually defining physiological attribute, such as grey hair, stooped figure or wrinkled skin. And of course, picture books are written and illustrated by adults, who give voice and image to the characters, each from their own perspective, and are selected for reading by adults, who act as 'gatekeepers' for the socialising constructs presented to the child. In this sense, the reading of a picture book aloud is a very interactive process which can and usually does, engage the child reader/hearer as a player or participant into the relationships and the action of the story.

To a child, grandparents are most likely to be the primary older figures with whom they interact in their lives. Children will experience the images presented in picture books and relate them to their own experience of grandparents or those of their friends, that is within the experience of their own social world. While in many stories the kin words 'grandma' and 'grandpa' denote hierarchy of ageing, that is they are older than 'mum' and 'dad', it is quite likely that many adults become grandparents

before reaching fifty, certainly well before self-identifying as 'old' in any currently accepted sense.

Palmore (1990) believes that literature written for children may be even more important than that written for adults in terms of shaping attitudes towards aging and older people, because a child's ability to discriminate abstract values is possibly less developed than an adult's. The understanding of the social value of 'old' people is a construct which is brought to a child through experience of the world and contact with older people and through the language learned to bring the self into the world. Contact with older people is possible initially through contact with grandparents or even great grandparents and through visual images in books. It's important to realize of course, that the illustrations play a very dominant role in imaging the characters and posing elements of reality or fantasy as the child begins to understand the world.

For adolescent readers, the ground begins to shift as constructs of old and ageing in fiction expand to an awareness of a wider social world. In fiction for adolescents, the context of cross generational tensions begin to appear as the adolescent characters begin to locate themselves with their own identities in separated speech communities. There are fewer, if any, visuals. The written words and the adolescent's own experience work together to present the ideology.

In fiction for adult readers, the experiential width of constructs of ageing and 'older' are revealed as personal experiences of the process of ageing. However, the social constraints control the level of creativity possible to what will be experientially believable to the reader.

Picture books

Picture books with small amounts of accompanying text are intended to be read aloud to very young children until the child is able to manage reading text alone. It is also important to note that with a read aloud text, there is what can be termed an 'interpreter' or mediator who has the power to withhold, to alter, to embellish, and to

make use of paralinguistic features of voice quality, facial expressions or gestures, to emphasise any part of the narrative. In other words, the reader of the book, interposes another voice between the writer and the intended reader, the child.

Voices in books for young children, are presented in both third person (reader as observer of another person's experience) or first person (reader is participant in the action). However, the read aloud voice has the power to interweave other voices into the text and thereby alter the position and role of the child reader in the story and in the experience. For every reading of a book, or 'acting out' of the story for the young child provides the child with a social experience and an occasion of understanding the world. Therefore there is a greater level of complexity in transferring the message from writer to 'reader' in read aloud books than there is say in adult fiction.

Fiction written for children falls very broadly within the genres of fantasy (the unbelievable), and non-fantasy, (believable intent), although the boundaries separating these two genres are very blurred. Fantasy fiction includes traditional stories or fairy tales such as *Snow White*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, which are probably familiar to all of us. Many of these stories began life as oral and probably moral tales, and in their origin may well have been directed towards adults as well as children. They may indeed have been a great deal more grim in their representations of good and evil than they appear to us today, with so many having happy-ever-after endings.

In addition to the traditional or folk tale as fantasy, there is also a modern genre of fantasy fiction directed towards children. Familiar examples here are the stories featuring hobbits by J.R.R Tolkien. Also included in this category of fantasy are any stories where animals (the Beatrix Potter stories), plants or inanimate objects (trains, cars), are personified, that is, given human life and personality. Most fantasy stories carry a moral which can be interpreted as the socialising cultural message contained in the texts.

Marina Warner (1995) in *From the Beast to the Blonde. On fairy tales and their tellers*, provides a detailed and scholarly exploration into the origins and developments of fairy tales and their social and mystical meanings to different ages, times and cultures. She suggests that:

The room that would represent fairy tales would lie between romance and fable, jokes and riddles, and its tenants would not only be the fairy tale beauties, princes and princesses so often associated with the genre, but would include a donkey, a goose, a stranger queen with an anomalous foot, and an old woman, laughing. As the fairy tale became established as a literary form, directed at children, this last figure became, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the narrator's most important and visible mask, for male authors as well as female. (Warner 1995: 146)

She goes on to elaborate on the role and power of the maternal voice of the story teller, often an older female (nurse, grandmother), as shown through Mother Goose, Mother Bunch or Gammer Gurton, for example, who act to reflect and mould the child's developing identity. This transforms in modern metaphor to what we refer to as old wives' tales — that is, worthless stories, untruths, trivial gossip, a derisive label that allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time as it takes all value from it. She explains thus:

Women's power in fairy tale is very marked, for good and evil, and much of its verbal riddling, casting spells, conjuring, hearing animal's speech and talking back to them, turning words into deeds according to the elementary laws of magic, and sometimes to comic effect. Perceived with contempt as lesser, they (older or alone women) adopted forcefully the despised *conte*. (Warner 1995: 168)

Older people represented in such fantasy stories, moulding the child into the ways of the world, are often drawn, verbally and visually with beaky nose, gnarled hands or long teeth. Older people are very often shown metaphorically as trees or animals or

birds. The wolf is kin to the forest dwelling witch, or crone and we carry this metaphor over into our own descriptive lexis for ageing when we talk about gnarled hands, or as in *Willa and Old Miss Annie*, hands like ‘a twig that is all bent and twisted and full of bumps’. (Doherty 1994: 12)

In stories written for very young children, where visuals accompany the read aloud text, the visual portrayal of the older person often draws on the physiological changes in the ageing body such as perceived changes in the voice, the longer nose, longer teeth, grey hair and a stooped body, very often using a walking stick. How else could Little Red Riding Hood (also known as Little Red Cap) mistake the wolf for her grandmother unless the ageing face in some way represents a wolf’s visage?

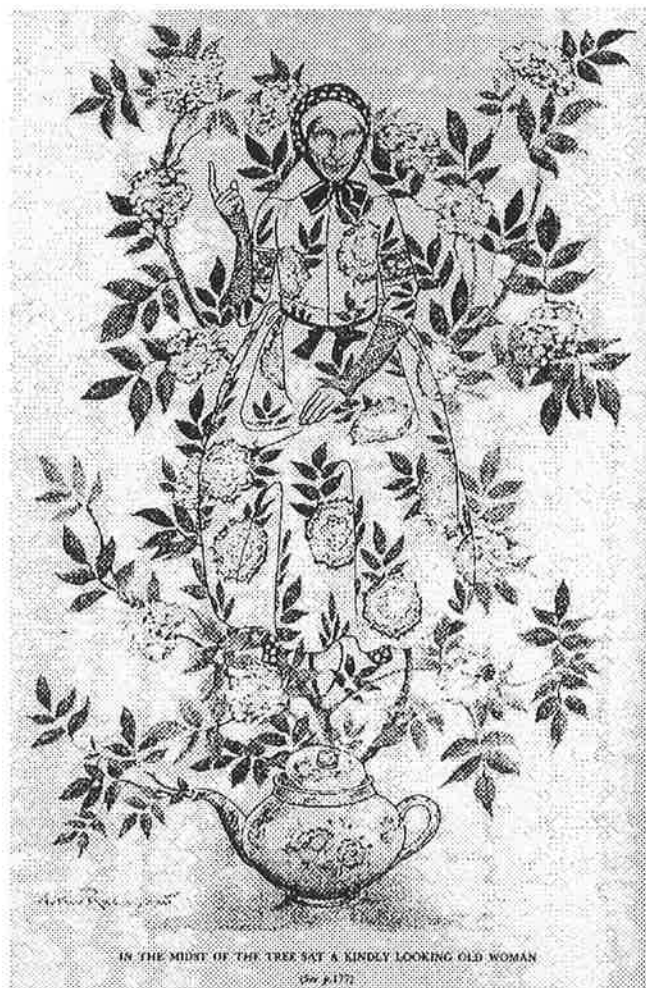


Figure 7.1 In the midst of the tree sat a kindly looking old woman. *Fairy tales* Hans Anderson 1985: 160 Illustrated by Arthur Rackham.

Many images of older people found in traditional tales, are of older person within nature. Images which wind and bind older characters into nature are common enough in traditional tales but not all are depicted as malevolent. Figure 7.1, above, has a 'good' old lady, surrealistically growing out of a tree in a teapot. This image shows a 'kindly' face and metaphorically, she is as straight as the tree and rising not sinking into the ground. So this image is not one of weakness or malevolence but of sweetness and strength.

Arber and Ginn (1995) in discussing traditional mythologies, suggest that it is often old women who personify malevolence, as old hags, evil crones, scary old witches and devourers of children. The ageing queen/witch in *Snow White*, the old witch in *Hansel and Gretel* and the wicked stepmother (who may in fact not be very aged) in *Cinderella* all of whom threaten to harm or even kill and eat innocent children are familiar examples. Of course older male characters are not exempt from portraying evil personas, or the devil itself as we find, for example, in the familiar story, *Rumpelstiltskin*. However, as we see in Figure 7.1 above, not all views of older people in children's fiction are negative. Such characters as Father Christmas and Tolkien's Gandalf, are the archetypal good guys, being heroic, wise and kind characters. If they are of indeterminable age, they are nevertheless, visually represented as 'old' with flowing grey hair and beards.

Such fantasy representations, positive or negative, are not necessarily supposed to reflect reality. Angela Carter (1991), in her introduction to *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, suggests that the very word 'tale', is synonymous with 'lie' in many languages. Children are often exhorted not to 'tell tales' as in untruths. And the fairy tale or folk tale is properly of fantasy or dream quality and not meant to be taken as really true. In fact, as oral tales, the telling and retelling of tales can carry many embellishments and include a personal present voice of each teller in turn. Such stories very often carry a moral where the 'old' character represents wickedness, which unfortunately gives the message that old is ugly and that by juxtaposition, ugly is bad and therefore power emanating from such characters is malevolent.

Very often power is held by the malevolent older person over the innocent, younger person. (For example, Rumpelstiltskin himself or the ‘wicked’ stepmother in *Cinderella*) The outcome or resolution of the folk tale is normally where goodness overcomes evil. The innocent beautiful child/young person in some way eventually is released from the power of the old person. Not all folk tales had a ‘goodness outcome’ in the original version, but modern versions are such that, almost all folk tales including modern film versions, do have positive outcomes. Good/beautiful is best and invariably wins out over bad/ugly. This is, in fact, the case in most modern fictions for children. There is inevitably a happy ending. This was not always so and not all tales have a happy ending as, if this were so, the moral would not be achieved and the tale would carry a different picture of world order.

Chinen (1989), in his research on fairy tales, notes that in about 98% of the 4,000 tales he surveyed, the focus is on youthful characters. In these tales, when old characters are portrayed, they appear as either being wholly good or irredeemably evil, existing either for the benefit of or to the detriment of the youthful characters, that is, not as focal characters in their own right. As expressions of the human psyche, fairy tales are obviously not intended to present a believable reality, but to provide images of good and evil or what we dream of or what we fear. They are moral tales constructing social and spiritual worlds. They are lessons for children through which children are brought into the social world. However, views of older people as victimisers of youth have become longstanding negative stereotypes which, it is suggested, may account for some of the existing prejudice against the elderly. As seen in Chapter 3, one of the prevailing images of older people is as ‘users’ of younger people’s work, or burdens on their energy.

It is not so easy to define the genre of non-fantasy, as all fiction has inherent (fiction meaning not true) an element of the unreal. However, there is a genre of story which tends or intends to portray credible human characters in recognisable situations and who speak and behave in believable human ways. Such fictions are abundant on library shelves and in bookshops. An examination of White (1993) will give a more detailed account of the percentage of Australian books for children which have older

characters featured. I surveyed a small collection of children's picture books. The collection has been gathered over a period of thirty years and includes traditional and modern picture books. The collection reflects choices in picture books for young children from a small number of family members and friends. In this sense it cannot be called a completely representative collection but is still large enough and random enough to provide a variety of themes in stories.

One hundred and forty books were surveyed. Of this number, four had either fairy characters or what would be normally called inanimate objects (buses, trains for example) as central characters. Six of the books had animals being themselves as central characters (but none of these were older characters). Forty-six of the picture books had animals personified or behaving and talking as humans as the central characters and of these, only one had an animal as an older character. Ten books were of alphabet or numbers and so I considered these as books without central characters. For the remainder, books with people as characters, only fifteen had older individuals in the story, six as grandparent and nine as non-kin older person, such as neighbour. So that from this sample of children's picture books, the percentage which presented older characters to children, was small at only 11.5%. Whether this is a quantifiable representation of the place of older people in children's lives today is arguable.

Before I examine texts of fiction for children in closer detail, I would like to briefly reiterate the sociolinguistic background to the relationship between a text and a reader, or listener as is the case where the story or tale is being related orally.

Language determines how speakers and hearers, readers and writers perceive and organise the world around them. Language reports and defines experience. Language is both an individual and a social possession. There is a strong relationship between language use and social structure. From childhood, individuals identify themselves and others within relationships and interpret both verbal and non-verbal behaviour according to the cultural values represented in the language or text. According to Halliday (1985)

... as language is manifested through its texts, a culture is manifested through its situations, so by attending to text-in-situation, a child construes the code, and by using the code to interpret text he (she) construes the culture. (Halliday 1985: xxxii)

It's from this perspective that I intend to examine the texts I've chosen. That is, what are the values represented within the texts, and whose voice is the text using, and how are these values conveyed to the child or adolescent? And from the point of view of Stephens' matrix, how do the themes fit social ideological positions?

As I have already expressed in previous chapters, the construct 'old', specifically when related to children's realities and to the representations in picture books, is a paradigm with very jittery borders, highly dependent on the verbal and visual texts and on the reading presentation, in the case of read aloud contexts. And, also as has been expressed in previous chapters, older people do not fit a stereotype any more than do members of any other group. In fact, older people, with their accumulation of life experiences as diverse as the individuals who own them, are very far from stereotypical. Ageing, or the counting of years chronologically, is not a process that should define individuals. The experience of ageing is unique for each individual and considers the cumulative sets of life experiences/events and a plurality of identities. Nevertheless, stereotypical images held of the elderly by society remain and these images influence the way in which relationships are developed and verbal interactions are carried out.

The portrayal of older people in modern children's fiction, focuses principally on older figures as grandparents and occasionally, neighbours. In modern stories, the older person is not usually the focal point of the moral, good or evil, rather an interactive character who doesn't bear power in the same way as the fairy person in traditional stories does. The older character is usually kind and perhaps wise, or, where they are initially offered as crusty, difficult, slow, ugly or intolerant, they are eventually revealed, through the persistence of the friendly neighbourhood children, as generous, smiling, happy and useful.

However, this contextualising of modern stories may, in itself, be seen as a lack of focus on reality and therefore verging on the fantasy or at least sustaining the stereotypical perceptions which we, as older people in our society, already hold to and therefore through our writing and reading of such stories to young children help to reinforce these images of our society. .

Ventis, (1986) who carried out a similar survey as Chinen on how older characters were portrayed in children's fiction, suggests that although the elderly are generally portrayed positively in children's literature, there is still a concern about the stereotyping of aged characters in books. In an increasingly age-segregated society, it is likely that children's attitudes toward ageing will be heavily influenced by media and literary presentations of older individuals.

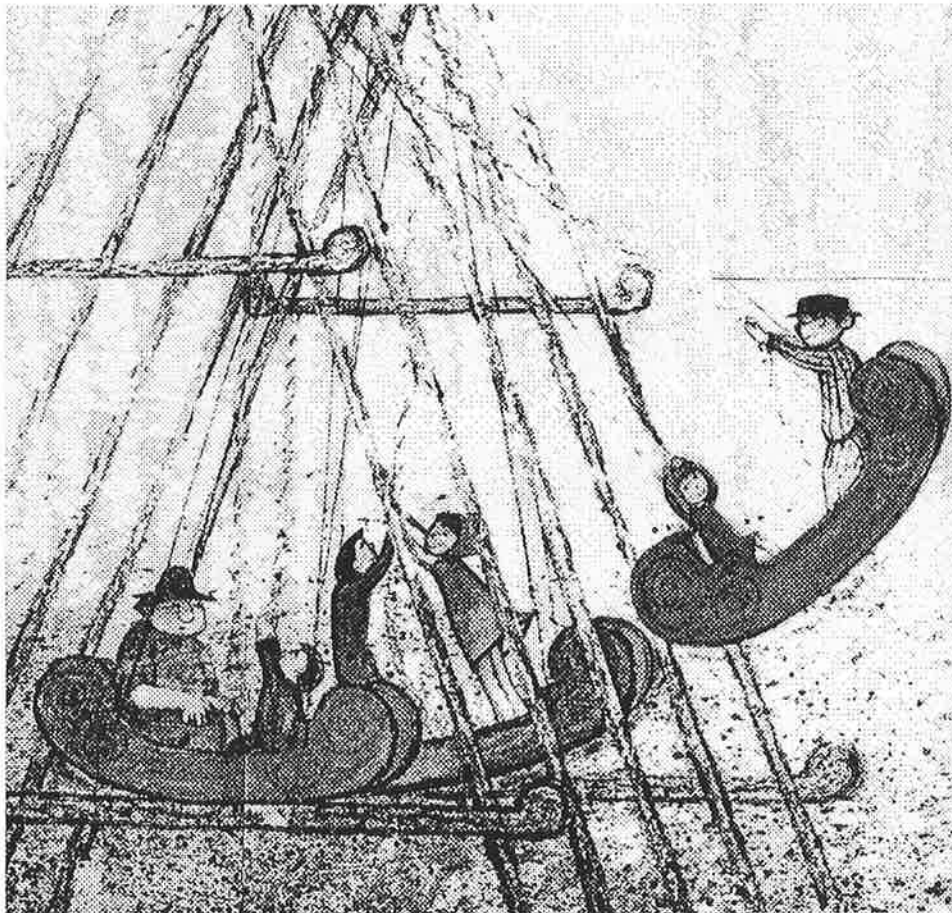


Figure 7.2 'We'll go for a ride on the big wheel', Grandmother said.
Grandmother Lucy's birthday. Joyce Wood. 1974. Illustrated by Frank Francis.

A common portrayal of older people in picture books (aided by visuals which often sustain various degrees of grey hair and stooped bodies in older people) is marked in some way to uphold any of the stereotyped images of ageing such as kind and helpful, belligerent, rebelling against being positioned in society as being useless, or forgetful. From the picture books I surveyed, it was rare to find an unmarked older character, that is the character portrayed simply as kin (a grandparent) in a 'normal' or unmarked interaction with a grandchild, such as can be seen in figure 7.2, above.

The dominant themes I discovered in picture books were:

- older person with failing memory (*Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, M Fox, 1984. Illustrated by J Vivas; *Rosa's singing grandfather*, L. Rosselson, 1991. Illustrated by N Young; *Remember me*, M Wild, 1990. Illustrated by D Huxley; *The web*, N Hilton, 1992. Illustrated by K Millard)
- older woman as kind grandmother and holder of family knowledge (*The rag bag*, A Hughson, 1984. Illustrated by T Lambert)
- grandfather, or older man as story teller (interestingly, modern stories have changed the story teller focus from dominantly female to dominantly male) (*Captain Snap and the children of vinegar lane*, R Schotter, 1989. Illustrated by M Sewall; *Is it true grandfather?* W Lohse, 1949. Illustrated by J Sands; *The whale's song* D Sheldon, 1993. Illustrated by G Blythe; *Storm in the night*, M Stolz, 1988. Illustrated by P Cummings)
- grandparent sharing time with grandchildren (*Grandpa's balloon*, J Randle, 1970. Illustrated by S Hughes; *Nana's birthday party*, A Hest, 1993. Illustrated by A Schwartz; *Grandmother Lucy in her garden*, J Wood, 1972. Illustrated by F Francis; *Grandmother Lucy's birthday*, J Wood, 1974. Illustrated by F Francis; *Through Grandpa's eyes*, P Maclachan, 1979. Illustrated by D Ray)

- older person as brave and resisting being stereotyped and controlled by younger family members (*To hell with dying*, A Walker, 1967. Illustrated by C Deeter; *The little old lady who was not afraid of anything*, L Williams, 1986. Illustrated by Megan Lloyd)
- older person fearful of ageing and abandonment (*Oma*. P Hartling, 1975. Illustrated by J Ash; *Loop the loop*. B Dugan. 1992. Illustrated by J Stevenson)
- older person exhibiting atypical behaviour and breaking or changing the stereotypes of ageing (*My Granny was a frightful bore*, N Newman, 1983. Illustrated by B Cook; *Kevin's Grandma*, B Williams, 1975. Illustrated by K Choraio; *My grandma lived in Gooligulch*, G Base, 1983. Illustrated by the author; *My Grandma's got a motor bike*, J Edmeades, 1982. Illustrated by the author; *Our granny*, M Wild, 1993. Illustrated by J Vivas)



Figure 7.3. And every day the children of Vinegar Lane, and even their parents, listened to his salty stories, helped him work and became his good friends. *Captain Snap and the children of Vinegar Lane*. R Schotter. 1989. Illustrated by Marcia Sewall.

As Stephens claims, most of these stories share more than one theme. For example, *Captain Snap and the children of Vinegar Lane* (Figure 7.3, above) has the old man as story teller, but only after the children have overcome their fear of him as ‘thin and mean and bent and bitter’ and his skin ‘as cracked and as dry as a slice of stale bread’.

One very common stereotype (and prevailing myth) about older people is that they have poor memories, that they can’t learn or remember and that they forget things easily. *Remember Me* (M Wild 1990. Illustrated by D Huxley) takes up this theme in its interaction between granddaughter and grandmother. The text leans heavily on the belief that older people have more difficulty with short-term memory but retain skills with long-term memory. I would like to reiterate from Chapter 4, that this phenomenon has not been shown to be real to any degree of satisfaction. Many adults report experiences of episodic memory failure and there are many factors at play in the development and maintenance of memory ability. Age, as measured in chronological years, normal ageing, has not been shown to be a factor in memory loss. This would be true for both short-term and long-term memory. However, the stereotype of the association with ageing and short term memory loss, persists.

In *Remember me*, Grandma can remember snippets of the past as in what her granddaughter did as a baby. But she has difficulty remembering to put the milk bottles out. She can remember the past but she will need her granddaughter’s help to cope in the present.

‘But where are my keys and my handbag? And where is the bus stop? I forget. I think I’m beginning to forget everything’.

But she can remember the past and relate stories about Ellie as a baby.

‘I remember what a funny, fat baby Ellie was’.

The voice is the older woman's so the child reader/hearer of this story will realise that older people self-identify as having poor memories. While a positive relationship between the two generations is being presented, the message here is based on a negative stereotype of ageing which is not applicable to many grandparents nor to all old people generally and that the older person is becoming dependent on the help of the young person.

Ellie says to me, 'Grandma, I'll help you find your keys and your handbag'.

Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge (M Fox 1984. Illustrated by J Vivas), focuses on memory as a lost but valued ('something warm', 'something as precious as gold', 'something that makes you cry', something that makes you laugh') item and the child listens to perspectives on memory from different older people at the 'old people's home'. He asks each old person he talks to what they think a memory is.

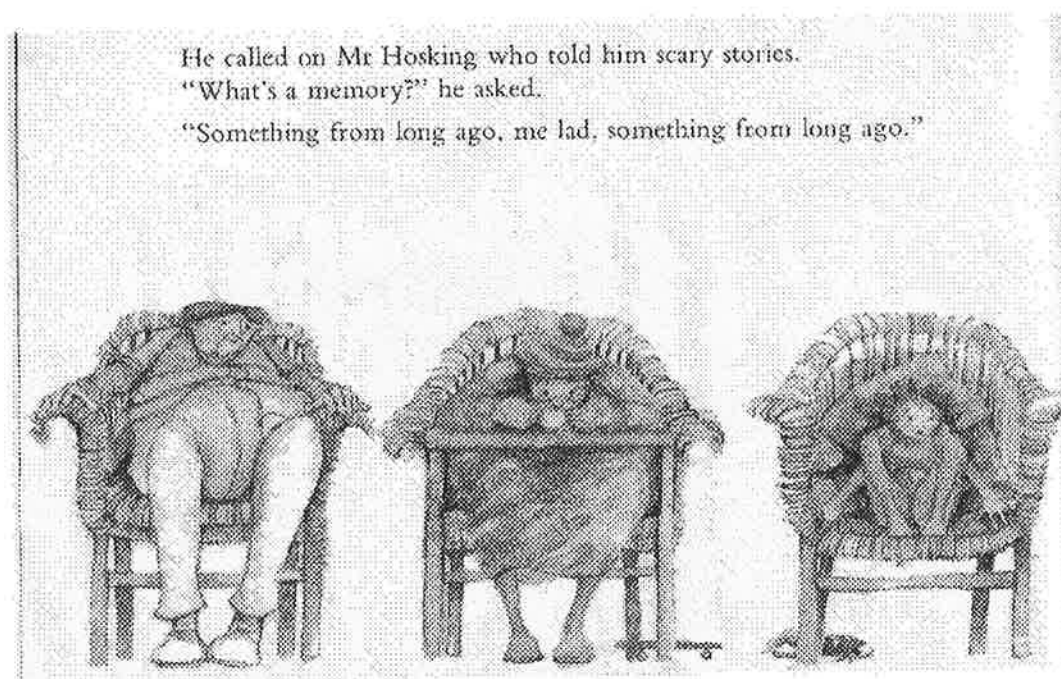


Figure 7.4 'What's a memory?' He asked. 'Something from long ago, me lad, something from long ago'.

Wilfred, Gordon, McDonald Partridge. Mem Fox 1984. Illustrated by Julie Vivas.

I've chosen three further texts to illustrate how presupposition works through the presentation of stereotypes of how older people are presented in read aloud, picture books for young children as a socialising effect. The first story is titled *Kevin's Grandma* (B Williams 1975. Illustrated by K Choro). The story is related through the voice (first person) of one child who presents his view of his own Grandma and contrasts this with his reported (third person) view of a friend Kevin's Grandma. The two grandmothers are drawn with contrasting behaviours:

My grandma belongs to a bridge club and a garden club and a music club. Last winter her music club put on a Christmas program for the children in the hospital.

Kevin's grandma belongs to a karate club and a scuba diver's club and a mountain-climbing club. Last winter her mountain-climbing club spent Christmas on the top of the Grand Tetons. (Williams 1975)

If we examine these excerpts in the light of traditional expectations of grandmotherly behaviours, the child-narrator's grandmother fits the stereotype of kindly, quiet and unmarked. Kevin's Grandmother, on the other hand, behaves in an unexpected a marked (eccentric or atypical) way. This is confirmed when we reach the end of the contrast and find the coda which tells us that perhaps Kevin's portrayal of his grandmother is not true, is imaginary or at best exaggerated.

I'm not sure I believe everything about Kevin's grandma.

The book is also dedicated to 'a child with a wild imagination'. And the story is in the end, not about either grandmother but about the credibility of the child Kevin, who we are led to believe, fantasises. However, by choosing the contrasting behaviours of the two grandmothers as descriptors for Kevin's behaviour, the writer has revealed a conviction that only the stereotypical view of ageing is the believable one, that, as exciting as Kevin's grandmother appears according to the tale, society, represented through a child voice, simply cannot accept the possibility of older people not being and doing according to the romantic stereotype. So at the end of the

story the reader, or the child/hearer can resume a comfortable 'normal' image of grandmotherly behaviour.

The second story, written in 1983 by N Newman and illustrated by B Cook, is called *My Granny was a frightful bore*. Again we have a child-narrator expressing a viewpoint of a grandparent's behaviour and of how grandmothers should behave. This story also reports the voiced opinions of various relatives.

Granny learnt to dance at 82,
A really odd-type thing to do;
And when she'd learnt both tap and ballet,
She changed her name from Maude to Sally.

Some people thought that she'd gone mad;
Relations said 'It's very sad,
She used to be so quiet and sane,
Her way of life was very plain;
She cleaned the house and made the tea
And had arthritis on the knee —
She was quite usual, you see!

But this time we also have granny's own voice offering an explanation for her behaviour.

I asked her why she'd done all this;
She said that I should know,
That grandmas just aren't all they seem,
That though they're old and slow,
Exciting thoughts are going on —
It's just that they don't show.

She said, 'Til now I've done things right,

I've never stayed up all night,
Or learnt a great magician's trick,
Or eaten cake until I'm sick,
Or gone into a lion's cage,
Or acted Hamlet on the stage.
A million things I've never done,
And so, when I was eighty-one,
I thought I'd better have some fun.
I was too busy, don't you see,
To ever really just be me'.

She's never liked the counting game
They make old people play,
Adding years is just insane—
Why count your life away?
If being old becomes a chore,
Don't dwell upon it any more,
The young in heart have lots in store.

My Granny was a frightful bore,
But she isn't,
No she isn't,
No, she definitely isn't,
Anymore!

In this story the grandmother has stepped out of the mold of expected older person behaviour and speech (quiet and sane!). She has begun to think and do as she has never had time to do before. Her behaviour and voice are highly marked and atypical and indeed carry shock value. However, there is an underlying message that this grandmother is odd or eccentric. It is the child's voice which reports her own view of her grandmother's behaviour and how it matches the expected 'granny' behaviour. First of all whatever is written down as an activity that Granny participates in is

newsworthy or it wouldn't have been reported. Secondly, the child comments on the behaviour with reference to her own perceptions. 'A really odd-type thing to do'. We also have the comment from Grandma that she's always done things right, which differs from what she is doing now. This text tells the reader that there is a conventional way of being and behaving, a socially claimed right and wrong way to behave at particular ages. That there is an image of behaviour including discourse behaviour which all older people should conform to. By stepping out of the image, and as has been pointed out, very few older people really fit the image, in other words, by being herself, Granny has violated the sense of cultural acceptability understood by the child. Indeed, the child feels confused and uncomfortable. Again, as in my first example, there is a coda which allows the reader, or hearer an escape back to conformity. But there's a confused juxtaposition of ideas from the title and the coda.

(Sometimes, though, I wish she was the way she was before.)

While I can imagine that these books would be fun for a reader to read aloud and act out the story with the rhythm and play of words, nevertheless these stories each give us a view that while older people behave and act and think as independent personalities, the stereotype is the reference point from which behaviour is assessed. Neither of these writers are taking any risks in attempting to bring about the changes in perceptions of older people to more closely reflect a reality.

In each of these books, the texts present a model of the world to young children which, although it may appear positive and encouraging in the development of relationships, is nevertheless, based on unreal and even negative stereotypes of older people. The referents are that the behaviours of the older people in some way are incompetent, are odd, strange, eccentric, not at all like society expects from older people.

My grandma has a motorbike (J Edmeades 1982. Illustrated by the author) gives a counter-stereotypical representation of an older person (grandparent but unmarked

for age), through the voice of the grandchild, without the coda of the behaviour appearing to be marked. This story focuses more on Stephen's (1994) theme of 'ecological awareness'. Grandma is so active with her car, her motor boat and her motorbike, that she is causing ecological damage to the extent that the animals decide to stop her. The ideology presented is of ecological awareness and grandma is the vehicle for the moral lesson.

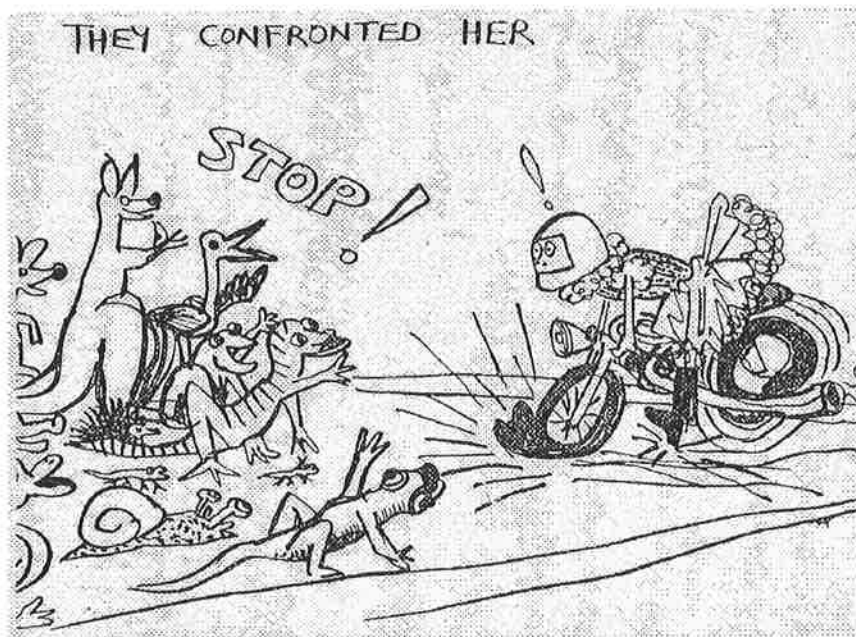


Figure 7. 5. The animals confront grandma. *My grandma's got a motorbike*. John Edmeades. 1982. Illustrated by the author.

Finally, I'd like to comment on one picture book which has presented grandmothers as the diverse identities (physically, actively, mentally) more like the reality of older people we should recognise. *Our Granny* (M Wild 1993. Illustrated by J Vivas) presents assorted grannies who live in assorted types of housing, who have different physical attributes ('thin legs', 'fat knees', 'bristly chins', 'interesting hair', 'crinkly eyes', 'friendly smiles' or 'big soft laps'), who wear a diversity of clothes, jewellery and shoes, who have a range of occupations and interests ('drive trucks', 'babysit', 'go to university', 'play in a band') and have a variety of friends. These grannies are represented in an unmarked way. They are all more representative of the more 'real' diversity of grandmothers which exist in our society.



Figure 7.6. Our granny has a wobbly bottom. *Our granny*. Margaret Wild. 1993. Illustrated by Julie Vivas.

Fiction for adolescents

I'd now like to examine some examples of recent modern fiction for adolescents to see how older people are represented and how the relationships between older and younger people develop. What I'm looking for within these texts are social images of ageing as they are presented to children and young adolescents, the cultural values these images represent, with reference to Stephens' (1994) table, above. According to Stephens (1992):

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster the child reader a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in the culture's past (what a particular contemporary social formation regards as the culture's centrally important traditions), and aspirations about the present and future. Since a culture's future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould an audience's attitudes into 'desirable' forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose. (Stephens 1992: 3)

First, I'd like to explore the theme of tension between generations, a persistent theme in fiction for adolescents, and how this tension relates to the social stereotypes which have already been discussed as they are revealed through the language used in the texts.

All societies experience intergenerational tensions. Different societies and cultures may express this tension in different ratios of positive and negative attitude. But the tension exists. It can be identified through social rituals and customs such as modes of dress and behaviour and in particular through an examination of language. Forms of address, idioms, colloquial expressions, blasphemies used by young and older people for example, all help group identification. As I have explained in previous chapters, there is a desire, specially on the part of youth, not to be perceived as

holding characteristics which belong to 'old'. This tension should not be confused with the expression of respect. Power and respect are not synonymous. Tension exists between older and younger people in terms of establishing power roles, rule making, sharing responsibilities, apportioning the wealth. Ageism, built on the stereotype of old people being 'unable' can be seen as a device for emergent adolescents/young adults to be seen as separate and different from old. In this sense, the belief in the stereotype is a useful tool in assisting young adults to develop their personal and their group identity.

From Chapter 3, we see that the stereotypical perception of ageing views people as in stages of physical and mental decline. As has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, this view of ageing has two consequences. The first is that we treat older people negatively, as useless and dependent. We talk to them as though they have nothing of interest to say, or worse as though they are speechless. Which in turn can convey the message that they are indeed useless and dependent. The second result is ageism as conversational and social practice and gerontophobia — extreme dislike of the aged and fear of the ageing process.

In the story *Willa and Old Miss Annie*:

Willa was afraid of Old Miss Annie because her hair was like wool and because her voice was full of tiny words. The words were so tiny that they were hardly there at all. They were like secrets. And her hands were full of bumps. (Doherty 1994: 11-12)

Doherty engages the reader as a character in the story through the use of 'you', membershiping the reader into collusion in the understanding that 'we' share the social perception that old-looking (and here invoking the nature/old person as tree metaphor) is to be feared:

Have you ever seen a twig that is all bent and twisted and full of bumps?
If you have, then you will know what old Miss Annie's hands were like.
That is why Willa was afraid of her. (Doherty 1994: 12)

The child, who is old enough to be aware experientially and to articulate her feelings, initially fears the ageing woman. This story is in third person voice, but nevertheless, the child is given the words which describe the experience of fear. The old woman however, has the positive characteristics of ageing, she is strong, wise, capable and independent. The resolution to this story (just as resolution to picture book stories for younger children often are) is that friendship, a closer relationship with the individual, overcomes fear and the fearful appearance of the old person loses its strength as the dominant criterion for judgement, while awareness of the old woman's wisdom, kindness and love grows.

Old Miss Annie looked at her and nodded. She put out her hand that was full of bumps like an old bent twig, and Willa held it tight. (Doherty 1994: 26)

In *Featherbys* (Steele 1994) already mentioned in Chapter 3, we again see the initial relationship between the young girls and the old ladies as one of fear, following the gerontophobic idea fuelled by lack of understanding and social ageism.

Before we really got to know the old Featherby ladies, the five of us kids were rather spooked by them. Sophie and I tried to work out why some old people put you off like that. (Steele 1994: 2)

And then the adolescent voice iterates the reasons why they didn't like old people, the Geriatric List presented in Chapter 3 and which reflects the most dominant stereotypical images of older people held by younger people.

They wear black a lot —
They shuffle around on sticks —

They can be crabby and disapproving —
They always think things were better when they were young —
They ask dumb questions about school —
They haven't a clue about computers and VCRs and things —
They are deaf and you have to shout at them, which is embarrassing, and
most of them don't understand what you are saying even if they aren't
deaf —
They have wrinkled and saggy skin and yellow teeth (or no teeth at all,
and then their lips are sucked in) —
Some old people even dribble. YUK! (Steele 1994: 3)

These reasons for 'not liking older people, reflect the stereotypical images which society holds of older people and which form the basis of ageism and gerontophobia.

The Children of Green Knowe (Boston, 1954) also carries this theme of fear of old people. The child, a 'little' boy of seven years, has already in his life, developed a presupposition of fear of old people.

But now his great-grandmother Oldknow had written that he was to come and live with her. He had never seen her, but she was his own great-grandmother, and that was something. Of course she would be very old. He thought of some old people he had seen who were so old that it frightened him. He wondered if she would be frighteningly old. He began to feel afraid already, ... (Boston 1954: 9)

In the context of this story, the older person is a great-grandmother rather than grandparent as in almost all other stories, and therefore the elements of physiological change such as grey hair, wrinkled skin and stooping body may be more believable than in many of the other stories. And indeed this is the description we have of her, through the eyes of the child. However, the initial fear he experienced, is not based on her appearance, as we see.

His great-grandmother was sitting by a huge open fireplace where logs and peat were burning. The room smelled of woods and wood-smoke. He forgot about her being frighteningly old. She had short silver curls and her face had so many wrinkles it looked as if someone had been trying to draw her for a very long time and every line put in had made the face more like her.

...

She rose and, standing, looked much older. Her figure was bent and shrunken, her face no higher than Tolly's own. (Boston 1954: 15-17)

The great-grandmother was bent and diminished in body but not in character or mind. The development of this story makes no further mention of fear of old people, nor of diminished abilities, either in memory or language.

On the other hand, Walker (1967), in *To hell with dying*, (illustrated by C. Deeter) allows her character no fear at all.

We never felt anything of Mr. Sweet's age when we played with him. We loved his wrinkles and would draw some on our brows to be like him, and his white hair was my special treasure and he knew it and would never come to visit us just after he had had his hair cut off at the barbershop. (Walker 1967)

Donow (1994) claims that of all the 'isms' that we experience, ageism may be the most intractable, for the division between youth and age persists as a social order. Indeed, he suggests, the more successful science is in extending the human life span, the more vexing will be the grievances that the old have with the young, and the young with the old in terms of who cares for whom and who holds the power. Again, we see the outcome of this view of the power of older people over younger in Vonnegut's (1964) apocalyptic short story, *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*.

The next book I want to focus on here is *Foxspell* (Rubinstein 1994). The principle focaliser in this story is Tod, prepubescent boy/youth through whose eyes and voice the reader is taken through the tensions of the story. All the other characters are given voice through Tod. ('she said', 'he said' and so on) So it is Tod's perception of the world that we are presented with. The story involves aspects of fantasy and reality which weave together, representing elements of confusion in Tod's mind as his world passes through dislocation, the renegotiation of existing relationships, founding of new relationships and above all discovery of self and developing attitudes towards his environment. If we look at Stephens' list of themes or topics, strongly represented are the tensions between responses to peer group pressure, ideas about family life, relationships between Tod and the adults in his world, his mother and grandmother, teenage rebelliousness and the challenging of adult authority.

The family, displaced for a variety of reasons, moves to another town to live with grandma, who clearly is an independent, active and knowledgeable individual. That is the first surprise for Tod who defines his grandmother in reference to a social expectation of what grandmothers normally should be.

Weren't old women meant to be quiet and gentle with soft, creaky voices? And they were meant to live in retirement homes away from everyone else, and smell of lavender water and have blue rinses. Grandma dressed like a man in old moleskin trousers and work boots. (Rubinstein 1994: 6)

Throughout the story there is development of the tension between Tod's struggle with his attraction towards a youth/peer group

He wasn't sure if he hated the Breakers or not. They scared him but they also made him feel excited and alive. (Rubinstein 1994: 55)

and with his established and reworking relationship with his grandmother and with his attitudes towards other older people.

He looked at the ripped seats and at the shocked face of the old lady sitting down at the back. She was almost as pale as Luke and she looked as if she was going to cry. She wasn't a tough old bird like Grandma. If Grandma had been on the train she would probably have made a citizen's arrest... This old lady was one of the blue rinse and lavender water sort, and Tod felt kind of responsible and really sorry for her. It had been flattering and almost exciting to be invited to be part of the gang. (Rubinstein 1994: 62)

And then later when the gang had actually committed destruction to his own grandmother's garden his feelings of sorrow for his grandmother's sadness and anger can be assuaged as he is drawn closer to the gang.

He was really shocked and sorry for poor old Grandma, but he was strangely excited as well. His mother was right, the plants had been ugly. he found himself thinking, as though he were seeing things from a different point of view. (Rubinstein 1994: 81)

Hostility towards his grandmother's way of doing things is paralleled with his feelings of his own identity and his identity with the group. Alienation of the one goes proportionally with membership with the other and at the same time his individual ego is becoming defined. And he is beginning to see himself differently from before:

Everything was just as it usually was. Only he was no longer the same. (Rubinstein 1994: 129)

And later he is still battling with his feelings and trying to articulate his position:

True, Shaun had hacked down her plants, but they were so ugly they deserved it. He tried to forget the memory of Grandma so upset she was nearly crying. (Rubinstein 1994: 162)

And:

He felt so guilty it made him angry at his grandmother. ... He tried to blame her to make himself feel better. ... He thought back to the time he'd sat on the hillside with Grandma in the yard, waiting for the fox. It seemed like a lifetime ago. (Rubinstein 1994: 169-170)

Tod, 12 years old, is on the threshold of self-definition, independent thought, and the development of his individuality. In showing antagonism towards older people (his mother and his grandmother), he voices his growing awareness of the differences between older and younger. He begins articulating his solidarity with the younger group in opposition to the older people.

There is no visual aid for the reader to develop an image of Grandma. The name (nominalisation) Grandma is Tod's name for her and he also provides the reader with a description of her. He doesn't give her an age but we can infer an age from her own voice articulating her disclaimers and her authority over her own identity and the decisions she makes which support her identity.

'I've been making tea for sixty odd years and I'll make it the way I like',
(Rubinstein 1994: 80)

Other books for adolescents make use of stereotypes of older people such as we find on the Geriatric List in *Featherbys* (Steele 1994) cited in Chapter 3 and this Chapter, above. Failing memory, time to withdraw and rest (Cumming and Henry's (1961) Disengagement Theory) and unwillingness or even fear of taking the step to live in aged care, are dominant themes as vehicles for character development in their stories. In *The house at Norham Gardens* (1977), Penelope Lively has the focaliser, the central character, a young girl still attending high school, express her view of the two older aunts (seventy-eight and eighty years old) she is living with. While they retain memory for knowledge they acquired as young women, their shorter term memory

and awareness of the world around them is reduced. Also they have reached an age where movement and mobility are precarious:

‘Grimbly Hughes sent the wrong digestives,’ said Aunt Anne. ‘I’ll pop down there tomorrow and have a word with Mr. Fisher.’

Clare said, ‘No you won’t. I’ll do it. The roads are all icy.’ (Lively 1997: 16)

And then she speaks to herself, implying that she cannot let the old ladies know she must take care of them because of their frail bodies and their lack of awareness of changes around them. By keeping these words to herself, she is protecting them. While still an adolescent, she is assuming the role of parent towards children, the carer and guardianship of what she judges can hurt them.

- Old ladies can slip on icy roads, and fall down. Anyway, it isn’t Grimbly Hughes, it’s the supermarket in Summertown. Grimbly Hughes hasn’t existed for fifteen years, Mrs Hedges says. (Lively 1977: 16)

Later, her view of their narrowing world and their lack of awareness is confirmed:

Clare left the aunts in the library. They would sit there till suppertime now, reading and dozing, according to the pattern of their day. Now that they were old their lives had contracted. The house, which had always been their base, had also become their shell. It held everything they needed and they seldom went beyond it. The outside world came to them through newspapers and the windows and Clare and Mrs Hedges and they received it with interest but no longer tried to influence it. (Lively 1977: 17)

And one of the aunts voices affirmation of their withdrawal from core social activities:

‘We have been useful in our time,’ said Aunt Susan, ‘Now it’s our turn to sit and watch.’ (Lively 1977: 17)

But they see themselves ‘fenced off’ or ‘boxed up’, not through their own choice but by inevitable changes, the physiological changes they experience — weakening eyesight and hearing and reduced mobility.

‘There is a rather regrettable tendency nowadays to fence people off according to age’.

‘Do you feel fenced off?’

‘Only by the tiresome business of one’s joints going stiff, and one’s teeth falling out, and not hearing so well. Otherwise one is much the same person as one always has been, and the world is no less an interesting place’. (Lively 1977: 48)

In *The fox in winter* (Branfield 1980), a new aspect is added to that view of ageing offered from the perspective of an adolescent focaliser. This time we see the adolescent girl, expressing emotions (Halliday’s tenor) towards both the old man in the state of being old and helpless (revulsion and the desire not to be close to the ageing person) and pity for the despair she sensed coming from the old man’s voice.

Frances felt a sense of panic. She wished her mother had been there to take the call, she would have known exactly what to do. Fran felt a surge of pity for the old man, his voice was so pathetic. And yet at the same time she felt revulsion too. She did not like old people and pain and emotion. She wanted to keep it away from herself, at a distance. And at the same time she felt sorry for him, this dignified old voice, so broken and despairing. (Branfield 1980: 10)

And she makes an observation of the effects on independence when the physiological changes occur and the individual becomes less mobile.

How could he look after his wife? They would have to struggle more and more to achieve less and less. It seemed terrible to have to face such problems when you were least able to deal with them. ... Getting dressed to go out, climbing up the steep path, carrying the heavy buckets when his legs were painful to walk on — all of these demanded an enormous effort. Even the most ordinary things that everyone else took for granted, like getting undressed and going to bed, became as much as a day's work when you were old. (Branfield 1980: 26 and 29)

And she observed her nurse/mother talking to the old people, her voice producing the qualities of 'baby talk', frequently used in medical and care situations, as discussed in Chapter 4.

'I didn't know you were a miner,' said Nancy. Her voice was always pitched high when she talked to Mr. Treloar, and ended with a clear key word. He had no difficulty in understanding her. (Branfield 1980: 59)

And finally, the rage against the experience of the 'old folk's home' where old people, in the penultimate social act of boxing up a category of people into a voiceless grouping, are gathered, is expressed:

The ward filled her with horror. Was this what everyone came to? It was a dumping ground for the old and the infirm, the decayed and useless. It was all so clean and orderly, with spotless bed-linen and neat lockers; only the ravaged faces of the old men with their empty eyes, their white or time-stained skin and toothless mouths seemed out of place. (Branfield 1980: 85)

Fran is recording the old man's memories. She discovers that his memory of his youth and his ability to express himself, although hesitant as he begins to tackle the new experience of talking into a microphone, become stronger and stronger as he finds his voice and gains confidence and pleasure from the experience:

After a moment or two, he switched off with an exasperated jerk of the microphone. 'I can't get used to the dang thing!' he exclaimed.

'You're making it different,' said Fran. 'Tell it as you did last time.'

'I can't talk Cornish into it.'

'Why not?'

'If it's recorded, it's got to be proper English.'

It hasn't,' said Fran. 'Just speak as you usually do.'

'When I was a boy ...' he began. He had not switched the microphone on. He started again. 'When I was a lad ...' He stopped again.

'Have a rest,' said Fran

'No, I will not be beaten!' he said emphatically. 'I shall master the dang thing yet!'

...

They played it back. There were fewer pauses and hesitations than in the first tape. (Branfield 1980: 78-79)

This representation of the ability to learn and experience new ideas and activities with ageing is counter to the accepted stereotype of older people as 'fixed in their ways' and 'unable to learn'.

Other books for adolescents give the older characters the voice of rage against their social position as helpless and useless when their own self-perception does not fit that view. This is the same rage against loss of self that is expressed in the film, *Daisies in December* (1995), discussed in Chapter 6, and in the Dylan Thomas quotation on page x. From *Queen of hearts* (Cleaver, V and Cleaver, B 1978) when, after witnessing an accident, the eighty-three year old man relates what happened after the accident to Wilma, the granddaughter of the old woman.

'It was the kid's fault,' continued Ben. 'When the police got here we told them what happened, and guess what they said?' 'What?' asked Wilma. 'They wanted to know how old we were,' replied Ben, and laughed his

rickety laugh. 'And then your granny got mad and asked them how old they were'. (Cleaver 1978:16)

Ben's rage was because of the presumption by the police that their age made a difference to the value of their testimony as witnesses to the accident. And we observe the notion of older person as child when the grandmother rages at being treated like a child by her own daughter:

'I'm not your child, I'm your mother. Do you think I'm so barmy now I can't make my own decisions? What gives you the right to come in here telling me what to do?' (Cleaver 1978: 29)

Difficulties or predicaments of cross-generational talk and misunderstandings also surface in this story:

The same as always, there were the decades and decades between them, with their separating mists and differences, and, involved in this separation, their two languages, which had never really met except in spurts and jerks. There had been give and take sometimes in the way they used to talk to each other. But this now, this was something different. Vicious. A poison. (Cleaver 1978: 41)

This concept of over-accommodative speech towards older people and the accompanying patronising sense which can generate feelings of rage within an older person, also appears again in *The rocking chair rebellion* (Clifford 1978). The young girl, volunteering to help in the local older people's home, tries to encourage an older woman to join in the organised activities:

'Wouldn't you like to come to the arts-and-crafts room? I'll bring you downstairs if you like.'

She stopped and glared at me. 'Busy work to keep me out of mischief? I used to give my children crayons and coloring books. Do they have any coloring books down there?'

...

Now dear,' I said in that soothing voice I heard some of the nurses use. Well you should have seen the way she turned on me. And her voice got real sharp. 'I'm not your dear. I have a name, young lady. A perfectly good name. I'm Mrs Sherman. And don't you ever use that tone of voice to me again!' She went on, almost as if she was talking to herself, very crossly, 'I don't know why people think if you're old, you have to be treated like a small child. A small backward child. Or a congenital idiot. I'm not senile. My mind is as clear and sharp as yours, maybe sharper. And I could teach you a thing or two, young woman. So don't you come around patronizing me!'

...

She really gave me something to think about, because after that I found myself listening to the way the volunteers and the regular help and even the visitors talked to the old people, and Mrs Sherman was right. I could hear how false and patient they sounded, and — Mrs Sherman used the exact word to describe it — patronizing. Everybody kind of talks down to the residents, especially the volunteers like me.

'This modern world,' she said. 'Men on the moon, space satellites, robots on Mars shooting film, a pace-maker here,' she pointed at her chest, 'but no idea at all about people. It's strange,' she went on. 'Scientists have been so busy learning how to keep us alive longer. But the problem is, they haven't learned what to do with us. So we end up in places like Maple Ridge. Well,' she added philosophically, 'at least it isn't called Happy Vale.' ... 'There's nothing happy about a home for the aged. How could there be. Euphemisms!' (Clifford 1978: 51-53)

And again, from Patricia Wrightson (1984) in *A little fear*, we read of an old lady unhappy with the move to the 'Old Folks' Home' organised by her daughter.

‘Helen!’ snapped Mrs Tucker. ‘I’m not childish yet. I won’t be made a child.’

Her daughter Helen, who was plump and short and anxious, with hair already going grey, flushed and said, ‘No, Mother, of course not.’

...

When you were old, she knew, you really were a sort of child. When the things you used to do were all done, and your body and your mind grew slower, other people took over. They called you dear, or Agnes, just as if you were a child, and kept you in a clean bright nursery, and brought you warm underclothes that you didn’t want. They worried and looked after you until, if you weren’t careful, you were a prisoner of their care. Just like a child. (Wrightson 1984: 6)

And finally, from Robert Bunch (1976) in *Two that were tough*, (illustrated by R Cuffani) the old man averts the intention of his family to deprive him of his independence and move him to safety and care ‘to be fed and sheltered.’ In this story, there is acquiescence as the physical and mental changes bring realisation that he has no choice. He acquiesces but not without first raging at the physiological and cognitive changes which have brought debilitation and subsequent loss of independence:

Then he stopped, realizing that he was arguing with no one and that he was shaking his fist at the world — at old age, at failing strength and weakened eyesight, and a memory that sometimes became confused. It was these things that made him mad ... (Bunch 1976: 54-55)

Adult fiction

Berman and Sobkowska - Ashcroft (1986) surveyed seven hundred works of fiction to explore how writers gave voice to older people. Of the seven hundred, they found that one hundred and seventy had presented older people, which is a much larger percentage than found in children’s picture books. A comparison of the one hundred

and seventy works from different periods indicates that writers in the same period tend to have similar attitudes toward ageing, suggesting that social attitudes do indeed affect the way writers portray older people. They found, for example, more tolerant and sympathetic portrayals of the elderly in the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries (for example, in Chaucer, Boccaccio and Voltaire) than in the seventeenth century (for example, in Molière and La Fontaine).

Social influences, however, are apparently not the only explanations for the attitudes expressed on ageing and old in the works of great writers. The genre of a work appears to affect the way that the old are portrayed. Old people, for example, are almost always ridiculed in comedies. The stereotypes of miserliness, avarice, exploitation, foolishness, (not being their age) and physical decline exist if only to be mocked and ridiculed. Literary convention undoubtedly accounts for some of this positioning of older characters. Stock characters constitute stereotypes which perpetuated negative images of elderly men (in particular men since women rarely have central roles in classical literature) even when the conditions or circumstances which created them had disappeared.

According to Donow (1994) themes of greed and miserliness, specifically attributed to old men are prevalent in classical literature. When Shakespeare's *King Lear* cries out to his grasping daughters, 'I gave you all', Regan replies caustically, 'And in good time you gave it' (*King Lear* Act II, Scene iv). Goneril and Regan display no gratitude for their father's gifts but rather a bitterness at being forced to wait so long. Who then is exploited in Shakespeare's play — the children who danced attendance on their wilful father or the father who was stripped of all by his unfeeling offspring? There is a similar theme running through Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, (1835) where the old man withholds his money and thereby controls his children. In these contexts, the children perceive themselves as victims, just as younger generations today might debate the issue of how much is owed to older people when it is they, the younger generations who have the burden of providing the food, shelter and clothing, as voiced by Lear at the beginning of this chapter.

Perhaps the quintessential literary example of this condition of age as the exploiter is Dickens' character Scrooge. Although people most readily identify this character (and its dozens of dramatizations) with its sentimentalized treatment of the Christmas spirit, its harsh portrayal of the aged exploiter speaks volumes about how society viewed one aspect of old age. In victimizing the young, — notably Bob Cratchit and his family — Scrooge is the embodiment of the exploitative old man.

Germaine Greer (1992) searching for strong female characters in literature, claims that even female writers have deserted the older woman as interesting character.

If we scan the works of George Eliot for fifty-year-old female characters, for example, we find very few. There is Adam Bede's mother, Lisbeth, 'an anxious, spare yet vigorous old woman', although probably not yet fifty, who does nothing but whine and wail. Eliot gives vent to her own rejection of her own ageing in the construction of this character, her identification with a perpetual daughter is repellently clear in the writing: 'The long-lost mother, whose face we begin to see in the glass as our own wrinkles come, once fretted our young souls with her anxious humours and irrational persistence'. (Greer 1992: 270)

And Greer goes on to suggest that the little value placed on older women in literature reflect the notion that 'All old women are hags; all old hags are batty old hags'. (Greer 1992: 270)

Social forces, genre, sex and the individual outlook of an author may thus affect the way the elderly are portrayed in literature. Berman and Sobkowska – Ashcroft (1986) found that negative traits of ageing outnumber positive traits by about two to one. However, the trait most often and consistently attributed to the elderly is a positive one — wisdom. The other traits associated with the elderly in order of their frequency are feeble-mindedness, tenacious clinging to life (invariably considered as reprehensible), cantankerousness, maliciousness, harshness, avarice, goodness, nobleness, loquacity and obsession with the past.

Indeed, there were only two traits that were consistently and specifically attributed to old age alone by all writers who mentioned them. These were the wisdom that comes from long experience, usually admired, and the tenacity with which the old cling to life, usually considered as reprehensible.

In more modern fiction these themes reappear but with different colours. In Patrick White's *Three uneasy pieces* (1987) we observe an old man's melancholic reflections on the failure of age to bring wisdom, and the different view of ageing from different age perspectives.

I would like to believe in the myth that we grow wiser with age. In a sense my disbelief is wisdom. Those of a middle generation, if charitable or sentimental, subscribe to the wisdom myth, while the callous see us as dispensable objects, like broken furniture or dead flowers. For the young we scarcely exist unless we are unavoidable members of the same family, farting, slobbering, perpetually mislaying teeth and bifocals. (White 1987: 11)

I have already referred to the Vonnegut's (1964) apocalyptic short story *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow* about old people clinging to life as an outcome of scientific influences favouring longevity which is perceived by younger generations in the story as reprehensible.

Two old women (Wallis 1994) is an Alaskan legend of betrayal of two older women who are abandoned by their group when hard times hit in a harsh climatic context. This story reflects the same theme as the film, *The Ballad of Narayama* discussed in Chapter 6. The old are designated as disposable, but in this case against their wills, and abandoned, left to fend for themselves during the harshest of winters. Both old as 'burden' and 'humans as animals' metaphors are invoked here.

In those days, leaving the old behind in times of starvation was not an unknown act, although in this band it was happening for the first time.

The starkness of the primitive land seemed to demand it, as the people, to survive, were forced to imitate some of the ways of animals. Like the younger, more able wolves who shun the old leader of the pack, these people would leave the old behind so that they could move faster without the extra burden. (Wallis 1994: 5)

In this story, the two women cling tenaciously to life and survive. Indeed they survive more bounteously than the main part of the group, due to their strength (old people are survivors theme) and their accumulated knowledge and timely recall of survival skills. There is no evidence of failed memory here.

Shields (1994) expresses 'others' perception of the self as having failed memory as 'the existential insult' (Shields, 1994: 136) although she is voicing the experience of a mere fifty three year old man. And she reflects on the other 'insult' of the perception of older people from the eyes of younger (again, even though this is in reference to an older person of no more than sixty years!) and the voice is that of the older person.

... Alice and I stood with our glasses of bubbly and had a good jabber about *The Feminine Mystique*. I could tell she was surprised I'd read it. Like many young people she believes we elderly types have long since shut down our valves and given way to flat acquiescence about the future. (Shields 1994: 242)

And Kundera acknowledges the tension between age and youth in *Life is elsewhere*, (1987) where the old poet reflecting that now as he ages he is on the other end of what he once felt and said about older people. They see him from the perspective of his physical appearance, the body image, not from what he knows about himself as unchanged in spirit from his youth.

The students whistled derisively at the old scholar who had come because he liked them; in their angry rebellion he saw glimmers of his own youth.

... The students were completely unable to perceive the visage of youth behind his wrinkled face, and the old scholar watched with surprise as he was booed by those he loved.

The old scholar listened silently to the whistles and catcalls. He recalled that when he had been young he, too, had liked to hoot and whistle, surrounded by a band of his comrades. (Kundera 1987: 171-172)

The experience of ageing as decline and decay prevails through most realisations in adult fiction. Julian Barnes describes how the experience of physical decline, which is the basis of 'other's' attitudes towards older people, doesn't always accord with the self-image. But we come to believe the image that others have of us:

Jean had often wondered what it would be like to grow old. When she had been in her fifties, and still feeling in her thirties, she heard a talk on the radio by a gerontologist. 'Put cotton wool in your ears,' he had said, 'and pebbles in your shoes. Pull on rubber gloves. Smear vaseline over your glasses, and there you have it: instant ageing.'

It was a good test, but it naturally contained a flaw. You never did age instantly; you never did have a sharp memory for comparison. Nor, when she did look back over the last forty years of her hundred years, did it seem to be initially, or even mainly, a matter of sensory deprivation. You grew old first not in your own eyes, but in other people's eyes; then, slowly, you agreed with their opinion of you. It wasn't that you couldn't walk as far as you used to, it was that other people didn't expect you to; and if they didn't, then it needed vain obstinacy to persist. (Barnes 1987: 139)

In Margaret Laurence's *The stone angel* (1993) the protagonist, an old woman, is trying to escape the pain of her decaying physical self. She finds herself on a beach watching two children play and makes an overture to them, an offer of food. They

look at her, then run away as if in fear. Her voice tells us that she can see herself from the perspective of the children, their fear at her appearance and of her age.

But when they reach the bushes I can hear them running, running as though their lives depended on it. I'm left gaping after them, thinking for some reason that I've underestimated that girl. Or perhaps it was the boy I underestimated.

Then I'm struck with how much I must have frightened them. Oh, stupid, stupid — how could I have been so dull in the wits? They've seen only a fat old woman, a crumpled sleazy dress, a black hat topped (how oddly, for this place) with blue and bobbing artificial flowers, a beckoning leer, a greasy paper bag. Now they fancy they're Hansel and Gretel, rushing headlong through the woods, wondering how to avoid the oven. (Laurence 1993: 189)

Is it any wonder then, that we are searching for the fountain of youth, even if, as according to Byatt's djinn, also referred to in Chapter 3, when the middle-aged female character asks for:

'my body to be as it was when I really *liked* it, if you can do that.'

...

'I can do that,' he said. 'I can do that. If you are quite sure that that is what you most desire. I can make your cells as they were, but I cannot delay your Fate.' (Byatt 1995: 201)

This theme of the ubiquitous search for the body that will not betray us in social encounters is also present in Oscar Wilde's *The picture of Dorian Gray*. (1890)

Sorrow at what is seen as the inevitable loss of body strengths and the perceived decline of sexual and other powers as opposed to the self-perceived strengths which

have in the past made up an individual identity, form the theme of many poems as these extracts from Tennyson's *Ulysses* show.

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where through
Gleams that in travelled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
...
Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (Alfred Lord Tennyson
Ulysses)

And the Irish poet, Eavan Boland (1995) in *Anna Liffey* draws a metaphor of the old woman as river, with a similar theme of the inexorable flowing of the river as metaphor for the flow of time, and with the flow, the losses of opportunities for self expression through loss of sexual and companional love and at the same time the loss of opportunities for language expression for the identities we will never have again and for the language or certain words we'll never use again.

I am sure
The body of an ageing woman
Is a memory
And to find a language for it
Is as hard
As weeping and requiring
These birds to dry out as if they could

Recognize their element
Remembered and diminished
In a single tear.
*
An ageing woman
Finds no shelter in language.
She finds instead
Single words she once loved
Such as 'summer' and 'yellow'
And 'sexual' and 'ready'
Have suddenly become dwellings
For someone else —
Rooms and a roof under which someone else
Is welcome, not her. Tell me,
Anna Liffey,
Spirit of water,
Spirit of place,
How is it on this
Rainy autumn night
As the Irish sea takes
The names you made, the names
You bestowed, and gives you back
Only wordlessness? (Boland 1995: 142)

May Sarton (1994) with her poem *Coming into eighty* uses the metaphors of life as journey and of the body as sailing ship, with its inevitable prospect of decay, trying to moor, to slow the process, but which must keep sailing into death.

Coming into eighty
I slow my ship down
For a safe landing.
It has been battered,

One sail torn, the rudder
Sometimes wobbly.
We are hardly a glorious sight.
It has been a long voyage
Through time, travail and triumph,
Eighty years
Of learning how to be
And how to become it.

One day the ship will decompose
And then what will become of me?
Only a breath
Gone into nothingness
Alone
Or a spirit of air and fire
Set free?
Who knows?

Greet us at landfall
The old ship and me,
But we can't stay anchored.
Soon we must set sail
On the last mysterious voyage
Everybody takes toward death.
Without my ship there,
Wish me well. (Sarton 1994: 15)

But with a perception which does not reside in any of the stereotypes, (which are of course presuppositions of what we as a social group believe things should be) Kundera declares the novelty construct which belongs only to older people, that of freedom from the fences and boxes put around them by the realising of stereotypes. Older people have the freedom to not be stereotyped:

The old scholar was watching the noisy young people around him, and it suddenly occurred to him that he was the only one in the whole audience who had the privilege of freedom, for he was old. Only when a person reaches old age can he stop caring about the opinions of his fellows, or of the public, or of the future. He is alone with approaching death, and death has neither eyes nor ears and does not need to be pleased. In the face of death a man can do and say what pleases his own self. (Kundera 1987: 172)

And Margaret Laurence, writing with her own voice, comments about the ageing process and the plethora of experiences and the many individuals who experience it.

... the myriad ways people meet it, some pretending it doesn't exist, some terrified by every physical deterioration because that final appointment is something they cannot face, some trying to balance the demands and routine of this life with an increasing need to gather together the threads of the spirit so that when the thing comes they will be ready — whether it turn out to be a death or only another birth. (Laurence 1993: 310)

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the many faces of ageing and identities of older people as represented in fiction. In children's fiction both traditional and modern stories the written text and the visual text work together to provide the image. In fact, the visual representation is highly functional in producing the image. Picture books also have the element of integrated voices which populate the text, that is, the writer's voice, the illustrator's voice, the child's voice but usually, coming between them and providing support for images to the text, the voice of the read aloud reader.

A child being socialised partly through access to first picture books and later to stories where adolescents set themselves in opposition groupings to the older generations, can come to see that older people are experiencing physical and

cognitive decline and that it is younger people who must pick up the burden of care and support.

Traditional stories for children appear through the voice of the story teller, such as mother goose, grandmothers or 'nursery nannies' and carry strong moral messages for socialising children; messages about behaviour and language which bring the child into the social world. In these stories, the age of the older person is blurred between the visual and the role, so that a grandparent or stepmother can appear to be old while in reality they might be young. The message is in fact that the wicked person is often portrayed as being old in the visual representation sometimes so old that they are wizened, hook nosed, long in the tooth or bearing in fact the face of an animal, the most often being the face of a wolf. The wolf is the evil persona and the older person is likened to a wolf. These traditional stories are the socialising morals teaching the child good behaviour so as to avoid being punished by the evil character. In the end, the younger person, is revealed as good and good overcomes evil. Traditional stories for children present older people, usually woman, as story tellers and thereby socialisers and keepers of the culture. Old people are seen as either good or evil as representations of the goodness and evil in nature and most often old is represented as physiologically old with stock physical characteristics, grey hair, beaky nose, gnarled hands and bent figure.

Modern representations of ageing in children's fiction strongly identify not evil but particular negative stereotypes as preconceptions. These stereotypes represented in the picture books are based on the prevailing stereotypes discovered as socially accepted and understood in our society. Generally they are of older people with failing mental and physical abilities whose few redeeming features lie in the abilities to tell stories and pass on the culture and the social ways. As the principal child characters and the older person in the stories become more familiar with each other, any negative presuppositions based on physical changes, usually give way to positive relationships based on realised strengths, abilities and wisdom, so that in most modern picture books, there is a happy outcome in the relationship between the young and old characters. As ways of socialising children, both written and visual

texts support the stereotypical paradigms even though very often the chronological age of the older character is unknown and may indeed not really be 'old' as the associated experience of the child may be of grandparents who indeed may be below the age of fifty and who do not self-identify as 'old'.

In some of the stories, the older person is positioned as story teller, narrator, reflecting the accumulation of social and life knowledge, which may be construed as wisdom, telling the cultural history, helping the child know the social life and how it is managed, helping children organise themselves into the society/culture. While in traditional stories, the story teller was usually female or a female persona, in modern stories the story teller is more often, though not exclusively, a man.

When we come to examine the position of adolescents in relationship to ageing, we can see the tensions between the emerging articulation of self-identity and the established set of defined identities of older people. The case of wisdom is set aside, set in opposition and the beginnings of fear and bias show through. Group membership begins alignment with a group of choice. Isolation from other generational groups becomes more socially the 'norm'. The 'them and us' paradigm begins to take shape. The metaphors of burden, uselessness and powerlessness assume dominance as a power struggle takes place. There are also elements of fear, growing gerontophobia and certainly of ageism.

The juxtaposition of the animal world is not just a literary artifice or fantasy. The possible abandonment of the older or perceived weaker members of the group exists, framed in terms of care and taking care of the 'problem' where the needs of the 'whole' assume dominance over the individual needs of the weaker. In this way the power of the older people, perceived as weaker, is reduced and through positioning 'old' and 'aged' at the fringes, pushed out. Should the power struggle be otherwise (as we see in the Vonnegut story, for example) then the issue is not merely one of fear of individual bodily decay and loss of abilities and eventual pain, but fear of the approach of marginalisation and even abandonment. A 'them' and 'us' paradigm will prevail.

The view of ageing from adult literature then reveals all of the stereotypical presuppositions at work in our society and that, with few exceptions (See the quotation from Browning on page xi of this dissertation) ageing is indeed a predominantly negative experience and a negative position to be in. As expressed in the extract from the story by Julian Barnes, one's self-view then takes on the negative aspect which is held by the collective. The search for the fountain of youth, even if only on the outside (Byatt's *The djinn in the nightingale's eye*) tries to convince the 'rest' of society that we are not yet in that despised place. There is sadness and fear expressed at the loss of physical and mental abilities and also at the loss of opportunities for self-expression.

This chapter has explored many works of fiction which portray older people as principal characters. With some exception in children's picture books, and very few exceptions in adult fiction, negative stereotypes of ageing can be found dominating texts and discursal exchanges throughout. It would be interesting to explore how these images of ageing reflect the writers own experience or the influence of the dominant perceptions of ageing and being old which our society holds. I would suggest that with the exception of Laurence, Sarton and White, few of the works of fiction discussed above were written from the point of view of the writer's own experience of ageing.

Chapter 8 will look at the self-identifying language of ageing from actual conversations with older people to identify a match between how older people and the ageing experience is portrayed in fiction and how older people perceive and talk about their own experience.

Chapter 8

Some personal speech acts

‘Oh well, when you talk about your own life it’s easy, isn’t it?’ (Participant S)

For the analysis of language in this section of the thesis, I recorded many hours of conversational speech events on audio tape as they occurred within the context of social activity, that is, observed language behaviour that did not originate from a scripted or designed experiment. My social speech events were what I am going to term visits. The preparation and organisation for the visits has been described in Chapter 5. The visits took place in the homes of the volunteer participants or in other venues of their choice. My methods of selecting participants and taping the conversations have also been described in Chapter 5. The complete transcriptions of two of the conversations appear in Appendix E and the summary of transcription conventions is described in Appendix D. My discussion will focus on the elements of the six broad strategies identified by Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993) as being age-salient, self-identifying discourse of older people.

While each visit formed a part of the whole, in the sense of reaching the common pragmatic goal of gathering age salient self-identifying talk from each of the participants, at the same time there were many smaller individualised goals within each visit, such as, for example, organising a time and date for the next visit. Indeed, with such lengthy conversation at each visit, there are many examples of different genres operating within the discourse.

After the initial meeting with each participant, I taped the complete conversations of each visit, at least three with each volunteer participant, with the exception of greetings and farewells, since these took place before and after the operating of the tape recorder. I had developed a set of questions for each participant which I intended to ask in order to gather basic background information on family, education, interests, and employment experience. These questions were used as prompts for conversation rather than as a question and answer style of conversation. In this way,

the information was revealed at different stages across the three visits and therefore is intertextually unique for each participant. I was able to gather approximately five hours of conversation with each participant. I have consequently made choices from within these extensive texts selecting what I believe to be useful small chunks of text which are salient to my discussions of language as representations of ageing and the self-identification of older people. In particular, I have not used any extracts of text which I have judged to be either extremely personal or prejudicial in any way to any person.

For each participant, the conversation operated to reveal her individual identity and her individual world view. Halliday claims that:

By their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared systems of value and of knowledge. (Halliday 1978: 2)

Since I take this as a truism, it makes little sense to examine conversational interactions as if they were unconnected with the purpose, for each participant, including myself, of establishing and identifying the self within the experience of the exchange, that is doing 'face' work. Indeed, each interaction was for all of us an act of identity since, for myself, I had the goals of my project in mind (gathering situated talk salient to ageing) and for them, their contribution to this goal, their volunteering to participate in research was an act of identity. Our mutually agreed goal was to get to know each other, to chat about our lives with the knowledge that the talk would be taped and later transcribed. Each volunteer had agreed to support me in achieving the goal.

As I have already explained, although I had questions prepared, they were open ended so that the conversation could be transformed from information gathering (as in a medical situation) into narrative and conversational moves of socialising such as with the offers of coffee and food. What to many people would be the trivial

exchanges of everyday conversation (what participant W refers to as ‘jabbering away’):

... disguises the significant interpersonal work it achieves as interactants enact and confirm social identities and relations. (Eggins and Slade 1997: 16)

Clearly, the conversations I had with the six volunteer interactants, cannot be defined as casual conversations in Eggins and Slade’s (1997) sense because of the underlying purposefulness in the goal to be achieved. These were interviews structured, not with question and answer format, but anyway, with a clear goal of eliciting talk about the ageing experience, the personal and social identity of the older participants, and ‘telling life’ narratives. However, while I had specific questions to ask each participant so that there was some small level of control over the context, most of the talk was freely detached from those questions. That is, the volunteer participants, described in Chapter 5 as B, C, L, P, S and W (with myself as researcher participant, M) were permitted, indeed encouraged, to pick up or change the topic as they wished. My premise was that while I needed certain information from them about their age, status, education, employment and volunteer background, they were free to decide how they would present the information to me. My aim was to make the visits as relaxed as possible so that each interaction appeared to be a casual conversation in a way that identifying talk about themselves would emerge as spontaneously as possible. (See Tannen 1984) for some stylistic devices which can be employed as useful strategies in building rapport.)

Eggins and Slade (1997) also suggest that the intriguing paradox of casual conversation is that:

We experience casual conversation as probably the only context in which we are talking in a relaxed, spontaneous and unselfconscious way. We feel it is the only place where we are really free to be ourselves and yet,

at the same time, we are hardly free at all. We are in fact very busy reflecting and constituting our world. (Eggins and Slade 1997: 17)

There was a marked difference in degree of casualness in the interaction experienced with each participant. This in turn is possibly a result of first, the personality of each participant, second, the kind of relationship I was able to establish with each as an individual and third, the context, the situation of the visit.

Two of the participants were older relatives (W and L). One of the visits was with both participants W and L at the same time. Three other visits were with W alone. The context of the interaction with these two was, as it had been many times throughout our developing relationships each with another around kitchen tables over cups of coffee and homemade cake (further acts of identity). We could talk about 'others' who were not present without having to explain what kind of relationship we had with them for example. And we were able to complete each other's turns because of the shared family knowledge:

- W: He knew somebody too where he could leave his car in Perth
so he left his car and um = =
- M: = = he came over here when J was = =
- W: = = in India.

Three of the other participants, although I had never met them before, invited me to their homes where we sat in comfortable chairs, in their environment, again drinking coffee offered by them and eating food prepared by them. I enjoyed three such visits with each of these participants. I would describe these visits as similar to chatting with a new friend over coffee or getting to know a 'colleague', with the unspoken but understood implication that after the three visits, we would possibly not continue.

The final volunteer participant, who described herself as a 'timid' person, (talking about her own perceived lack of ambition, she said, 'I spose I was too timid to have done, had I thought of it even.')

chose to meet in a quiet study room of the public

library where there was no coffee or any other kind of embellishment. The conversation during these visits, as evidenced in the transcripts of the talk, were markedly different from the others in terms of 'distance'. While all the other participants talked about their families and friends using first names, for example, at no time did participant P employ the first names of her family. Instead she referred to them as 'my son' or 'my daughter in law' or 'the children' or 'the American husband'. Her level of terms of address thus added a degree of formality to our interactions not experienced with the other participants. (Refer again to Poynton 1989) I also found that I had to 'gap-fill' (pick up a turn in the conversation) much more often with participant P than I did with any of the others. Of course, this can not necessarily be seen as age-salient but rather as personality-salient or reflective of a personal attitude towards forging close relationships with new acquaintances.

The fact that two of the participants were kin and the others were not indicates that there should be a different set of social practices observable between myself and each of the participants. The two kin members were both sisters of a generation removed from myself. Their shared background knowledge and our shared background knowledge then, is different from my shared knowledge with the others. Also we already have an established pattern of interaction which involves particular kinship practices established through interactions over many years and personal changes. These interviews then could be said to have caught interaction at a few moments of a dynamic process of social identity for all of us. That is, as discourse and social identity work in a linear direction, then we are at this point in the 'middle' of the process since we would expect the interactions to continue after the event of the research project.

For the other participants however, the situation or context of relationship was different because our interaction with each other was for approximately five hours over a period of five months. Interactions with these participants appeared more 'fixed' in time and were critically dependent on each of us knowing the social moves of conversation cooperation.

With the family members there are many possible moves such that W can refuse my offer to pick her up in my car and counter with 'YOU WILL NOT', without either of us losing face because this language, with its full illocutionary force, is understood language of our kin speech community. Consequently, the negotiation can continue or renegotiation can begin. In this situation, W is employing what Kreckel (1981) calls a homodynamic subcode and by doing so, she is asserting her privilege as the older person in the cross-generational talk. This could not be done with the non-kin participants without being highly marked for impoliteness.

In all conversations, there is orderliness of interaction — the feeling of participants in it that things are as they should be, that is, as one would normally expect them to be. This means there is coherence in the interactions, in the sense that individual speaker turns fit meaningfully together, or a matter of the taking of turns at talking in the expected or appropriate way, or the use of the expected markers of deference or politeness, or of the appropriate lexicon. This sense of orderliness could break down in instances of, for example, off-target verbosity where one of the participants could fail to maintain the topic or be unaware of the turn taking 'rights' of the other participant.

As I have already mentioned, I didn't ask questions and wait for a completed answer but I participated in the conversation with my own narrative and my own anecdotes on the topic. Consequently, the conversations appear to be more even in terms of power, although the topic is also theirs to control. Once I had put my question, they could carry the response as they wish. However, within all interactions, there was a degree of accommodation on my part which can be seen from my frequent use of the encouraging 'mmm' indicating that 'yes I'm interested' or 'please go on'. Because the participants were free to choose the topic, age-salient conversation only occurs some of the time. A great deal of the conversation is not age-salient as the themes could be part of a discourse repertoire of any adult age group. The perspective of the speaker, however, will most likely be that of someone with experience in the topic. For example, P narrates her holiday journey on a canal boat in France, telling about events and people, experiences which are not particularly age-salient. Although I

have over thirty conversation hours of transcriptions I have only selected sample extracts for analysis which are age-salient for each of the participants.

Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993: xxiii-xxiv) identify six broad strategies through which an 'elderly' identity can be made salient, either by the older speaker themselves or by her or his conversation partner and which they organise under two general headings.

The first heading is (A) *Age-categorization processes*. Under this heading they consider three age identifying acts. (i) *Disclosure of chronological age*. They suggest that the telling of age is unevenly distributed across age-groups, far more frequently by older than by younger speakers. For Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman, age-telling is mainly of interest because of its interconnectedness, discursively, with issues, of health-in-aging. For example, age is commonly told as an *account* for ill-health or frailty. While none of the volunteer participants in this study related ill health as accountable to age, their experience is not of course in any way generalisable. (ii) *Age-related category or role reference* subsumes the wide range of means by which speakers locate themselves or their conversational partners within specific age-groups or generations. For example, young adults may align themselves with the succeeding generation to an elderly co-speaker; elderly speakers may distance themselves in generational terms from people who are apparently their peers. Again, this age identifying speech did not appear in my samples. However, this did occur in the discourse with the older man, Harrold, in the 'ageing' episode of the television serial *Seachange* (Australian Broadcasting Commission 2000) which was discussed in Chapter 6. (iii) *Age-identity in relation to health decrement, and death* refers to how discourses of frailty can themselves thematise old age. This kind of talk is what Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman (1993) refer to as 'troubles talk'. This is where I would set the talk about health which has an effect on conversational ability such as poor vision and/or poor hearing. As in the following exchange between participant P and myself:

- P: I notice myself now and again, I miss the whole phrases I've been grasping ... at a restaurant yes. I've been — they've been getting terribly noisy too.
- M: Yeah.

Or 'telling troubles' may include talk about environmental changes, such as moving to another area distanced from friends and relatives, or changes in the mobility of an individual, thereby reducing conversational possibilities or requiring adaptation to circumstances of conversational possibilities. Participant C discusses her view of this type of change in her own experience and in that of a very old friend as follows:

- M: Do you drive?
- C: Yes, I do, but not nearly as comfortably as I did. I drove anywhere through anything, but lately I've — I'm — I'm well aware that I'm much more — I don't go to town. I won't drive into town. Well I drive to um, Angas Street to WEA but I don't go through town and on the whole I drive mainly on this side of town you know.

And about her older friend she says (my added words on parentheses):

- C: I notice it very clearly in B's case, having known her when she was very active. You know, we used to do things together even though she was eighteen or nineteen years older than I. We used to do quite a lot together. But um, you know, as that stopped — and now she's almost immobilised — once a fortnight we get a cab — she orders a cab — picks me up and away we go to town and (she) does any little job she has to do and (we) have a small meal = =
- M: = = mmm mmm = =
- C: = = a sandwich in a café, like that.
- M: mmm mmm

C: The same thing in reverse ... um, and I'm determined that she's going to do that as long as she can actually move because it's the only sort of contact she has with the outside world really ... um, and it's getting harder and harder to, to find topics of interest to chat about because my life has um narrowed enormously since I became lame, you know ...

And P observes:

P: ... but I can feel it creeping on me [laughs], some arthritis here and there, and so I realise how difficult it is. If I didn't have my little car — that I could ... take myself somewhere else, yeah, to meet people, if you feel like it, in the street, or take the car and go for a coffee. It changes your whole aspect really.

And later she tells me about her difficulty stepping down from the bus:

P: So I generally go out the front door of the bus if I can now, to make sure the bus driver sees me.

M: ()

P: Yes I find it hard to step to the pavement ... a bit easier — take myself somewhere else, and meet people.

S also remarks about her physical health and its effect on her life:

S: Well I can't work the way I used to. I used to do all the housework. Now we have to pay someone — we have to pay someone to do the garden. Well I can't bend down.

However, I would suggest that changes in mobility such as no longer being unable to drive a car, may not always inhibit activity, merely make it more difficult. I would

also suggest that such ‘troubles’ are not always associated with ‘frailty’ as we observe in the following:

S: *I go to church at Goodwood you know, and before I could get there in five minutes in the car, and now I — I’ve got to go on the tram, climb over the fence, and go down the — behind the hotel, and then up the street. You know it was so easy before.

While W claims:

W: And I walk all over the city. I go up and down stairs and things for exercise.

As a second major category, Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman consider (B) *Temporal framing processes*. Within this category they identify instances of (iv) *Adding time-past perspective to current or recent-past states or topics*. For example, individuals might identify themselves as being a widow or a widower for a length of time or identify other life defining events in terms of time. W relates the death of her husband and the time of her daughter’s operation thus:

W: Oh yes, she had it back when H was alive and that’s eighteen years.

M: Oh yeah.

W: Well it’ll be eighteen — eighteen years since H died but it’ll be about eighteen years since her op.

(v) *Self association with the past* constructs elderly identity by appealing to cohort-experiences, associating with earlier periods, knowledge, and values such as in the following example:

S: *I always wanted to be a teacher, so I just went straight to teacher’s college = =

- M: = = mmm = =
- S: = = you see. And that was a great two years. We — er [laughs]
college was good. It was on the train line. When the train went
over, the lessons had to stop, cause you couldn't hear a thing.
[laughs]
- M: Where was that?
- S: In Brisbane. The Teacher's Training College. On T Street it
was, next door to the um, Canberra Hotel I think it was. It was a
temperance hotel. Very old building. I believe it was
condemned.

And in the same vein, their final category is (vi) *Recognizing historical, cultural, or social change* establishes elderliness through commenting on general (non-cohort-specific) change, such as:

- W: I see you've got a kerosene lamp made electric.
- M: Yeah.
- W: That's a good idea.
- M: Yeah, I've got a pair of those.
- W: Yeah.
- M: Yeah. It's um — I've had that for a long time.
- W: Oh that was all I ever had on the middle of the table to even sew
by.
- M: mmm
- W: I often think of it.
- M: mmm
- W: ()
- L: When we dressed up in the bedrooms to go to dances with a
candle = =
- W: = = Yeah. I tell my granddaughters that and they won't believe
there was no such thing as electricity. = =
- L: = = [laughs] = =

- M: == [laughs] ==
- L: == Oh dear. ==
- W: == And N said “How did you live without television?” I said
“Television? We didn’t even have electricity.

While we all, as participants, share the agreement to work towards the goal, a great deal of the talk is self-evaluation with respect to ageing. Narrative or ‘telling life’ falls into this category of self-reflexive attitude.

Giddens (1991) says:

The individual appropriates his (or her) past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated for an (organised) future. The trajectory of the self has a coherence that derives from cognitive awareness of the various phases of the lifespan. The lifespan, rather than events in the outside world, becomes the dominant ‘foreground figure’ in the *Gestalt* sense. (Giddens 1991: 75-76)

So that when S relates a narrative about the war from her perspective as a participant in it, she is at the same time reflecting on her role and her identity at that time and reaffirming that self in the present as she talks about it to me:

- M: You were going to say something about the Germans.
- S: Oh yes. In Mundubbera they um — every now and then they er — the next day you know you’d get up in the morning and someone’d say “the black cars were up here last night” and a couple more Germans would disappear and down to ==
- M: == like to ==
- S: == concentration camps ==
- M: == to the internment ==
- S: == yeah. Oh that was fun too. We had of course — we had to have air raid shelters — we had these big trenches dug. We had

to have air raid practice you see, so all the kids'd be marched down into the dugouts and there's one little girl, she was about eight — she stopped and said "I don't have to go into the trenches Mrs C" and I said "Why not?" And oh she said "I'm a German. They won't bomb me". [laughs] I said "Oh dear" so =

M: = = So quite a few migrants used to be up there?

S: Oh well it was, you know — a lot of Germans had gone there to live. I don't — I didn't pick up any ill feeling about them in the town. We had — I belonged to the — What did they call it? — Women's National Emergency League. You know you get a call and we marched around and learnt first aid and um, well we had rehearsals — the locals'd turn out and lie in the streets with signs on them — what was wrong with them — and we'd treat them. I was the um — I started as Sergeant Major, I think ...

For Giddens the 'self' must relate to continuously evolving circumstances and opportunities and how we align ourselves in relation to them and how we choose to talk about them in particular circumstances.

C reflects on how her opinions on ideologies and her attitudes towards ideas and people have changed at various stages in her life as she has developed different understandings of the world. So that, as a reader, she has had different perspectives on different writers at different times in her life:

C: *And it is true, of course, but we don't know what it's like to be, say, eighteen or twenty five in 1995 = =

M: = = That's true. = =

C: = = do we? We've no way of knowing. Um, someone said to me recently — I was criticising er, er. Strongly, D H Lawrence. Everyone — you know, there are a lot of people whose — I mean writers — whose opinions I respect, who seem to think

he's marvellous. I don't. Can't stand him. I think he just wrote rubbish. At least, perhaps, I'm beginning to change my mind just slightly, but, um, I have never taken to D H Lawrence. And someone said to me, but um, "But from what angle are you looking at him? Um in the 20s, you know, you were just born — coming to, to sort of, um, see things. Um, you're seeing him from a completely different angle from the people who've read him since". And I realised then that perhaps I ought to see myself more, as er, well more generally one should see oneself more er, in relation to one's age group and then judge one's reaction to things. It may well be conditioned by ... that

What C means by 'in relation to one's age group', I believe, is that we perceive who we are in relation to others and to social views of our age at each stage, considering the changes that go on around us the environmental and social influences which affect us. So that being eighteen in 1920 is a different experience from being eighteen in 1995, and that we can't 'know' another's experience. She comments on relationships with other generations thus:

C: *And um — and of course, you know from the point of view of interests — its impossible for them, um — for them to be the same. And it seems to be so obvious that you talk about different things in a different way to your own contemporaries, from the way you talk to someone from a different ethno- socio-economic side of things. I think that too is pretty obvious, um ...

And W expressed the same idea in different words, also using the complicit 'you' to ensure my agreement (implying that 'we' or 'everyone' agrees with her belief) and even though she is voicing her perceived attitudes of a younger generation she is allocating to them, her personal view:

W: God, you don't ask your — your oldies, you spoil the party.
 [laughs]

On the other hand, B is more positive about her relationships with her grandchildren. She reveals her perception that they agree with her that they share life events together through her use of 'we':

B: We have a lot of communication ... er a lot of fun actually ... as they grow up, and the communication I have with them ... I mean without them, there'd be lots of things I would never have caught up with.

M: Oh, it's very valuable isn't it = =

B: = = Very = =

M: = = keeping up with relationships. = =

B: = = Very. ... And I go out with my grandchildren. They invite me places. ... Um, I'm always grateful for that.

C enjoys observing lexical changes over time and from generation to generation:

C: I came across the use of new words too, new use of words they're called now,

M: Oh really?

C: Oh yes. There are — see, when I first went to England, I came across the word "bonking", which I'd never heard before, I'd never seen before the word, and lately they talk about "rumpy pumpy" instead.

All the participants voiced their feelings about the experience of ageing, and their perspectives on their lives at the moment in relation to others, and about their future, reflecting the social theories of ageing such as those, for example, of 'Withdrawal' or of 'Continuity':

S: *I remember saying — It's funny, you know. I was only in my forties, you know. [laughs] I remember saying to him "I don't

mind getting old, do you?" And he said, "No" Never dreaming that only half my life has gone.

While C had this to say:

C: Never thought I'd live to see 95. It just seemed like a date in science fiction to me.

M: When you're little, you know, it seems like that.

C: Oh Lord yes. = =

M: = = mmm I remember being little and thinking, you know, how old will I be in the year 2000, things like that.

C: Oh God

M: It's approaching and I really will be alive and kicking, I hope.

C: Um, I'm not so keen. I think I've lived an interesting life ... oh interesting for me ... I've done nothing. I haven't been President of the United States or an astronomer or anything like that, but it's been a very full life, and er, I'm told that my heart's a bit dicky, and now.... So if I don't live to the year 2000, I don't mind, nor do I really care whether we're a republic or a royal ...

However her life appears to be in continuity since she is still studying 19th century literature (which she lectures on in U3A) and says:

C: I'm broadening my knowledge all the time about that period.

And W expresses the idea that she is beginning to withdraw from some activities:

W: So when I used to go on my own, it was a bit — that part was awful.

L: mmm

W: Anyhow, I've finished going now.

M: You mean you're never going again?

W: No. ... It's a bit too hard.

M: mmm

One of the strongest stereotypes of ageing is that older people find it difficult to learn new things. However, there is no evidence that this is true, and some evidence that people can learn anything if motivated, if there is a life need to do so. S says:

S: *Computers to me are, you know — you know I don't understand them. They tried to teach me here, but ...

M: mmm

[pause — 3 secs]

S: I dunno I think praps it's getting old. I just can't cope with all the new gadgets you know.

And C observes the contrasting experience of two of her friends, foregrounding that even physiological changes (blindness, for example) and environmental (mobility) effects operate differently in bringing about the changes in conversational possibilities:

C: It's interesting you should say that because most — very much with two — I — this old lady will be ninety this year, I've been going for the last twenty odd years, and I go every Saturday morning and do the cross quiz with her, and she can't see any more because she's going blind, but I read her out the clues = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = and she can still think of words, and um, but she — she's got quite a good grasp of modern affairs you know, what's going on, but um ... and then I've got another one, another friend, who had a very bad stroke — after — in a wheel chair permanently. The whole side — the whole left side is — her hand — she sort of — one hundred now, and I've noticed —

remarkable that she's a very old one, um, you know, her movement has shrunk enormously = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = and um, her gaze is um very, very narrow, the things we talk about — change — it's not so much the use of language it's the er = =

M: = = topic? = =

C: = = it's the topic yes.

M: mmm

C: I — to be quite honest, I have to force myself to see some people because we don't seem to have anything to talk about much nowadays. I enquire about her children and take her the *Guardian* someone else brings me, um and we talk about what was on TV, how her cat is, and things like that. There's nothing in common any more.

And later she picks up this theme again:

C: There used to be a tremendous exchange of ideas ... now there isn't.

I also examined all the transcripts for evidence of episodic memory failure. In over twenty three of taping conversation over nineteen visits, between the six older volunteer participants and myself, in the transcriptions I located the following instances of episodic memory failure and what kind of repair, if any, took place. I also make a comment on whether the act of episodic memory loss caused impediment to the understanding of the ideas being presented by the speaker.

The oldest participant, P, experienced one instance of episodic memory failure. However, as I have already noted, P produced less talk than the others, was less verbose and maintained the greatest conversational distance from me through her use of careful speech which included particular forms of address.

S experienced seven instances of episodic memory failure, two of which were repaired with prompts from me. For example, S failed to remember the specific name attached to some kind of cookware. I supplied the name for her in my next turn and the conversation continued:

- S: *They — they had this wonderful er, er — you know ... pots
and pans that won't scratch,
M: Oh, like Teflon?
S: Teflon. Yeah, they're much — very good ...

W experienced seven instances of episodic memory failure, one of which was self-repaired and one of which was repaired with a prompt from me.

- W: I said to her, you know, would she like to come out one day and
we'll get on um, a bus that goes, er — the um, oh, what do you
call it — where you get off it — off the road onto these —
O'Bahn = =
M: = = O'Bahn = =
W: = = Oh the O'Bahn

And L experienced one instance of episodic memory failure but managed to retrieve the word and self-repair within the same turn after a brief pause:

- L: They had an afternoon show with um, what's her name, lives
out at Seacliff um, ... oh N, N W.

B and C both experienced one instance of episodic memory failure without repair. For example, C was talking about her teacher education experience and the particular course she did for which the name eludes her.

- C: Then I did my um, what do you call it? My um, my teaching
thing, ah, um,

- M: Practical teaching, is it?
 C: No that was a [laughs] — um no, you know, the um ... two year course that you do.
 M: mmm mmm What is it called ...pressure cooker?
 C: I'll think of it in a moment.

She didn't think of it in a moment, and nor did she worry about it but continued with an explanation and description of the course she had taken. The loss of the name of the course she was taking didn't impede my understanding of her narrative. In this instance, the episodic memory failure had no negative effect on the success of the interaction.

In one instance of conversation between three people, all three worked together to bring about repair. We were talking about train journeys in Australia:

- L: It's mainly the um, um = =
 M: = = the Ghan? = =
 W: = = no = =
 L: = = no = =
 W: = = no the — it was the one that goes to the west.
 M: Indian Pacific
 L: Indian Pacific that now goes = =
 W: = = () = =
 L: = = right up to Brisbane = =
 M: = = mmm = =
 L: = = and through Melbourne without changing you know.
 W: mmm See, it never went to Melbourne.
 L: No.

There appears to be no age-related significance in these few examples of episodic memory failure. What is to be noted is that, in no instances did the memory failure interfere with the meaning of the discourse or in achieving satisfactory

communication. In fact attempts to repair, successful or not, can be seen as contributing to the overall cooperative effort to achieve communication success.

I examined the transcripts carefully for instances of off-target verbosity and although there are strong links to verbosity (S says “You don’t have to encourage me to talk, do you?”), there is no evidence of either off-target verbosity nor of loss of topic control. It is more likely that such language behaviour would be found mainly in older cohorts (as referred to in Chapter 1 as the ‘very old’) who are experiencing high levels of anxiety or even illness, than in this small sample.

I also found it interesting that two of the participants (P and S) revealed that they enjoy acts of identity through letter writing.

P: But I write a lot of letters to friends = =

M: = = mmm = =

P: = = which I like doing.

M: Do you keep your letters? I mean do you keep letters?

P: Yes I do keep copies of the ones I write.

M: Oh, do you? I do too [laughs]

P: Well it’s nice to read what you’ve written yourself, isn’t it?
You’re surprised at what you’ve said.

And S explained at length her letter writing experience:

S: *I write a lot of letters. In fact my daughters and I keep half the post office going. One of the ladies that knows me in there said I ought to get a rebate.

M: Well, good. [laughs] = =

S: = = But they don’t — they can’t. But er ...

M: No they don’t do that. But, er, yeah, who do you write to?

S: Oh well, I can’t type so well now. Make too many mistakes — until then — like I used to sort of keep a family — my mother

started it — she used to have a family letter and then when she died I — we, my sisters and I, kept it on, and then, er, the sister next to me, she died, so there's only — there's two of us write, the third one never writes except once in a blue moon. ...

Of course, the four volunteer participants from U3A were accustomed to researching and writing talks to present to interested groups. The act of putting thoughts on paper was not an unusual experience for them. This act of writing letters and writing lectures and talks and indeed delivering lectures, would form a strong part of each one's self-identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at some of the extracts from the transcripts of conversations between myself and six volunteer participants. I have only been able to examine a small portion of the total, but I have chosen what I believe to be exemplars of various language representations of the ageing experience and individual self-identity. The voices are those of the older women who participated in the conversations. They express their views on their own bodies, sometimes falling into the category of 'troubles telling'. They express their views on their relationships with other generations and how they see that being managed. They express their views (about themselves or their world) on the decline or otherwise of cognitive functioning, of mobility, of the ability to learn and contribute to society. They talk about how they feel about ageing. They narrate their own life stories and events they have experienced which constitute their own identity. Their views reveal both conformity and non-conformity with socially accepted stereotypical views of ageing in our society.

They experience what is termed episodic memory failure, but this does not appear to have affected the cooperation or the success of any of the conversations. In addition, there is no evidence of off-target verbosity. Because I have tried to engage a cohort of participants who are active in their community (volunteers and speakers) issues of

power and status are not largely evident in these exchanges, although there are degrees of conversational distance between myself and different individuals which could be an effect of personal speech style or of failure on my part to create the optimum environmental context.

It seems to me that trying to find a match from the discourse or exchanges which took place in these individual speech events which were the acts of identity for all six of us, to the stereotypical images provided through the media and through fiction is not really possible. Of course, while words belong to the whole community, as we choose the words we want to place together to give our thoughts meaning, they become our voice. It is then difficult to identify from these words which are the voices of the individuals and which are other voices other texts being reproduced by the speakers. However, since the expressions of ageing identity are different for all participants, this does lend itself to the interpretation that we do all experience the process differently, we all accumulate diverse experiences throughout our lives and we all form our own identity and choose different ways of expressing it.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

In this chapter, I'll first summarise the main points of each of the previous chapters. Then I'll reiterate the three research questions. And finally I'll respond to the three research questions, drawing on the findings garnered from the primary and secondary data.

Summary of previous chapters

In Chapter 1, I've described the constructs 'normal', 'ageing' and 'old' which are central to this study. Although there are no 'fixed' criteria for measuring 'normal', as applied to ageing, I have followed Geschwind (1980) in assuming the construct 'normal' in ageing to indicate a situation where language and cognition abilities are unaffected as a result of illness or accident, that is, non-aphasic affected language use. This implies that I have not examined language use with ageing from the perspective of aphasia-related cognitive change.

In this study I have assumed 'ageing' to be a process and 'old' to indicate a state. In order not to be unduly restrictive in my perspective and presentation of both of these constructs, I have taken on the meanings of these two words as they are allocated by different speakers or writers, hearers or readers in whichever situation or context I am examining. Differences may occur, not only in the chronological perception of 'ageing' or 'old', but in the cognitive or functional perceptions of 'old', for example. Therefore, the words are given shape through social meaning or intention.

In Chapter 2, I've outlined some of the theories of language, beginning with a discussion of the meanings and value of signs, the meaning of text and context and the role of language, including metaphor and metonymy, in constructing our realities, in establishing, sustaining and changing our concepts, and of categories and stereotypes.

Of paramount importance are the language theories which show that our view of ourselves, our self-identity and our social identity, and our view of the world around us is shaped by our experiences and how we use language to express these experiences. In this way, language not only expresses what we know and experience but it also plays an important role in shaping the world around us. It's crucial to note that cultural, social, ideological and behavioural perceptions are shaped from childhood. Children are socialised into a family, a community and a world through their interaction with their social and physical environment.

Since it is through language that we come to identify ourselves, and realise the world around us, the words and expressions which are used around us, can shape our beliefs, our ideologies and perceptions. From this experience we take on social constructs of everyday things and ideas. We form categories and we form semantic constructions for dealing with our thoughts, activities and interactions. We develop the use of truth making language, of metaphor and imagery, all of which we integrate into our semantic field, so that metaphors become different ways of representing and understanding our relationships with people and the world and of sharing meanings in our social world. From there we gather ideology (such as, for example, our concepts of ageism and gerontophobia) into social practice which can be sustained or changed through language.

Chapter 3 has provided a historical overview of the social construction of ageing and provided a more detailed examination of the concepts of ageism, gerontophobia and the perennial desire for the 'fountain of youth'. I have also discussed, in more detail, some of the prevalent theories of ageing such as Disengagement Theory, Activity Theory, Role Theory, Continuity Theory and the Theory of the Third Age. Other developments or changes which occur in language behaviour as a result of education, moving home, the death of cohort members, changing employment or retiring from employment, losing mobility and the environmental effects of isolation and poorly structured services, are also discussed. Such changes may either encourage or restrict opportunities for developing relationships and for being involved in social communication.

In Chapter 3 I have also included some examples of ageing humour from a variety of sources, accompanied by theories of the role of humour in the development of social identity and the maintenance of stereotypes and ageist attitudes. It is also suggested that older people, when confronted by the stereotypes invested in them, eventually can come to fit the stereotype in all areas of behaviour, including language behaviour and that ageism through humour has a strong social role in sustaining this.

Chapter 4 has provided an overview of existing research into the relationship of language and ageing. I've begun with a discussion on the research into the issue of sensory (vision and hearing, for example) impairment in ageing and the subsequent possible difficulties for satisfactory communication. Following this, I have a discussion of the possible effects of cognitive changes, how the research in this area has been conducted and how it is as yet inconclusive with respect to the paradigm of decline and decrement in ageing.

One of the most valuable concepts to have emerged in the last couple of decades in language and ageing research, connects the theory of the Theoretical Communicative Predicament of Ageing (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci and Henwood 1986) with Speech Accommodation Theory (Coupland, Coupland, Giles and Henwood 1988). The Theoretical Communicative Predicament of Ageing describes the situation where younger people, recognising ageing signs (grey hair, for example) in others, expect older people to have declining conversational abilities, and subsequently younger people may 'accommodate' their speech or, indeed, avoid interacting with older people altogether. Accommodation may be in the form of changes in speech from younger to older individuals in such a way that the speech is slower and/or louder or the younger speaker may use a simplified and often patronising lexis which is often referred to as 'elderspeak', 'secondary baby talk', or 'motherese'. This kind of exchange is often found in medical situations, according to research, but can also be found in other domains of service such as in banks or shops. Research has also shown that this situation of 'over-accommodation' towards older speakers occurs in inter-generational talk as

does 'under-accommodation' where little effort is made by one conversation partner to adjust to the conversational condition of the other.

It is also suggested that individuals who are perceived in a stereotypical manner and who are subsequently on the receiving end of attitudes and behaviour directed at the stereotypical images, eventually come to fit those images. For older people, this can mean they will fit the expected 'decrement and decline' paradigm.

Finally in Chapter 4, I have examined aspects of the theory of Off-Target Verbosity (Gold and Arbuckle 1995), which is the condition where individuals, for whatever reason (at this stage not determined through research), miss the speech cues of their communication partner and are unable to maintain a coherence and relevance in their speech. Off-target verbosity is not indicated as being the same as verbosity (the ability to talk easily and confidently) but appears where the conversation is poorly directed through lack of topic control or failure to allow the conversation partner appropriate turn taking 'rights'. Off-target verbosity is reported to occur mostly in 'very old' individuals, although there is very little clear documentation on causes of this condition. It has been suggested that Off-target verbosity could result from physiological changes such as poorer hearing which could cause 'speaking exchange cues' to be missed. Another possible cause could be environmental, where the speaker, due to decreased opportunities to exchange talk and reflect self-identity, perhaps due to isolation, simply over-talks when the opportunity for conversation arises.

In Chapter 5, I've described my methods of data collection and the system of linguistic analysis used in this research. I collected, described and analysed data from print (news items and advertising) and electronic media (television and film) and from children's, adolescent and adult fiction (novels and poetry). I have analysed these examples from the point of view of the way ageing and older people are represented, thereby contributing to, sustaining or changing the social view of the ageing experience.

Since my examination of previous research (Chapter 4) into aspects of ageing indicated that much of it had been approached through the 'decline is expected' paradigm, I decided to approach the collection of primary data from a 'decline is not expected' paradigm. As explained in Chapter 5, I asked for volunteers from the wider community rather than from a specific communication domain such as a medical setting. I interviewed six volunteer participants (two were relatives and four were participants who responded to my notice in the newsletter of the University of the Third Age) for several hours each over a number of what I call 'visits'. The analysis of the self-identifying age salient language in the transcripts of the recorded conversations during the visits, provided the material with which I could observe whether or not there is a match between the representational language and images of ageing and the self-identifying talk of the participants.

Chapter 6 has examined some representations of older adults as portrayed in the media. These have included both news items, news stories, advertising and fictionalised portrayals of older characters in film and television entertainment such as soap operas.

News items are often related to issues of economic or social policy. The metaphors used in such discourse on ageing is frequently that of 'burden' or 'problem'. Such discourse both determines and sustains the stereotypical view of older people as unproductive and dependent on younger generations. In the news stories, older individuals are also often portrayed in a highly marked way by exhibiting unexpected or atypical behaviour such as riding a motorbike at the age of ninety-five or sky diving at the age of seventy-five and so on. Both of these examples show older adults as being 'counter stereotypical' to the usual stereotypes of ageing. The newsworthiness of such stories depends on our socially accepted presuppositions of the stereotypes of older people as being slow, frail, ill and leading unexciting lives. Without our complicit acceptance of these negative stereotypes, the stories would not be newsworthy.

In advertising, older people are rarely present. Older bodies are not usually seen as being attractive enough to sell products. Therefore they are rarely depicted visually in advertisements. Products for older people (or those aware of their ageing) are usually sold using the image of a younger, more beautiful person (most usually female) since such products are often being advertised as youth enhancing, younger image making products. Where images of older people do appear in advertisements they are usually shown as dependent or ill and are used to advertise community projects, security or retirement villages.

Occasionally, older characters being stereotyped in a film or on television, exhibit atypical or marked behaviour, such as observed in *Daisies in December*, where the older couple realise a sexual/romantic union. In spite of such occasional marked portrayals, most of the images represented in television soap operas or serialised stories or in film match the negative stereotypes of older people. Most of the research into representations of older characters depicted in the media indicates that they are represented as experiencing memory loss, as being dependent, as being asexual and cranky (although crankiness can also be interpreted as raging against being stereotyped). In television, older people are usually foregrounded through one episode of a serialised soap opera, since soap operas often work thematically, and the ageing condition is a theme which is usually explored within one episode, after which those older characters resume a low profile and are not integrated into the principal story line. So that, it is likely that television and film representations of ageing and old, work at reinforcing the negative stereotypical images held by our society.

One of the issues which arises in the examination of texts produced for the media and similarly in fiction, that is, scripted texts which are prescribed by an author, is the issue of author control. What is written and prescribed for media is frozen text as opposed to what is uttered in a conversational context, which is not pre written or prescribed. Different organisational conventions are used. It would seem that very little media or fiction discourse follows the 'natural' flow of conversation. It is rarely conversation in

action, therefore it neither contributes to the construction of the identity of the speakers nor does it contribute to the structure of a relationship. The scripted discourse, nevertheless, does interactive work through being received by the listener, viewer. Since it is unlikely that the writers are producing script from the point of view of their own experience of ageing, they are surely invoking the socially constructed stereotypical view of the ageing experience. In this way, the identities which have been constructed for media entertainment help to form and sustain the stereotypes of ageing. However, it should be noted that the overall presence of older people in the media, whether following a stereotype or whether indicating marked behaviour, remains low when we consider the increasing percentage of older people in our society.

Two other films I've discussed in Chapter 6, one a film of traditional life in Japan, and the other a futuristic view of a highly controlled society, examine issues of older people as burden on society. In each of these films, the society in question can not sustain the older people because they are perceived as being unproductive. They are then cast out from the group when they reach a designated age. This is ageist practice in social policy and is also reflected in hegemonic ways in society through decision making with respect to the social and economic value of older people. A prevalent attitude is that since older people are perceived as being unproductive, they should not expect an even share of the common wealth. Arguments in favour of abandonment of the aged can be, and are seriously entertained within the social ideology.

Chapter 7 has explored the images of ageing through fiction including where appropriate, visual images. Firstly, picture books for young children act as one way in which children are brought into the social world, through both the verbal and visual representations. In traditional tales, older people, both male and female, are represented as either very good or very evil and the stories represent certain moral exemplars on which to model social behaviour. Older people are often visually represented as being close to nature, with animal like body representations and limbs represented as gnarled as trees. In traditional tales, the story teller is often an older female character sometimes

animal, sometimes old nurse or grandmother who has the role of bringing the child into the social world, teaching about the social structure and helping the child derive meaning from the world around.

In modern picture books, older people such as grandparents or neighbours, are represented much more benignly. The grandparent is just the grandparent, not identified by age but through visual representation and through the dialogue which takes place between the child protagonist and the grandparent characterised and through the interpretation of the 'read aloud' reader. Older people represented in picture books are almost always kind, although the stereotypes of our society dominate. Failing memory, slowing bodies and dependency are represented characteristics. However, more recently, images of grandmother on a motorbike or travelling the world, counter-stereotypes or older people exhibiting atypical behaviour, have been produced for children to experience. In modern stories, the older person is also positioned as storyteller, more often, though not exclusively male, reflecting the accumulation of social life and knowledge which may be construed as wisdom — relating how to behave in the community, helping the children organise themselves into the culture.

In fiction written for older children or adolescents, the constructs of ageism and gerontophobia appear more frequently. There is an emergent hostility towards ageing from the perspective of the adolescent as the younger person begins self-identifying with peer groups and moves away from closer relationships with older people. The language (including metaphorical language) used to describe these social moves reflects the negative stereotypes of ageing observed within the wider community.

The predominant view of ageing revealed in adult literature is that ageing is indeed a negative experience and a negative position to be in. Leaning heavily on negative stereotypes, most of the discourse is in fact irredeemably sad and weighted with loss. There is loss of status, loss of partners, loss of physical strength, loss of words. Self-identity, as represented through adult fiction, reflects what we expect others to see of us.

Even the stereotype of wisdom in ageing does not prevail. With some exceptions, (Laurence 1993, White 1987 and Sarton 1994, are examples I have used) the voice in fiction does not come directly from personal experience of ageing. The ideologies presented in works of fiction predominantly arise out of a social perception of the experience of ageing. One's self-view then takes on the negative aspect which is held by the collective. The fountain of youth, even if only an external illusion, becomes the vehicle through which we can convince others that we are not yet in that despised site of old age. To look young is to be perceived by the group as being still powerful and able.

Chapter 8 presented an analysis of the transcripts of discourse gathered during visits with the six volunteer participants. I selected extracts which are age salient and which reflect the attitudes and identities of the participants towards aspects of ageing. No particular agreement on how ageing should be perceived has emerged. Each participant identified herself in her own words, strongly nominalise with 'I', as part of her own process of ageing. Each participant sees herself, her body and her life story in a personal way, without recourse to 'matching' or not 'matching' particular stereotypes. This is to be expected, since ageing is not a group defining or limiting paradigm but a dynamic process for everyone. Consequently, we should expect the language we use to talk about our lives to be presented in a unique way.

The interview/visit must be seen as a complex social act in itself. The events were not merely casual conversation between partners with established relationships. Each visit entailed pragmatic elements of various genres such as making arrangements, offering and sharing food and drink, getting to know you and achieving a goal of identifying age salient talk. Each participant offered to cooperate in the interaction process. In the discourse produced through my interactions with older people we can observe their contributions first hand. The process is for them both an opportunity for self-identification and at the same time participation in a voluntary activity of contributing to social research. This data collection, therefore, was not approached from the paradigm of

‘deficit and decline’, but from within a model of ‘contribution to social well being’ both of the self and of the community.

Reiteration of and response to the research questions.

The data collected in this research has been able to weave strands of observation of language behaviour from many different sources in order to examine social and individual perceptions and expressions of the experience of ageing. This research contained three interrelated elements.

- Linguistic self-identity of the elderly

This thread explored how the elderly use language to identify themselves as either belonging to a group (identified by age) or as distinct from other groups (identified by age).

The research question is: What are the linguistic markers of this identity?

- Linguistic representation of the elderly

This strand explored the many language representations of the elderly as demonstrated specifically by the media and through literature.

The research question is: Do stereotypical representations match the observed data?

- Communication networks of the elderly

This component was concerned with the observation and analysis of the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of communication behaviour of the elderly. It has involved an examination of some inter- and intra- group communication networks which engage the elderly, with an observation of any differences in discourse between these networks.

The research question is: Does the language of the elderly reflect their position in selected communication networks?

In response to the first research question, I refer back to Chapter 8, which details the self-identifying speech acts of the six volunteer participants. I repeat here the six strategies through which an older person's identity can be made salient through conversation. (Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman 1993) The first of these is '*Disclosure of chronological age*' which is discursively connected to talk about issues where age *accounts* for ill health. This category of age salient self-identity did not appear in this data. None of the six volunteer participants reported illness as a result of old age.

The second strategy is '*Age-related category or role reference*'. For example, individuals may align themselves with an age cohort or distance themselves from their peers. This category of age salient discourse appeared in the scripted discourse of film and television, but did not appear within the data collected from face to face conversation.

The third strategy is '*Age-identity in relation to health decrement, and death*', or what is also termed 'troubles telling'. This relates to how discourses of frailty can themselves thematise old age. For example, hearing loss may effect conversational ability. This did appear in my data where participant P commented that she has difficulty hearing and that she felt that restaurants are becoming noisier. This third strategy may also be connected to issues of environmental change or changes in mobility where activities are curtailed because of distance, access to transport or difficulty in using public transport or stairs. While none of the volunteer participants reported reduced participation in activities, four of them reported that it was becoming more difficult to participate due to physiological and environmental changes and that it was consequently requiring more effort from them to participate in activities of their choice.

The fourth strategy is '*Adding time-past perspective to current or recent-past states or topics*'. Such a strategy includes reporting role status through time such as 'I've been on

my own for quite a while now'. This strategy was commonly employed by all participants.

The fifth strategy is '*Self association with the past*'. This strategy is cohort specific and includes referencing the self in relation to social changes over time. This discourse appeared frequently in the data associated with perceived changes in how 'things' were done in the past contrasting with how 'things' are done now.

The final strategy is '*Recognising historical, cultural, or social change*' in non-cohort specific instances. This strategy of telling age also appeared frequently in the data.

The first three of these strategies are related to age salient 'troubles telling'. This style of discourse would stem largely from discourse which presents the older person self-identifying as ill or frail or dependent as a result of having reach certain age chronological. However, this style of self-identifying discourse was not dominant within the discourse represented through these visits. There is no conclusion to be drawn here as to why this was so. It is possible that none of the volunteer participants normally self-identified in this way. It is possible that within the discourse paradigm of 'well-being' that I employed, the positioning of the discourse was away from such 'troubles-telling'. Another possible reason for the lack of this type of discourse is that within the temporal setting of the visits, familiar convergence of discourse did not reach the point of intimate self-disclosure.

The final three strategies mentioned in Coupland, Nussbaum and Grossman's (1993) list of strategies represents a style of discourse occurring through narrative of past life. This style was well represented in the discourse here. Again, it is likely that the context of the visit, where I asked the participants to tell me about their life rather than asking direct questions about health, elicited this narrative style of discourse.

In response to the second research question I refer back to Chapters 6 and 7 which detail the representation of ageing and of older people through the various channels of the media and through works of fiction. These examples of representation are then matched with the observations of self-identifying discourse reported in Chapter 8. The predominant view of ageing and older people represented through both media and through fiction is of these experiences as being negative. It is important to note that the voices, even when purporting to be those of older people such as in film or on television, are in fact those, with some exceptions, of younger adult writers. In almost all of the examples, it is younger adults claiming the voices of older adults.

In sum, the representation of older people in media and in fiction follows stereotypical presuppositions. As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, there are socially constructed positive and negative stereotypes of ageing. The positive stereotypes are of older people as kind, wise and helpful. The negative stereotypes are of older people as boring, foolish, dependent, ugly, asexual, ill, frail, incompetent and so on. These negative stereotypes appear to be sustained throughout media and fictional representations of ageing and of older people. However, they are not sustained through the actual discourse of all the older participants. Each of the older volunteer participants expressed her identity in a unique way, sometimes with discourse which could sustain a stereotypical view of ageing and sometimes through discourse which would not sustain such a stereotype.

Finally, in response to the third research question, I examined the self-reported data from each of the volunteer participants in order to identify their speech communities or 'Who do they talk to?' All of the volunteer participants reported conversational relationships with younger generations. The degree to which such interaction took place varied with each individual. Such interactions was reportedly preferred, more frequent and more satisfying with the generation immediately following, that is, their own children or 'middle-aged' network members, than with the subsequent generation of grandchildren. All the participants reported satisfying communication with peer networks which they

experienced through volunteer work, through active participation with educational institutions, such as U3A, and with long-term personal friendships. None of the volunteer participants reported unsatisfactory conversational relationship except in one case where the relationship was with an old(er)-old friend who suffered illness to the extent that she could no longer communicate as she used to was deteriorating. The experience of exchanging conversation with this older friend was reported as being 'difficult'.

Social perceptions of ageing and of older people as a group which can be stereotyped, either positively or negatively, as can be seen from media and fictional representations, can not be sustained when examining the discourse of the six older volunteer participants in this study. While there is an expectation within the community that ageing is the cause of ill health, decrepitude and foolishness, and indeed the decline of conversational competence, this is not upheld through an examination of the conversations with this small group of volunteers. Their self-identifying discourse did not report age related health issues. However, there was a reported preference for peer group communication, with the claim that it is easier to talk to someone who shares the same experiences and therefore the same language to express that experience. .

Within this group of volunteer participants, there were no observable acts of off-target verbosity. This may be explained by the contextualised positioning by the participants of 'careful' speech and the willingness to cooperatively produce the 'right' language. Although every attempt was made to create as relaxed an ambience as possible and consequently produce as much casual conversation as possible, the existing pragmatic elements of observer's paradox and of the need to achieve a goal, may well have influenced the discourse into more careful style. This element is difficult to identify and with such a small group, of course no generalisations can be made.

One further element of the exchanges was noted and has been commented on. That is the incidence of episodic memory failure. Such a phenomenon is reported to occur in adults

of all ages but is specifically attributed to older adults. This phenomenon did occur in all participants. It occurred least of all with the participant whose most careful speech style has already been noted. The greatest number of incidences of episodic memory failure were observed in the discourse of the participant who herself claimed to be a 'good talker'.

I have also commented on the manner in which repair of such incidences occurred and the effect generally that incidences of episodic memory failure did not negatively affecting conversational satisfaction. On the other hand, each such episode opened up the possibility of cooperative exchange, where both conversation partners assisted in the repair of the 'loss' of words. It has also been noted that the failure to repair, where this occurred, did not affect the success of communication.

Our language reflects and expresses our identities, shaping and reshaping ourselves, as we interact with others and enjoy experiences. If our interactions with others are positive experiences they are opportunities for us to develop our networks and to self-identify within our cohorts as well as we can. If our interactions are negative experiences or if our opportunities for interaction become less frequent as a result of the loss of conversation partners, through illness, death, reduced movement, social policy, social practice or 'others' attitudes, then our self-identity in its dynamic process, will be affected accordingly.

As we are all ageing and confronting ageist practices, it is important that we understand the processes through which language helps shape our personal identities and our social identities and which subsequently support, sustain or participate in changing social practices.

Many myths and stereotypes still include erroneous ideas regarding ageing. Reaching sixty or seventy years of age does not provide automatic entry into old age. In fact, the onset of ageing is a gradual, subtle process that varies in rate and intensity with each

person. It is not an abrupt change, nor is it a sure and steady retrogression from good health to poor health. Nonetheless, examination of the ways that changes in social structure trigger changes in cultural meaning may be an effective mechanism for documenting the effects of social structure on individual behaviour and attitudes.

However, despite the images of loss in ageing, I would hold that in 'normal' ageing conversational abilities don't change. Circumstances change. We don't lose the language ability to shop, to order food in a restaurant nor to tell our troubles to our neighbour. We experience changes continually throughout life. Therefore, it follows that we should expect to experience language changes throughout life. This should be seen as an increment rather than as a decrement. As participant C said, 'I'm learning new things and new words all the time'. What changes and what we lose, are the opportunities for language use. We lose the opportunities to meet friends because of lack of mobility or distance. We lose the ability to understand, not because we reach seventy, but because our hearing fails us. Reducing our spheres of activity, means reducing our spheres of conversation. The loss of friends, means the loss of those parts of our identity we shared with them, so we can no longer participate in the conversation about those times or those events.

Further directions

Since I have been able to gather transcripts of many hours of conversations, including cross-generational conversation between family members, and have only been able to use selected extracts, there remains a great deal of extremely useful material which could be analysed from other perspectives, such as:

- A much more detailed examination of the shaping of identity through narrative and the telling of life stories.

- A more detailed examination of how the instances of episodic memory failure do not appear to affect the success of the communication, rather, to form part of the movement forward of cooperative talk.
- An examination of the texts to see exactly at what point in the visits language style shifts indicating increased conversational convergence occurred and how such style shifts reflect changes in perceived status between myself and the other participant.
- An examination of the salient differences between family cohort talk and non-family cohort talk. Eggin and Slade (1997) suggest that there are differences in levels of cooperation and confrontation between familiar and less familiar participants. Since two of my participants were familiar to me and four were not, my data could prove fruitful in this direction.
- An examination of the talk which took place between the two age-cohort family members (sisters) in the absence of the researcher (when I was not present in the room). We could expect that such an examination of language between individuals who have been communicating with each other for eighty years, to reveal valuable data with respect to ongoing acts of self-identity.
- A more detailed examination of the transcripts for each individual to observe any patterning in nominalisation of self-identifying speech acts.
- An exploration of the relationship between the ages of fiction writers and their representations of ageing within their fictional works. Do they give voice to their own ageing experience or do they represent older people based on an ideological perspective?

- And since this research has only been able to observe and report the older female voice, valuable observation should be carried out using the same methodology with older male participants.

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Appendix A

Participants in research

I am involved in a research project investigating language changes in ageing. The thesis includes aspects of language such as representations of ageing in both print and electronic media; representations of ageing in children's and adult fiction; stereotypes of ageing; ageing as metaphor; social, psychological and physiological reasons for language change and inter-generational discourse. I hope to be able to collect, on audio tape, examples of authentic dialogue involving people of all ages, but especially people over the age of 60. I would love to meet anyone who would be interested in participating in this project. If you would like to participate or would simply like more information, please contact me, Carol Gibson, on 3021558 (work) or 2974537 (home).

Appendix B

Confidentiality of information document

To ensure that I get the most value from this research I would like your permission to record random conversations in which you are a participant and to use selected, transcribed examples of your conversations within any publication which may arise from this research. I assure you that the content of all recordings will remain confidential. Please, if you don't mind, sign the form below.

<p>I (name) _____ hereby give permission to Carol Gibson to record random conversations in which I am a participant. I understand that these recordings will be used for the purpose of research. I further give permission for Carol Gibson to use selected examples of these conversations within any publications which may result from this research.</p> <p>Signed _____.</p> <p>Date _____.</p>

Appendix C

Themes and topics for conversation

1. What did you do yesterday?
2. Describe a typical day.
3. Describe a typical week.
4. How would you describe your health?
5. What factors do you think contribute to your health?
6. Tell me a bit about your neighbours.
7. Tell me a little bit about your neighbourhood.
8. Tell me a little bit about your sisters and brothers.
9. Tell me a little bit about your children your grandchildren.
10. Describe your best friend.
11. How long have you lived here?
12. Why did you move here?
13. Where did you live before?
14. Can you remember the happiest experience of your life?
15. Can you remember the most unhappy experience in your life?

Appendix D

Summarised transcription key from Eggins and Slade (1997: 5)

Symbol	Meaning
.	certainty, completion (typically falling tone)
no end of turn	implies non termination (no final intonation)
punctuation	
,	parcelling of talk; breathing time (silent beats in Halliday's 1958/1994 system)
?	uncertainty (rising tone, or wh-interrogative)
!	'surprised' intonation (rising-falling tone 5 in Halliday's 1994 system)
WORDS IN CAPITALS	emphatic stress and/or increased volume
“ “	change in voice quality in reported speech
()	untranscribable talk
(words within parentheses)	transcriber's guess
[words in square brackets]	non-verbal information
= =	overlap (contiguity, simultaneity)
...	short hesitation within a turn (less than three seconds)
[pause — 4 seconds]	indication of inter-turn pause length
dash — then talk	false start/restart

Appendix E

Example transcriptions

Transcription 1 — S and M

- M: That's the one I'll leave with you. And there we go.
- S: What about that one?
- M: This is the box for this one. I'll take, = =
- S: = = You don't want to leave the wrong one or something.
- M: No. I'll make sure before I go. I'll double check it. Oh this looks great. Did you make this?
- S: Yes, I made it this morning. = =
- M: = = mmm = =
- S: = = I don't know if you know Miss S. She was Principal of the um, the commercial — domestic science high school when I was young and she published this book. You know, it even tells you how to boil beans and = =
- M: = = mmm = =
- S: = = all that sort of thing.
- M: mmm
- S: She got five recipes for ()
- M: A cook book? What kind of — what do you call this?
- S: That's a tea cake = =
- M: = = It's a tea cake. = =
- S: = = a large tea cake she called it.
- M: mmm
- S: I made it and then I thought, oh good heavens you mightn't like cinnamon, you know [laughs] = =
- M: = = mmm There's nothing I don't like.
- S: Oh good.
- M: I'll turn it round here a little bit so that we're equidistant from that.
- S: I can't eat offal. I can eat most things but, = =
- M: = = Oh I'm not a great meat eater altogether, but, mmm
- S: No.
- M: I wouldn't choose it.
- S: I was a vegetarian till I got married.
- M: Oh really.
- S: Now my granddaughter's one.
- M: Oh is she? Which one? The eldest one or the youngest one? mmm mmm

S: The eldest.

M: mmm mmm
[pause — 4 secs]

M: I eat meat very occasionally.

S: mmm

M: Sometimes I take my mum out to have dinner in a hotel or something, and the menu in a hotel is mostly meat.

S: Course. Yeah.

M: Meat um, steaks and chops and fish and stuff, so I eat meat then, but that's about all.

S: We had lunch at the um, Brighton Esplanade yesterday.

M: Oh yeah. That's where we go. = =

S: = = A few of the ladies I went with ordered chicken. And they got half a chicken. = =

M: = = mmm mmm = =

S: = = You know they couldn't possibly have eaten it all. = =

M: = = mmm

S: I got three big chops. Very generous.

M: Very generous, isn't it? Yes, hotel food's like that. That's one of the places we go. We go to the Brighton Esplanade.

S: Have you tried the one at the Largs Pier?

M: Haven't tried that, no. It's nice, is it?

S: It's quite nice sitting there you know near the sea. Oh it's beautiful.

M: By the sea. With a view out? mmm

S: mmm

M: Oh, I should try that.

S: They um — the Esplanade does good too. It's a nice lookout.

M: mmm We go to Seacliff sometimes. I went there last night with my mum. That's quite nice. But you can't — they haven't got the dining room overlooking the sea or anything.

S: No.
[pause — 4 secs]

S: Then my friend — when we left, she — we drove all along the beach you know. Oh it was lovely.

M: mmm That is, isn't it? Oh last — no, not last night? = =

S: = = no this was after lunch.

M: Oh right. mmm

S: I belong to Beta Sigma Phi and we have = =

M: = = That's right. = =

S: = = lunch oh well once a month I spose.

M: mmm mmm

S: Whoever's birthday, chooses the place.

M: Oh that's good, yeah.

S: Although that makes it hard when it's your birthday and you can't think where to go.

M: [laughs] And how do you get there? Do you — does someone pick you up?

S: Oh yes. If it's in town I go on the tram, but um, a couple of ladies pick me up a lot.

M: mmm

S: I used to drive but my daughter — family decided I was too old now so = =

M: = = oh right. [laughs] = =

S: = = Funny. The weekend that was going to be my last drive and I ran into the car in front of me.

M: Oh really!

S: You wouldn't believe it would you. My very last afternoon. I was never going to drive again.

M: Oh mmm

S: \$1300 worth of damage.

M: Oh. Was it covered by insurance?

S: Oh yeah.

M: Yeah. Oh that's alright.

[pause — 4 secs]

M: Um. Oh well, [puts cup down] mmm It's not all that much fun driving.

S: No, but it's so convenient.

M: It's convenient, [laughs] yes. I've been driving, = =

S: = = You don't know how convenient till you can't.

M: No, no.

S: I go to church at Goodwood you know, and before I could get there in five minutes in the car, and now I've got to go on the tram, climb over a fence, and go down behind a hotel, and then up the street. You know. It was so easy before.

M: Where's the — where's the, the church then, that you have to go to?

S: It's in street called Coxton. Well, you can go down Goodwood Road and round = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = but I mean it's longer.

M: mmm

S: And so really what you're doing is going behind the hotel. = =

M: = = The Goodwood = =

S: = = I spose it's the Goodwood Hotel, the one at — where the, the lights, before you cross the road.

M: Oh that's right, yeah. mmm [puts the cup down]

S: And you know the trams on Sundays only go every half-hour. Have another piece. [indicates to me to have another piece of cake]

M: Yes I will. It's lovely. It's a beautiful cake.

S: That's when I really miss it. But also I used to drive out to Gepps Cross to see my daughter and now I have to go in a taxi. It's quite expensive.

M: mmm Do you get a concession on taxi?

S: She doesn't want to come here so she pays one fortnight and I pay the other fortnight.

M: Oh, why doesn't she want to come here?

S: I think she's happier in her own place.

M: Oh yeah.

S: You know she's retarded.

M: Oh that's the one you ==

S: == Yes. ==

M: == Oh fair enough.

S: And she cooks me a nice meal. I think she likes doing that you know. ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == I don't know she — even for Mother's Day she's not coming out. I said, "Do you want to come on Sunday?" "No", she said.

M: mmm

S: So I'm going out there tomorrow.

M: mmm

[pause — 4 secs]

S: I think in her own place, she feels at home and she can do what she likes, and.

M: mmm

[pause — 3 secs]

S: Course she's very fond of all the family, she's always buying them things and making them things, you know, like cakes and.

[pause — 3 secs]

M: mmm So the two sisters get along alright, your — both your daughters?

S: Oh well, you know, um, one's ten years older than the other and one's retarded, you know, but they get along OK — alright.

M: mmm

S: Well they can't be close really ==

M: == No. No. ==

S: == can they?

M: No, not really.

S: I mean one's got a, an Honours degree and the other one's a, you know, she can read and write, I suppose, that's something.

M: mmm

S: But she knows money. Oh.

M: Does she? [laughs]

S: She — I think she's got — my birthday's in November. I think she's got my birthday present already. But she's always buying something for somebody, not expensive things. But you know.
[pause — 4 secs]

S: Coles are — you know how you save coupons and then you get a set of plates, and she's bought M, that's the younger one, course she's living in a house down at Willaston, so she doesn't have too much stuff you know.
[pause — 4 secs]

M: Oh that's nice.

S: I wouldn't be surprised if she'd buy her two sets.

M: mmm

S: Last Christmas she um — go down to Coles — I didn't know it was so good. They — they had this wonderful er, er — you know ... pots and pans that won't scratch?

M: Oh like Teflon.

S: Teflon, yeah, they're much — very good and she bought her sister — her sister here a frying pan and then the older girl got a big stockpot and the younger girl got a saucepan, and the frying pan's wonderful.

M: mmm

S: I got a little leather purse. I mean she's got no sense of value. She doesn't have = =

M: = = mmm

S: ()

M: [laughs] mmm mmm
[pause — 3 secs]

M: So tell me about your um your life, you're, you're um, childhood.

S: Oh.

M: Let's start with that, shall we?

S: Oh I was very lucky there. My mother and father — well there were 11 years between them. Mum was 11 years younger. He came back from England — he'd been to New Zealand and then he came to Australia in 1912, and he was on his way to Bundaberg in Queensland, and he called in to see my Great-grandmother, and my Grandmother — she was his third cousin or something. He met my mother and he never ever went to Bundaberg. They got married and lived in the house opposite Grandma's. There was Grandma opposite and Aunty up the road, and er, four girls in the family — they lost the boy when he was two and I was only three months, and er, then Aunty up the road had four girls and a young boy, and we — we had a wonderful childhood really. Dad was a bit irascible at times but Sundays — Saturday nights we'd sit round the table and have tea together and play I spy and games like that. I can remember rolling on the floor laughing so much at something Dad had said. And then when we went away at Christmas — we used to go to the south coast every Christmas to K — five of us at first, then four — and er oh we had a wonderful time. Dad and Mum used to

fish, then we'd make a point of buying funny books, and we'd sit after lunch and Dad'd read them and we'd be crocheting or hand embroidering or something, so we were very lucky I think. ... We all got on well, and I can hardly remember — I don't know what happened — I must have lost my temper once and threw a nailbrush or something at one sister. I don't think Mum'd let us fight. Course I had a bad temper. The others didn't. = =

M: = = [laughs] = =

S: = = And er we walked — I spose Mum didn't like the local school — it was only just up the hill. Oh it's a great big beautiful building now, but in those days it was just a timber place with two teachers, so we had to walk a mile and a half to school. This is in Brisbane.

M: mmm

S: That wasn't funny in hot weather. I remember carrying one of my sisters and my cousin across the creek, one night when it rained and there was a flood. I never heard my mother knew all these things, you know, but what else could we do. There was a bridge with a pipe under it and we used to swing across that hand over hand on the way home. It was an old home and er ... I think I told you this last week — about reading — and we were all lined up at the principal's = =

M: = = mmm

S: I didn't get into trouble. But um yeah we had lots of fun — a lot of companionship, and when there was the birthday, well, you didn't have to invite other people. By the time you asked the cousins and yourselves you had a party you know.

M: Yeah, yeah.

S: And then we joined the Brownies and the Guides, and of course the great aim was to go to — my father was the er — well he became the Vice Principal in the Commercial High School — go to Dad's school, you know, and er I remember buying my first uniform — anyway I got — there was an English family too that was down. I got very friendly with the two boys and in fact they the older boy and I were in love for awhile. Oh we still do write to each other. And er, I heard from him this week, and um ... so, one after another the four of us went to the commercial high school. I remember Dad saying — his office opened onto the roadway or over the roadway — and he said to me, "I don't think you ought to stay to kiss me goodbye", he said, "people might misunderstand." I spose, you know, someone see the pupils kissing the principal they might wonder about it.

M: [laughs]

S: So we didn't do that. But the only thing — I think the difference it made having Dad there was that er, he saw we got the best teachers = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = you know, we all got a good teacher in all subjects because he did the timetables. But fortunately he had a smoker's cough, so our room was at the top of the stairs, we'd hear him coughing up the stairs and we were all as good as gold when he went past.

M: [laugh]

S: Jolly teachers, you know. Every time you got in trouble they'd go to him and complain. I thought it was rough. You got trouble from them, then you went home and got it from him.

M: Yeah because you were his = =

S: = = yeah = =

M: = = his kids, right = =

S: = = yeah, yeah. Not the others. I don't think they were as naughty as me = =

M: = = daughters.

S: I talked a lot, as you can tell. [laughs]

M: [laughs]

S: But um ...

M: I think it's a good skill. [laughs]

S: One of the — some of them, though, used to go down () to tell — tell me but you know ... So — but I — I wanted to go to university but of course, Dad couldn't afford to send the four of us and it wouldn't do for one.

M: No.

S: Anyway I think the war.

M: Yeah, it's the same — I hear that story again and again.

S: I always wanted to be a teacher, so I just went straight to the teacher's college = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = you see. And that was a great two years. We — er [laughs] college was good. It was on the train line. When the train went over, the lessons had to stop cause you couldn't hear a thing. [laughs]

M: Where was that?

S: In Brisbane. The Teacher's Training College. On T Street it was, next door to the um Canberra Hotel I think it was. It was a temperance hotel. Very old building. I believe it was condemned. We had two years there and um the second year — I did Matric at night while I was — You know we didn't have a lot of work in the day time. Bit, I spose, a bit. We'd stay in after — stay at the college after school and do night classes you know, and they — course they er — they were quick — it was a cramming school really, I spose. We had a Latin teacher. My father said "I wish I could frighten my students the way he does you two." — my other sister and I. So I got my er — well we called it Senior in Queensland. It was like Matric. = =

M: = = mmm

S: And then when I — at the end of the second year, when I was appointed to a school I was the only one of two that got a Brisbane school, and the other one was the daughter of the niece of the Minister for Education or something.

M: mmm

S: So I think it was a — I don't know whether Dad had said anything or whether the name just got me = =

M: == mmm ==

S: == and I went to a school called Oakley. To get there I caught — well ran, usually a mile and a half, a mile to the ferry and across to the west end on the ferry, then got a tram into town, the tram out of town, then you either got a bus or walked to school. I used to leave home at half past seven every morning and I was there four years and er
[pause — 4 secs]

S: It was pretty good really, cause I remember afterwards, when S was born, the principal even came or the head teacher came to see me in Hospital, er ... and at the end of the fourth year at Oakley I was sent — er appointed to er Palm — Palmerston North? No. I've forgotten the name of it. Anyway, it was just up in the mountains there outside Brisbane. Palm ... By that time of course, I'd — I'd got engaged and got married instead, and a lot of people thought I did it to get out of going, but I didn't. I was quite prepared to go ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == you know, the funny thing, years after my sister lived quite — just down the road from that school. But um, we got married and um, we went to live on the dairy farm my husband leased — I think we paid ten shillings a week for it — and um, we had five floods in the nine months we were there. And then I got gallstones. Oh gee was I sick. Doctor came down — it was the most awful track to come down to our place. People thought nobody could possibly live there on a track like that. But there was — you'd walk down to the back of the farm down to um, Mooloolaba, the beach, you know. Sometimes we'd do that. And then the farm didn't do too well and so we left it and er we had a — we rented a house up on back — on the top of the mountain. My husband started working for a carpenter. And course, by this time I was seven months pregnant and I went blind. No, I didn't go blind. My legs started to swell, so the, um — I'd read in this book, you see, if your legs swell you should go to the doctor.

M: mmm

S: So we walked miles to this doctor's, and he said "Oh you better go down to Brisbane". So I went down to my mother, and she called the old doctor — he was — and er I don't know how many days I was there. Not very long. And I called out one afternoon — I was reading — I said I couldn't see properly and then I — I — all I could — I went blind and all I could distinguish was night and day.

M: And you were still pregnant?

S: It was kidney trouble.

M: Oh.

S: They said 10 000th of an inch in each eye and I would have been blind. So course they raced me into hospital — the lady next door had her car out ready to drive me if necessary and they induced the baby. She was 3 lbs 5 oz nearly — tiny thing ... And when she — then we went back to live at Maroochydore, that's right, ==

M: == mmm ==

S: = = and um that time my husband was working for this carpenter and er we stayed there till um the war came, cause he was in the navy. Oh no that's right, just before the war was declared, we had a pie stall in Nambourne and he was riding home at two o'clock Saturday night, and heaven knows how, there were two bikes on the road, probably the only traffic there was — they hit each other. The other boy just scraped his arm or something, but V broke his hand and his arm and he had concussion. That's right and a slight fracture in the skull, that's right. And all he did was lie in hospital and fret because he was a naval reserve, and he couldn't get in and he had to report. So as soon as he could stand on two feet — he didn't even admit he couldn't — you know as a signal man — that he was seeing double. And he went into the navy and um he went away. Well he went down to Melbourne, and he came back a couple of leaves. And then they sent him overseas. And he was away for three years. He was even on a convoy to Russia — () wanted to clean up — and er — Norway ...

M: mmm

S: He said if any one fell over it was no good picking them up. They were dead in three minutes = =

M: = = Too cold. = =

S: = = cold. They went to Iceland on the way over, that's why. [laughs] I spose. Fancy sending two destroyers — they put the story so they would think they were going to the tropics. And they sent them to Iceland to meet another destroyer that was supposed to hand over their winter gear. Of course they wouldn't, would you? [laughs] So anyway they went to Iceland.

M: [laughs]

S: Then he was serving in the Middle East. And then he came home after three years, and then got six weeks' leave he had — that was right — and, er, I was pregnant with P and he's — then he went into the Pacific and served there. He went to um, Hiroshima just after the bomb dropped, you know, at the end of the war.

M: mmm

S: He came back, and um by this time P was born and we — we had a block of land, but you couldn't get — he couldn't get timber or anything you know.

M: Yeah.

S: And a friend put a sort of — he was a builder — put a sort of hut on it for us. And er, what happened, of course, he was a carpenter, so he used to scrounge stuff from the rubbish dumps and things. It was very comfortable actually. Then he went into the er — Where did he go first? Anyway he went into the public service. I think he was in the Housing Department, and then he was in Social Security. And um then J was born. So there were four years between each of them. And he got promoted to Bundaberg. So we went up there for eight years. That was nice. I remember saying — It's funny, you know. I was only in my forties, you know. [laughs] I remember saying to him "I don't mind getting old, do you?" And he said, "No" Never dreaming that only half my life has gone. [laughs]

M: [laughs]

S: So er, we stayed there eight years, and then he fort — fortunately — cause he asked for either Townsville or Melbourne cause he said “You know, it’s no good staying in Bundaberg. There’s no future for the kids.”

M: mmm

S: You know you can either go to into the civil industry or to (). There was nothing else. So we came to Melbourne. We bought a house out near the Sandown Racecourse, and er ... Well P and J — well course S — by this time we realised she was — we’d done the right thing, from when she was about five I think she was in special school in Brisbane.

M: That’s the first child?

S: Yeah and er = =

M: = = Does this have anything to do with the fact that you were ill?

S: Yes, they think that the poison somehow infected a part of her brain. They never could work out exactly but that’s, you know that = =

M: = = That’s a shame, isn’t it? Nothing you could do at the time — nothing you could control or ... = =

S: = = No ... = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = I think she would have been such a nice person. Cause she’s so generous and thoughtful you know. Yes she went to a special school, that’s right. Then we went to Melbourne and for a long time I couldn’t find anything for her. And um somebody said to me “Why don’t you?” — well, the doctor, that’s right. “Why don’t you try (A)?” I thought — they thought I only wanted her to go one day a week. It was a long time before we both realised we had misunderstood and she could go for a week. Because as soon as I went to Melbourne — I did a bit of teaching in Bundaberg during the war — and then when I went to Melbourne, I put my name down for a primary school — course I was a primary school teacher and um I put my name down as being available from March, but I hadn’t been there a fortnight and this — someone rang me up. He said “Can you teach English and Maths to years 7 and 8?” — Well forms 1 and 2 = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = which were equivalent in Queensland to 7 and 8. And I said “Oh yes”. So I started at Springvale High School.

M: mmm

S: And I was there twenty-five years. And while I was there, I did a degree at Monash. See I got my Matric and they wouldn’t count the couple of subjects I did in Brisbane. I did English and um Philosophy. But you couldn’t blame them. That was thirty years ago. Oh and I loved Monash. I did er = =

M: = = [laughs] = =

S: == [laughs] five histories. I did them — you know I did them a funny way. I did one and when I — course this — the senior mistress said to me “You do er, two subjects at Monash, you’ll be able to be a permanent high school teacher”, you see. So I did those. We discovered if I did a lot of history, I could be in charge of history if necessary. So I did that. So I had one, two and three histories, and then I don’t know, I kept adding another one. But it was all over the — higgledy piggedly But, um, then of course, when I got to — I had five subjects — the department — no seven subjects — the department would give you time off to finish your degree, and when I applied, of course, somebody said, “No my subjects didn’t count” cause I’d done them in such a funny way. So I stormed up, cause somebody told me they did, and I found the fellow that had said it, you know, it was all fixed up. But um when I’d done my five histories they say you can’t do any more than five ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == and the fellow that had me for the last degree said, “Why don’t you do Ancient History?” They don’t call that a history. They say it’s made up — too much imagination. So I did two more.

M: [laughs] Heavens! ==

S: == Talk about an unbalanced degree.

M: I reckon. [laughs]

S: And then I finished with Anthropology and Sociology because J was doing them. So I thought — By that time, P and J and I were all at Monash.

M: mmm

S: See P got his. That’s right, P got his degree, then I got mine, then J got hers, then P got his Doctorate.

M: So how long were, um — how old were you when you finally graduated?

S: Well, um it was 1967, about fifty two.

M: Oh that’s great. [laughs]

S: Yeah I was going — nowadays they’re all grey-haired, but in those days I was the only one, ==

M: == Yeah ==

S: == or one of the very few there. ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == But oh I enjoyed it. It was great. ... It’s funny too. We used to get student teachers at Springvale and some of them were talking in the staff room. They said “Nobody ever gets an A at Monash”. And I said, “Well I did”.

M: [laughs]

S: I got quite a few for my essays — and A minuses. They just looked at me as though I was nuts, so I didn’t say ==

M: == [laughs] ==

S: == any more you know. ==

M: == Nothing to say.
[pause — 3 secs]

S: I loved it. I had a — I made — the only friends I made in Melbourne were at er, Springvale High School.

M: And you still had your family and you still had your full time job. ==

S: == Yeah.==

M: == Yeah that's the way to do it, isn't it?

S: Yeah it was — I don't know — V. was so difficult over it all — so difficult over S — I couldn't stand any more, and he was away a lot, so I just applied for a divorce and got it.

M: mmm

S: He lives in (Kiloundra) now.

M: mmm In Glandore?

S: (Kiloundra) in Queensland.

M: Oh — not in Adelaide?

S: He tells everyone how he's loved me since the time I was seven. I said "You had a funny way of showing it". I thought it a funny way of showing it. I didn't know. I spose the war too didn't help.

M: No lots of external influences. mmm mmm Did you ever get married again?

S: No. ==

M: == No. ==

S: == No I didn't want to. But what amazed me and — I've always been pleased with his — with his family. I thought they'd wipe me you know, but no they've stayed ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == just the same.

M: mmm

S: His brother and his sisters ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == still write to me and ring me up, not a lot, but, you know, they keep in touch.

M: mmm ... Oh that's really good.

S: So that was — that was really a — something I didn't expect.

M: mmm And did he remarry?

S: No. No. I think he's one of the old and bitter. Silly old bugger. () [laughs] P went up to see him when he was eighty, he and J and um they came back, they were pretty fed up with him. [laughs]

M: mmm

S: But he's um — he's always been very — liked boys. He wanted five sons and he only got one. Anyway when P was young, he was always taking boys and P away camping. Apparently there's some boy up there who has no father and he sort of semi adopted him

and takes him away on holiday and things, and his brother lives near him and they go shopping and so on.

M: mmm

S: So it's — you know I hear about him from the family. I spose he hears about me too. ... But he came — when I graduated he came and took me out to dinner, J and I.

M: mmm

S: Yet he never asked — never said a word, you know, while I was doing my degree. One year I got a high distinction, and J got a distinction, and he was away visiting his mother or father and we sent him a telegram. No he never ever acknowledged it — never said a word. You know we were so thrilled with our selves, we were. [laughs]

M: I should think so, rightly so!

S: Yeah

M: That's wonderful! And that's just not — that's not just a casual thing, a high distinction. =
=

S: == () ==

M: == There's a lot of work gone into that, a lot of work and a lot of um cleverness has gone into that.

S: Bnd of course being older I think — cause later on, I when I was at Springvale, I marked er year 12 history papers, and you could pick the mature students ==

M: == mmm You can. Yes, you can. ==

S: == They didn't have a name on them but you knew — the way they write.

M: Yes, definitely, I agree with that,

M: I think that you know there's a real benefit to being older ==

S: == Oh I think so. ==

M: == because you bring a whole lot of life skills too, analytical skills. You know ==

S: == Yeah. ==

M: == you can see stuff clearly.

S: Yeah, and the way that you ==

M: == Yeah, and you're motivated.

S: Yeah.

M: So that's all quite true. mmm And it's fun. [laughs] ==

S: == Oh I — did you do it that way too, did you?

M: Yeah. Yeah, I did, um, I did my first degree when I had three children.

S: mmm

M: then I did my Honours year, and then when the kids had — were starting to leave home, I was doing my Master's Degree and now of course they're well gone ==

S: == Yeah. ==

M: == Now I'm doing my PhD, so, um ...

S: I was going ==

M: == I just enjoy doing it. ==

S: == going to do a Master's degree, but um I don't know — nobody — I had no guidance about what I should do, um, ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == things got all mixed up, you know, ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == and so I couldn't go on with it.

M: Yeah you need to — you need to sort of be pushy and get a supervisor ==

S: == I should have had a student ==

M: == like that. ==

S: == student counsellor or ==

M: == Yeah. ==

S: == or something ==

M: == I suppose. ==

S: == or somebody to tell you what to do, ==

M: == That's right. ==

S: == and how to do it. ==

M: == Yeah, or one of your lecturers. ==

S: == Yes. Yeah.

M: It's nice if they approach you, and say sort of, well, you know, ==

S: == Yeah. ==

M: == we really think you'll be able to do some research.

S: Well they usually do, I mean if you're an ordinary student, but they come and say, "Do you want to do Honours?" I know they did with J.

M: ()

S: But er, I don't know whether — cause I was older. I don't know. Anyway, nobody ever did. Nobody helped me, so, ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == I mucked that year up.

M: mmm

S: Anyway, I'm quite happy about getting a degree.

M: Oh yes, oh yes, it's great.

S: So I took, you know — well being divorced wasn't funny ... and S hasn't been. But I've been pretty lucky and I think if your family — if you've got a happy background you need just ability ==

M: == I can see that. It's really clear. My mum is the same — my mum's the same age as you, and she — she's had a similar background growing up with all those sisters and ==

S: == cousins ==

M: == and cousins ==

S: == yes ==

M: == and that was their circle ==

S: == that's right ==

M: == that was their circle, and she finds it now very easy to make friends you know she'll go and join something ==

S: == yeah ==

M: == and she's easy going and got lots of friends and I think it comes from that confidence =
=

S: == I spose so.==

M: == from being in a big group of people all your life.

S: Yes well we had that. Yes I think — well as I say, I made friends at work.

M: mmm

S: My son — they've been married for quite a long time now. This is his second wife his first
==

M: == Oh really! ==

S: == his first marriage was a total disaster.

M: Oh. mmm. Oh, well maybe learn something.

S: Yeah.

M: mmm

S: mmm Of course his sons have suffered.

M: mmm

S: The youngest one's a total recluse.

M: mmm

S: Won't go out. Watches TV or plays with his computer all night. I believe he's absolutely wonderful with a computer.

M: mmm

S: Can solve problems that his father can't. ==

M: == Lots of kids are like that anyway [laughs] whether or not you know — whether or not the — whatever's going on in their family — they just like to sit at the computer and do stuff.

S: () Well I feel terrible about this. I don't believe in making favourites but this — my god-daughter 's little girl — oh yes she and I are just like that — and um her father got a computer and the two older children and the father are using it. And they said you can't use it, you're too young. She's only four, you see. So she watched them for two days, the third morning she's up, she worked it herself. ... No problem at all.

[pause — 4 secs]

M: [laughs]

S: Computers to me are, you know — you know I don't understand them. They tried to teach me here but.

M: mmm
[pause — 3 secs]

S: I dunno. I think praps it's getting old. I just can't cope with all the new gadgets, you know.

M: mmm Well, unless it's relevant to your life I think that you know = =

S: = = mmm = =

M: = = you don't bother.

S: Of course, in the high school — cause I used to just go, you know — I'd be there — I'd say
“Who can work this?” There was always a kid. You never have to do it yourself.

M: No, that's right, that's right. mmm

S: They always knew how.

M: mmm

S: Amazing.

M: Yes. Yeah, I think it a very rare — a kid coming — coming up these days through the
school system who can't use um — who's not really good at computer work = =

S: = = Oh videos and you know all the other equipment. = =

M: = = how to how to computer = =

S: = = except vacuum cleaners and things.

M: Oh vacuum cleaners and dishwashers. Yes — yeah stuff like that. [laughs] It's a bit
different.

S: [laughs]

M: “Which end do you hold?” = =

S: = = [laughs] = =

M: = = [laughs] That's true. mmm ... But yeah, it's all changing. It does. Fast. mmm
[pause — 3 secs]

S: Is this the sort of thing — you just want to hear my voice = =

M: = = Yeah. = =

S: = = and what I say?

M: Yeah, that's right, it's lovely. Thank you.

S: Thank you.

M: [laughs]

S: As you can see, I can talk. = =

M: = = Oh I — that's — that's good. = =

S: = = I write a lot of letters. In fact my daughters and I keep half the post office going. One of
the ladies that knows me in there said I ought to get a rebate.

M: Well, good. [laughs] = =

S: = = But they don't — they can't. But er ...

M: No, they don't do that. But, er, yeah, who do you write to?

S: Oh well, I can't type so well now. Make too many mistakes — until then — like I used to
sort of keep a family — my mother started it — she used to have a family letter and then

when she died I — we, my sisters and I, kept it on, and then er, the sister next to me, she died, so there's only — there's two of us write, the third one never writes except once in a blue moon. So I used to write to my nieces and nephews. I used to send twelve copies. Everybody kept saying, "Oh we want to be in it too", you know. So I used to send twelve copies. It was weekly for awhile, then I made it fortnightly. It got too expensive — then monthly. And then last year it got — you know I wasn't typing very well, so I just gave it up. I just — But I've got two or three friends I write regularly to. = =

M: = = What do you mean by family letter?

S: Well, just er, er, see you pick up bits of family news = =

M: = = Oh and you — you compile it and = =

S: = = Yeah. Yes, I put it all together = =

M: = = it around.

S: Yeah. Yeah

M: Oh that's great.

S: Oh it's — yeah, yes, yeah. = =

M: = = So someone calls you and then you = =

S: = = They write. = =

M: = = you have a chat

S: = = Yeah. = =

M: = = and you put it all together = =

S: = = That's right. = =

M: = = and mail it?

S: Yeah.

M: Oh, that's lovely.

S: That was. Yes. You know, not that many of them answered — but they would occasionally. But they always came to see me = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = if they could, you know it seemed to keep the family in touch.

M: mmm

S: But it's, er, I had to give it up because I was making so many mistakes when I typed it up. When — I, I feel so guilty because this boyfriend of mine — you know the one I told you — the first boyfriend — he um, he types a letter to me and yet he's got um, what's that one where you gradually lose control of your fingers — of your body, you know?

M: Parkinson's?

S: Yeah.

M: Parkinson's disease.

S: He's still stuck to the typing because I find his writing hard to read.

M: mmm

S: I feel so guilty because I hand write him I hand write back. I've got an electric typewriter. I think if I had the old non-electric typewriter, I'd manage better. My son gave me the electric one. I've used it for years but when you get older, your finger flips cross two keys you know.

M: mmm

S: I don't know ...

[pause – 4 secs]

M: mmm

S: ()

M: Yeah, but the other one's are hard to push — are harder to push — harder to push them, aren't they?

S: Oh yes I don't know. I haven't used one for a long time.

M: You need a bit of strength, yeah. mmm

S: I didn't say much about my son, did I?

M: No. Well something about your son?

S: Well, until he married this first wife, he and I were very close you know we got on very well together and er ... he was always in trouble at school, for talking I suppose. Course nowadays we know they're not kept occupied.

M: mmm

S: When he got to, I think it was upper secondary or something, he got a married teacher. She said "Here P, when you've finished your work, read this." and he went from twenty third in the class to first — second and then first.

M: That's what it is, isn't it?

S: Yes.

M: Not enough stimulation.

S: No.

M: mmm

S: And, er, when we came — that was in Bundaberg, and er when we went to Melbourne, he and J went to, er, high school there, and he got into Monash, and he did Science the first year, and then he decided to do Chemical Engineering, which I had never heard of. I'm still not too clear what it is, but he did his degree in it and then they offered him, um, four years to do his doctorate.

M: mmm

S: So he ummed and ahed a bit, because he didn't know whether — he said "I don't know whether I'm being lazy. It's easier to do this than go and look for a job." So I was very glad he decided to do it. So he did his doctorate and all I ever saw him doing was boiling up little seeds of barley and measuring how long it took them to get hot and how hot they got He worked with some other chap. Anyway he got his doctorate — Doctor of Chemical Engineering. Then he went — where did he work first? Oh he went up to the um ... rice

growing people. He was working for a rice mill — rice growers. Then he went to Cadbury — no Rowntrees — then he went to Cadbury's. He went to England with them to get away from this first wife of his. Oh she's a horror. She's always turning up and, you know, police, with the boys and all sorts of things. She's still like it. You know she's never given up at all. You'd think — instead of making a life of her own, she seems to have concentrated on making his life and the boys' life a misery. ()

M: Well was the — what was the problem? Was she — what did she do? Why did they get divorced?

S: Well I'm not too clear, really. ... I don't even know what grounds. I think same as I did. I did desertion. You now you can prove they've been — you haven't seen = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = them for 12 months = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = or something. I don't know when they actually got divorced. It might have been after he went to England. ... Probably was.

M: mmm

S: And, er, the eldest boy was going to go with him. No. He went off to England and then he sent a ticket to the eldest boy to come and stay with him for three months. But at the last minute, the eldest boy wouldn't go, so the middle one went and he just stayed there. He just stayed there and made his life and went to school = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = and made a real life for himself. The eldest one's, as I said, you know. And, um the youngest one, I don't know, he's a strange boy very difficult to talk to. He has a bit of a problem speaking too. I think you know, a bit of.

M: mmm

S: You know, it's not very noticeable. Anyway he's moved away from his mother now and staying with his brother in a flat which we all think is a good thing.

M: mmm

S: Cept for him of course.

M: How old are the boys — the three boys?

S: The eldest one's 23, the next one's 21 this year, and the young one's 16 — 17.

M: mmm And they were living with her?

S: Yeah. Cept the middle one. The middle one — see the second wife — she's had some time with him. He's () got a very quick temper — flares up. But he wants to be a pilot and he want — he tried to get in the Navy in England. He was — wanted to get in the um — oh I don't know what they call it — the flying part of the er, Navy and er, he couldn't — he didn't get into that. He got in, as a you know, as a — he should have become a captain but anyway () = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: == but he didn't want that, so he — he only stayed two days and he left. So he — he came out here, and his father's, well, here he's helping — paying for — he's got his commercial license. I think he wants to — hopes someday to fly for QANTAS, or someone, you know.

M: mmm

S: And the young one's just doing his Matric, so I don't know how he ==

M: == So none of them actually live with your son and his new wife ==

S: == No. Not now.==

M: == now?

S: The oldest — the middle one goes backwards and forwards. He'd stay there if they let him, I think, but he's, you know, he's a bit disruptive. ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == He's got this violent temper ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == you know. But he's so affectionate you know otherwise. ... I don't know what the younger one's going to do — he seems to be one of those very reticent people, you know. =
=

M: == mmm ==

S: == I ring him up and it's hard to get sort of more than three sentences out of him. [laughs]
==

M: == mmm ==

S: == [laughs] And me the way I talk.

M: Might be just his age too.

S: Well could be, yeah.

M: mmm ==

S: == He didn't seem to — you know when P was young, all these adolescent problems — I don't remember having any of them with him. Whether he was just happy you know. ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == I remember the day he got married. I was waving goodbye to him. Course you know I was coming afterwards. And as he to get out the gate I called out "Have you got your handkerchief?" And he said turned to me and he laughed and he said "Oh I knew you'd say that."

M: [laughs]

S: [laughs]

[pause — 6secs]

S: He's out of work at the moment. I don't know what he's gona do now. He hasn't decided. ... They want to — when he retires — they want to go and live in Tuscany.

M: mmm mmm That's the new wife.

S: Yeah.

M: mmm Is she a bit younger than him?

S: She's not much. No. They're about the same age. She's German. No I think she's a year older. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = She's German. So I don't know why she wants to go to Tuscany. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = But they've always got on very well. And yet you know she's quite happy. She came back with him here and she seems to be quite happy to stay here, and yet she's got a son and a granddaughter in Germany.

M: mmm

S: But if P'd had a job in Germany that he could have gone to — cause he's learnt German of course — but she — I think — whether she helped him choose his current job or he decided for himself — she was quite happy to come back.

M: mmm mmm And she works too, does she? She's a psychologist?

S: Well she's a psychologist. Yes she's just building up a practice. Oh, of course er, she did two years in Hamburg, and of course she married and she came to live with P in Melbourne. They wouldn't accept it so she started again. Two years in Melbourne. They went to London. They wouldn't accept it so she had to start again.

M: [laughs] = =

S: = = She did eight years to do the four years.

M: = = That's terrible, isn't it? That's pathetic. = =

S: = = It's terrible. = =

M: = = It's ridiculous.

S: And she's the sort of person you find yourself telling her things = =

M: = = mmm = =-

S: = = you'd never dream of telling anybody. So she must make a wonderful psychologist you know. = =

M: = = mmm mmm = =

S: = = I'm quite stunned sometimes when I think of what I've said.

M: [laughs]

S: It's not the sort of thing I talk to people about much. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = You know.
[pause — 3 secs]

M: So, sounds like you get along with her.

S: Oh yes, she's very nice. Yes she's a nice girl. Well = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = she's always been very good to me. ... Like the other day she said — oh I can't remember — and she said "When are you coming over to see us?" And I said, "Oh I can't

afford it". Which is quite true. And she — as soon as I said it she said "P", and I said "No, look. I can't possibly come over just now anyway, you know". [laughs] = =

M: = = [laughs] mmm

S: Cause you know with U3A and that, I don't like missing it.

M: No. mmm

S: Think I've taken on too much this year. I won't take as many next year.

M: mmm

S: Cause I go to five a week and it's a bit much.

M: It's quite a lot.

S: You're only sposed to go to three.

M: Oh.

S: But, er, I was only going to three, and then the fourth one I put down and they rang up and said I could go to and then the fifth one, the chap wanted to know why I wasn't there.

M: [laughs]

S: You know, "Where's S? Why isn't she coming? Is she sick?" So I thought oh well, I'd better go

M: It's one of your favourites, is it? [laughs]

S: I think he might — they have this week — every term they bring a newsletter, you see and I wrote a few paragraphs about his class and this other man's class and how good they were and so on. Not that that helped, but it might have.

M: mmm mmm

S: Well it was true. I mean, I wasn't making it up.

M: mmm

S: Don't have to.

M: No. No.

S: I quite believe in that. If you like something, you write and tell people that, and if you don't like it too.

M: Yeah I — I didn't use to ever bother. It didn't ever occur to me. But I know now that it's really important ==

S: = = yeah I do = =

M: = = to get — to get some feedback — get to find out what people actually do think. It's very constructive. You don't have to be nasty about it. = =

S: = = No. No. = =

M: = = You just say, yes it's good, it's wonderful, jolly good, and say so. = =

S: = = Got a chap who's been doing — we've got that salt — salt damp round there and he's just done it for us. And er the man next door said, "He's made a much better job than they did to the house on the other side". So I wrote and told him. You know. Why shouldn't you? It only takes — well I said to J "Why don't I write a letter? It only takes 10 minutes."

M: mmm

S: She said "Mum, it only takes you 10 minutes, it sometimes takes people a week."

M: mmm

S: I spose it's true you know.

M: I spose. If you're in the mood for writing — you've got, you know ==

S: == Yeah ==

M: == you've got your pens ready ==

S: == That's right. You know what you're going to — you've made it up in your mind ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == Yeah ==

M: == and you know about your envelopes and your stamps ==

S: == Yeah, that's right . ==

M: == [laughs] you know where the post office is. Some — some people would say now 'What do I do? Now I have to go down town and buy some stamps.' ==

S: == Yes, that's right. ==

M: == Or now "Where's the post box?" [laughs] ==

S: == That's right. ==

M: == Some people would actually have to. ==

S: == And they wouldn't even know how to find the post code, would they?

M: Oh no they have to go and look it up ==

S: == Yeah ==

M: == find out how to look it up. Yeah, that's true. It'd be ==

S: == Yes. ==

M: == it'd be a mental stress for them. mmm

S: Cause I write long letters in my head, you know, to different people. ==

M: == mmm mmm

S: And I miss my — one of my Monash, not Monash, Springvale friends — I went overseas with her a couple of times — her and her family — or her husband — and she died of cancer last year. Gee I was so sad. And my sister died of cancer a couple of years before that. I went up — well I went up to see her, to say goodbye you know cause I knew she had it — and I just sort of couldn't come home again. So I stayed there for five months until she died.

M: mmm

S: I didn't have to, cause S was happily ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == settled and so ...

M: How long did you stay?

S: Five months

M: mmm That's quite long, isn't it? mmm

S: No I spoke to her husband ().

M: mmm

S: Course we did it between us, you know. I didn't do a lot of the actual nursing — he did that.

M: mmm

S: You know. I made her bed and did the washing = =

M: = = mmm mmm = =

S: = = things like that. She was always a special one in our family. You know I don't know what it was about her. She was, well, they — you should have seen the boys. We used to get her cast-offs. [laughs] Like my youngest granddaughter — they just come in (), you know.

M: mmm

S: You could say she had 'it'. You should have seen her in her airforce uniform. Yes, my two sisters were in the airforce. They were radar — radar operators and um they were on duty at Port (Lipton) when the *Sentinel* sank, and my sister saw that submarine on the radar and they wouldn't listen to her.

M: mmm

S: It was too new and nobody had confidence in it, you know, and the = =

M: = = They didn't even bother to go and check? = =

S: = = No. No. And it was the same in the — those two subs came into Sydney Harbour. Some of them girls = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = on radar duty saw them and they wouldn't believe them. In fact there's a new book out about the *Sentinel* and she's mentioned in it.

M: mmm

S: Gee they looked nice in their uniforms. If I hadn't had (S) I'd have gone in. ... I didn't tell you that, did I? During the war — course my husband — I didn't even ask — as soon as my husband went overseas, I was home like a shot you know [laughs] with S. My parents were wonderful to S, and, er, when they were calling for teachers I went back and I was teaching in a place called Mundubbera for about a year and then we had a flood when I was there too. And while I was there, S got men — well they said she got meningitis see. I went roaring home and my father said "Look, don't go back. You can — we need shorthand teachers at school. So if you come here." So I was all set to go there and I went in to see Colonel Hill — I don't know what he had to do with it but he was in charge. Well I ended up teaching in the army (schools) because they wanted married women you see.

M: mmm

S: They didn't want unmarried women, there - I spose it doesn't tempt the () or something.

M: [laughs]

S: That was good experience. Of course they were camped in the — they slept on the show grounds, you know, on the seats there. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: == And we had ninety at the time, sixty typing and you can imagine the noise and the others were supposed to be doing — oh yes, the others did army forms and filling them in. I used to do shorthand to build up their speed you know, and um and two men came back from Timor. Have you ever heard anything of the Timor Commandos? They had an awful time in Timor. When they left Timor the Japs were one hundred and twenty to one. There were two of them came to the course and you know, course my husband was in the Navy and the Navy took them off — you know we used to talk. So I took them home cause I thought “Dad’ll like to meet them”. And we all became very close friends and my sister married one of them.

M: mmm

S: So er, I’ve had a few interesting things in my life. [laughs]

M: Yeah. Yeah. I reckon.

S: You know, for awhile — and I sort of half fell in love with the other one.

M: Is that the one that writes to you?

S: No. No. This is um — no he’s dead now. But um it’s a strange business, because he was sort of — I think we both were — he was engaged ==

M: == You were married then. ==

S: == and I was married.

M: Yeah.

S: So it never went anywhere and we never expected it to, you know, but it was — it was a wonderful three months.

M: mmm mmm

S: He was such a nice chap.

M: mmm

S: He died. I don’t know what of. I had a letter from his wife — he seemed to be, you know, — when we went to Melbourne, they lived there and we all became friends ==

M: == mmm ==

S: == you know.

[pause — 5 secs]

M: You must have a good facility for keeping friends and keeping in touch with people.

S: I spose. I never thought of that. I spose I have. I ...

M: mmm Because some people don’t bother, do they? ==

S: == No. ==

M: == It sounds like you make a lot of effort to ==

S: == I do try, yeah. But um I’ve got one of my school — school friends now she can’t seem to write back now she never did like writing. She doesn’t even ring now.

M: mmm Yes letter writing is a kind of, um — it’s a really good skill. It’s a very communicating skill.

S: Yeah.

M: But I don't think a lot of people have it anymore. I don't know.

S: Well my younger sister does the writing, you know. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = She does the family letter occasionally. All her family's scattered, but she writes to sons and daughters. They never answer. They ring up occasionally.

M: mmm

S: Course she's got one in Brisbane that she's close to.

M: mmm

S: Oh I didn't tell you why I came to Adelaide, did I?

M: Uh uh.

S: Well um I was in Brisbane living with S. You know we were quite happy, but it wasn't as full a life as here. And J was — first she was on the farm at Wilmington and then she left her husband and she moved to Port Augusta. Something to do with training Aboriginal women — Aboriginals for teaching.

M: mmm

S: And the girls — when C was in year 10, she rang or wrote and said couldn't — couldn't I come over and we'd buy a house here and I could look after the girls through the week and she'd go up and down to Port Augusta so they could go to a better High School.

M: mmm

S: She didn't like the high schools in Port Augusta.

S: mmm So we came — I came over and we bought this house and um C went into Adelaide High School. Was it a nightmare trying to find somewhere for S. I think I went to every agency in every place for about eighteen months you know. There's one down there at, oh, Gepps — not Gepps Cross — Bedford — down there, there's a hostel. She was in there for awhile.

M: mmm

S: But she was only sposed to stay there till she had a job, but she couldn't — they wouldn't give her a job in the end, said she wasn't good enough. So I used to pick her up every morning and bring her home here and take her back in the afternoon because they didn't want her round in the day time, see. And then some — one of the, er, what do they call them — social workers ?— took to S — took an interest in S and she got her into a house out in Hampstead Road, out that way. And, um, that didn't work terribly well because the others had all been there for years and she — you know she couldn't = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = they couldn't accept her. So then she got her into this place at Happy Valley, that's right, and she was sharing this big house. There were — she and a girl shared the flat at the back and the other three were in the big house at the front. And then one of them died. One of the girls died. So um I don't know, there was a big mess around and one of the boys was very difficult so they put him in S's flat and they got S in this, um, elderly citizen's place

M: mmm

S: Which was the best thing that's ever happened of course.

M: mmm

S: That's the — it's a wonderful place.

M: mmm So she's in an elderly citizens' place, but she's not = =

S: = = not because she's there because she's elderly, but because this er bedsitter became available there and they let them have it. I don't know why they did.

M: But it would mean that her surroundings would be relatively peaceful = =

S: = = That's right = =

M: = = and calm. = =

S: She — she's fifty-five. She's almost elderly, I spose.

M: Yeah. mmm

S: And oh. = =

M: = = But it'd be calm. = =

S: = = Oh, that's right, yes, yeah, there's no noise. They're not allowed to have dogs though you can have a cat. She's got a cat because one of the carer's got a boyfriend that was allergic to cats. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = So she passed the cat on to S. But you know when she shifted into that place she had no curtains so one of the carers brought down her curtains and put them up for her. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = and, um, yeah, they're like that. Oh, I think sometimes she lives better than I do I think. She's got a new fridge. She's got a new TV. She's got a new antenna for her TV. She's got new furniture. You know, she's very comfortable.

M: mmm

S: Only 'tis a bit small. I — there are some units with bed rooms, you see. Well hers is just a bed-sitter.

M: So she just lives in the one kind of space?

S: Yeah. The funny thing is, the bathroom is huge. Now why they put such a huge bathroom? They could have moved the whole = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = and given her a big sitting room. It's very badly constructed, I think, design. Then there's — over the sink the blessed cupboard comes right over the sink and I'm always hitting my head on it.

M: mmm

S: But, you know, it's only minor. Doesn't worry her.

M: mmm

S: She doesn't let things worry her of course. Sometimes she can storm about something. She can jump and swear. [laughs] I was afraid it would worry the other old people there, but it

doesn't seem to. One old chap puts her rubbish out for her, takes the newspapers out for her.

M: mmm

S: She's got an air conditioner. I said well she'd better have an air conditioner. There's a little — you know, with a flat on each side, so they let her put one in.

[pause — 4 secs]

M: Where does she get her income? What kind of income? I spose she's on a pension. They change the name at different time, don't they?

S: Oh yeah. She only pays, I think, \$23 a week rent.

M: mmm That's nice, isn't it? mmm

S: Carers watch what she's spending, you know. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = She's not allowed to spend more than so much for her food.

M: mmm

S: She always seems to have some money when she needs something.

M: mmm

S: But I need someone to do that with me. = =

M: = = [laughs] I need a carer too.

S: I've never been any good with money. = =

M: = = Wouldn't a carer be nice? [laughs]

S: = = Oh yeah. I don't know. You can't buy what you want to, you know.

M: No. No.

S: But she's got some nice clothes.

M: mmm

S: They've taken her out and bought them. She has this beautiful white top with embroidery in it. It's lovely feel, and I said to her "S, that is nice. But it says dry cleaning on it. Dry cleaning only." I didn't say any more, but next time I'd gone they'd taken it back and changed it. She must have said "Mum says." = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = Well it would have been awkward for her. = =

M: = = mmm = =

S: = = So they took it back and changed it — but they always ring me up you know before they do anything. S needs so and so. Do you think it's alright?

M: Oh great. Cause she's been, been with you most of the time before, hasn't she? = =

S: = = Oh yes.

M: So you've helped make her decisions. This is the first couple of years you've been = =

S: = = Yes. Yeah. That's right. = =

M: = = without her.

S: She, er, — they even, even sent me a card at Christmas and thanked me for my interest in her. I couldn't get over that. I mean she's my daughter.

M: [laughs] It's the other way round, isn't it?

S: That's — it — that's what happens. (They just dump). The parents are in Queensland, so they never hear a word of them. Someone, a girl — her brother comes and sees her once a month and I think they keep in touch with him. But most of them.

M: But you've actually looked after her for over fifty years. = =

S: = = All her life, yeah. = =

M: = = mmm And working and studying.

S: mmm

M: mmm

S: Yes it just worked in you know. She was left school when I could start teaching. And she seemed to cope alright at home on her own in the day time She doesn't mind being on her own.

M: mmm

S: She can read and that. I don't know how much she gets out of it. () gave her some books. She read school girl books for a long time and I said didn't she think perhaps she ought to have something a bit more grown up, so now she reads romances, but not the erotic ones. You know.

M: mmm Sort of Mills and Boon?

S: Yeah, that's the type.

M: Oh well.

S: Well why not.

M: Why not?

S: I want her to because I wanted to keep her skill of reading = =

M: = = Yes, so, um, I agree, I agree. [laughs] Yeah. I mean. = =

S: = = I worked hard enough to get it.

M: Yes. There's a lot of a lot of people talk about, you know, good reading and bad reading and all of that, that but I think reading is good. [laughs]

S: Yeah. Well that's what I think.

M: Yeah. Any — any reading is good.

Transcription 2 — C and M

M: mmm Right, right. Well it does sound um very interesting to me. I mean that needs a lot of airing, the topic of witches.

C: The thing that interests us both enormously, is the way, um, one — I think persecutions — from stereotype — which was invented by men, er, so you, um — in a way to get away from — well as an attempt to overcome — with Christianity the old religion — I suppose you can call it that, um, which has meant that, you know, er, women — particularly women of a certain age group, have been persecuted because they're seen as, as you know — there were three stages of women in the old religions, um, the maiden um, the, um, mature woman — middle — child producing, you see, and then the crone or the old um, woman of wisdom. And that is what has created the difficulty. Old women are seen primarily as a, a threat because they have wisdom, er, and then of course because they're no longer attractive, they're seen as a threat to men's masculinity. They er, men seem to resent, um, the fact that they're no longer beautiful and desirable and they certainly = =

M: = = They're not continually making the effort = =

C: = = mmm = =

M: = = to um be beautiful, to = =

C: = = in other words they're = =

M: = = {laughs} = =

C: = = showing that they're, they're = =

M: = = they don't = =

C: = = free of men = =

M: = = yes that's quite right. Yes, I've read a little bit about that () the word crone and the negative concept that goes with it.

C: Oh yes, yes. I mean, almost it's — it's a pejorative word, isn't it?

M: It is. That's what it is. From what I've read it's not only in our kind of society either. It's in all societies. There is this attitude and there are — there is this language that describes old women and ... ()

C: Um, I think possibly there's a slightly different attitude in China from what I've read in the past.

M: mmm

C: But, um, I don't know now whether it's the same ... push the plunger down and help yourself.

M: I, um, I haven't read anything about every, every different society, but the ones that I have read, um, um — my topic is language and ageing — and so what I've read — I've tried to get hold of what I can about = =

C: = = mmm = =

M: = = um, er, attitudes towards old people in as many societies as I can, and what I've actually read describes — or seems to point to the fact that despite the fact that there appears to be superficial respect, there is actually, continually, this tension between youth and age. It doesn't matter what society it may be.

C: That's interesting.

M: It may be represented — I mean, the language might be respectful language, but there is always this tension between the old and the young. = =

C: = = mmm = =

M: = = And the word crone, in various translations, crops up in practically everything I've read.

C: Oh M must hear that. Yes. ... You'll excuse me not joining you, but I've had my two cups.

M: Oh.

C: And they do enough damage in this cold weather.

M: It's very kind of you.
[pause — 3 secs]

M: Yeah, so, um, but actually, um, one thing I read, was that, in a couple of societies, er men — old men are also referred to as witches — as — treated in the same way as women — have the same pejorative, um, um, representation.

C: Oh.

M: I thought this was interesting. I can dig that — I can dig that out. That was in — it's Melanesian — some Melanesian society. Some very small groups. ()

C: mmm Cause mostly they were honoured and um almost treated as shaman.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that's quite interesting too, that um, this shaman thing is not necessarily an age thing. It's a power thing.

C: Oh yes.

M: And that can be even quite young men = =

C: = = Oh yes = =

M: = = in fact.

C: Yes. I've noticed that. Um, I don't know much about the Inuits or um the sort of Northern, um ... beliefs. But um when you come down South East Asia, you find they are very, um —
mmm = =

M: = = Yes. = =

C: = = and sometimes um in the Phillipines
{pause — 5 secs}

C: Yes ... I try to keep the interests of my students going, you know, by introducing guest speakers, and er we've been lucky enough to get Dr. T B back.

M: Oh, right.

C: He's coming back to talk to us soon. He's such a wonderful lecturer really.

M: I've never actually met him.

C: Oh, he's wonderful. [laughs] We love him dearly. He had a book launching recently.

M: yeah.

C: A new book

M: mmm

C: Cause I — he really is a specialist in Chaucer. So when I asked him to come and talk he said he'd talk about language to us — which of course fits in beautifully with what we're doing — and , um, he said like the Pardoner "I'll bring some of my own". = =

M: = = [laughs] = =

C: = = to sell. So, I said there'll be a buying public.
[pause — 5 secs]

M: ()

C: It's not so heavy that people can be put off by it but you know it's um lighthearted, scholarly underneath. But you know presented with = =

M: = = With anecdotal things = =

C: = = Yes, but ... One thing I had the pleasure of pointing out to him that he'd left his own name out of it. Gone for a Burton.

M: Oh. [laughs]

C: He has a chapter on names which have been used as um um, passed into the language like 'boycott' and 'sandwich'. Um, in the airforce we always talked about 'gone for a Burton'.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Do you know where it came from?

C: Well I looked it up in Brewers and they say, or Brewers says that, um, er it's either just the airforce slang that became common () or it means Burton's ales, which of course were a famous brewing company in Ireland. And it would mean someone had skived off the job, gone to drink beer instead of um getting on with the job.

M: Left it ...

C: But I never heard it used in any other sense and in the airforce it's always used — meaning it was part of the airforce slang that covered up great seriousness with lightheartedness. = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: == Um, 'gone for a Burton' means that someone died, you know — been in an air crash — been shot down. ==

M: == mmm ==

C: == 'Bought it' was another one. But you referred to it like that was kind of superstition, I think.

M: yeah superstition.
[pause — 3secs]

M: So, yeah. It's not one that you hear very often these days.

C: No I don't think so. And perhaps T's too young to remember that.

M: mmm

C: He might not be old enough

M: That would be interesting because you can see how these kinds of expressions shift from generation to generation.

C: Exactly. Yes.

M: Because we can't always ... That would have been interesting to study that but I can't change now. [laughs] Do that next time.

C: It's like the word 'gay' — 'gay'.

M: Gay? Oh yes.

C: I resent the misuse of the word because I um, I can find no other word that exactly expresses ==

M: == No that's right. ==

C: == er, you know, the quality of gaiety.

M: Jolly?

C: Jolly? Too heavy. No. No. No, not really. There isn't any other word.

M: No it would ()

C: Very interesting. I come across it in books, printed, you know, say um pre 60s.

M: mmm 40s and 50s.

C: Yes. Yes. Used quite unselfconsciously.

M: And I spose it would be interesting to know why that word was chosen too. I mean in the beginning ==

C: == I've never been able to find out. ==

M: == being a homosexual wouldn't have been a gay thing.

C: No.

M: It would have been quite

C: () I wonder if perhaps ... there is a way of speaking which, um uses ... opposites ==

M: == mmm mmm ==

C: == to express things ==

M: == To try and select the positive

C: That seems the only explanation. Mmm

- M: ()
[pause — 4 secs]
- M: mmm Well what I'm trying to do really is, um — starting out with stereotypes and looking at how older people are portrayed in fiction, in the media — print and electronic media and everywhere and then just looking actually at um, um — because I'm a linguist I'm looking at the language that old people use and just see how that reflects the role that they — that um — fore example on TV — the role on TV and the media. Are they actually — are they being given language which accords with the stereotype, or is it more in tune with reality. So that's the kind of thing that I'm looking at. As well as that, looking at, um, how cross-generational talk takes place. Um, there is a theory of accommodation — accommodation theory of language, where — when two people or more from different, um, socio-cultural backgrounds meet — who chooses the topic and who accommodates to the — to the other person? Is there an accommodation or is there? [background noise]
- M: One would expect that if the two people, um, have been friends for a long time or come from the same family or the same age group, that there's no need for accommodation — that they do not need to accommodate to each other, especially if they have the same knowledge — understand each other, but when someone fresh enters the conversation, accommodation is required. That is this person does not have the same knowledge as the other people — and what I'm interested in is looking at cross-generational as, um, the theory is that, um, one or other of the generations make a lot of accommodation. A lot of people might think that, um, they have grandchildren, for example, — that they get along really well with their grandchildren. Well, of course they say they do and of course they do. But is the conversation the same with their grandchildren as it would be with their close friends? Is there actually some level of accommodation going on with the grandchildren?
[pause — 3 secs]
- C: Well just off my head I'd say course there is. Er, the interests are different, um ... Er sometimes grandparents tend to use their grandchildren's slang. It's never a success.
- M: That's right.
- C: It's not what grandchildren want from their grandparents. They expect them to be more stately, more oldie worldie, — more ... [laughs]
- M: Yeah. That's right. [laughs] Yeah. OK. Yeah.
- C: And, um — and of course, you know from the point of view of interests — it's impossible for them, um — for them to be the same. And it seems to be so obvious that you talk about different things in a different way to your own contemporaries, from the way you talk to someone from a different ethno-socio-economic side of things. I think that too is pretty obvious, um ... Any example I give you will sound intolerably snobbish, and, er — so I just have to do it.
- M: Yes go ahead. Go ahead.

C: Um, I have a nice little girl who comes and does some housework for me once a fortnight, and when I say nice little girl — she's a woman — a youngish woman with youngish children, er — who of course, has had a different educational background. She's shrewd and a survivor and had, you know, all sorts of troubles. She said a wonderful thing to me one day. Er, I'd just come back from my daughter's wedding, er, a few weeks ago. And, um I said, you know — "Such a lot of fuss. It was all so formal and it was such a terrific business. I've been married twice and I had none of this with either of my weddings." And she said, "Well I've never been married at all, so I wouldn't know." And before I could even think it, she said, "Sounds odd, doesn't it, when I've got three children?"

M: [laughs]

C: And I thought that was marvellous because ... no one of my generation, I suspect, would have said that.

M: No.

C: mmm.

M: No, not in that way, certainly.

C: No, it probably would never have happened in my generation.

M: And if it had it probably would have been quite different language used to talk about it. That's interesting yeah. So yeah, there's been a big generational change.

C: There can be communication with good will on both sides.

M: mmm Yeah.

C: But I think there has to be good will.

M: There has to be good will and there has to be interest. You have to be tolerant.

C: mmm

M: And I guess this is one of the things that, er, — with this tension between youth and age — particularly in our society at the moment — incredible — it's that only youth and beauty are of value. Um, I think that, um, it's very difficult win that tolerance from younger people and to be heard and to be given the value that older people have. But I look at the, the, the people that I talk to from U3A — and look at what they're doing with their lives and the knowledge they have, wisdom. [laughs] It's absolutely incredible, you know, um ... Well, we know, — I mean it sounds a bit — it sounds trite, but a lot of young people don't have anything like that — () observational and analytical skills and clarifying skills and the older people are always portrayed as being a bit thick, slow, lost it, past it. It's just not true.

C: Do you ever watch a thing called — I bet you never have time to watch anything — it's called *Waiting for God*.

M: No.

C: Well, you should. It's, um, let me see. I think it's Monday or Thursday. Let me check. [rustle of newspaper as she check's the paper] ... No it's neither. It's Friday {rustle} Yes, eight o'clock on Channel 2. Only half an hour.

M: I could watch it then. I could take the time.

C: Um, I think you should.

M: What's it about? Is it = =

C: = = It is set in a retirement home and, er, it is mainly dialogue between an older man and an older woman. They're neither of them quite your normal older people. I won't tell you any more. I'd rather just = =

M: = = Oh. It sounds great. I had no idea there was such a show. I'll watch it definitely.

C: I think it will amuse you. And, er, it may interest you as well.

M: mmm Well, see that would — that'd be interesting — seeing how they er portray people in a home — older people in a home — what kind of lines they give them to speak.

C: mmm

M: Is it anything remotely connected to reality or is it reinforcing the stereotype?

C: It's English. Which of course is why I watch it.

M: Yeah. Yeah. It's probably quite good.

C: [laughs] Oh get down — the outdoor cat ... I only let her in because (my cat unless I feed her). I have two cats — because my cat — I was going to say about — you know — very often as an older person, what you feel about the young is that they're reinventing the wheel and you could save them all that trouble. [laughs]

M: [laughs]

C: They insist on reinventing the world = =

M: = = by themselves. You're right about that, they are. I come up against it all the time. I think, well I know how to do that. Why don't you ask me? But they're not going to.

C: And of course, the Chinese saying that you don't understand a thing until you've taught it. So perhaps you don't understand a thing until you've done it.

M: mmm That's just the way life has to be.

C: mmm Yes

M: There are a lot of theories on what, what this tension is about between young and old. It's probably, um — it's probably power — um, the young people desperate, — desperate to get power. (And then there are certain rituals). And if there's not a lot of space for them to do it = =

C: = = mmm = =

M: = = er, it's very frustrating. So that, you know, one way to do it, is to push older people or to actually draw strong differences between the two — so that what you're talking about is old fashioned, it's finished, it's gone. I know what's going on now, therefore I've got the power. And so then that older people have probably um will not be recognised. .

C: And it is true, of course. But we don't know what it's like to be, say, eighteen or twenty-five or thirty-five in 1995 = =

M: = = That's true. = =

C: = = do we? We've got no way of knowing. Um, someone said to me just recently — I was criticising, er, strongly, D H Lawrence. Everyone — you know, there are a lot of people

whose — I mean writers — whose opinions I respect, who seem to think he's marvellous. I don't. I can't stand him. I think he just wrote rubbish. At least, perhaps, I'm beginning to change my mind just slightly, but, um, I have never taken to D H Lawrence. And someone said to me, but um, "But from what angle are you looking at him? Um in the 20s, you know, you were just born — just coming to, to sort of um, see things — you're seeing him from a completely different angle from the people who've read him since." And I realised then that perhaps I ought to see myself more as er, well more generally one should see oneself more er in relation to one's age group and then judge one's reactions to things. It may well be conditioned to a certain extent by ... that.

M: Yeah, that's a good point.

C: mmm Mind you [laughs] = =

M: = = It's not always easy to do = =

C: = = if you're not, it's a wrench of the mind. It is so comfortable to sit back and despise, or run down, or be derogatory about people, um, writers, in my case. And it's actually um = =

M: = = Cause they're doing it differently to the way that you've got = =

C: = = and my intelligence is at odds with my — my emotional reaction, my gut reactions, you know. Because it's emotion that determines that sort of thing. Emotion comes from one's age group. Oh dear!

M: But there's not much you can do about that, except sort of = =

C: = = If you're aware of it. = =

M: = = You can be very vigilant about why you make decisions and things like that. = =

C: = = That's exactly it. It's hard — it's hard to be vigilant. It's so much easier [laughs] = =

M: = = To say well I've learnt that and that's fixed = =

C: = = Yes = =

M: = = "I've got this opinion that's based on something good so I won't ever change it." Yeah.

C: But there are a lot of people my age, would tell you that the older they get, the less they're convinced of things — the harder they find it to make decisions about things in this way. They, um — you begin to see all around — a subject = =

M: = = You have too much knowledge.

C: Yes. [laughs]

M: Yeah.

C: You seem to — you end up sitting on a number of fences, which is very uncomfortable, really. ... You become agnostic about things.

M: Yeah, I notice that particularly when I'm at work. I have been there a long time. I have seen people come back and start to reinvent stuff and say "Why don't we do this?" "Because we did that and it didn't work." "Why do you do this?" "Because it works." Um, and after a while you just sort of have to say well hang on, this is happening every meeting. This is happening every day. There are all these new people twenty years younger than me. This is happening all the time. I'm getting sick of it. It's time I quit. Or at least it's time I shut up.

And you watch them go over and over and over it but you get this sort of feeling – Why? What? I know what’s good. [laughs]. And it’s very difficult and you have to — yes you do. You have to look at it from — from the other perspective. It’s quite irritating.

C: Oh yes. Yes. Since I was lecturing in History and Education for all those years, I saw things come and go, and um — even before my own time — knowing the history. Um, and I watched people introducing the same mistakes, you know — knowing what America did and it didn’t work and now suddenly, you know — fifty years later, they’re doing it in Australia. [laughs]

M: And this person announces this wonderful idea = =

C: = = Yes exactly = =

M: = = [laughs] but they’re going to do it. And they don’t have — they don’t have the knowledge. You can see. Yes, but see, that’s my point. It was this idea of so much knowledge that you’ve actually um, looked at everything from so many perspectives, so you say goodness me. Um, I can’t actually make a decision. I can’t change. I can’t change anything and life has got to go on. There isn’t any point changing it because if I change this, then that’s still going to happen and that’s a bit dangerous. You think, “What am I doing here?”

C: Sometimes we accuse ourselves of opting out. Um, and yet ... when you reach a certain age in life, you tend to think exactly as you say “I can’t do anything about it”. So, you know, all that generous enthusiasm for changing things that ought to be changed — that you had when you were young — it goes, because you see, you know, the same thing happening over and over again. You see the uselessness of change.

M: That’s right. Exactly right. And you can see these forces at work that you can’t stop and they’re going to go ahead and make all the mistakes anyway.

C: Who was it that said — French — was it Voltaire? — “I must cultivate my own garden”. ... And that’s the way you feel. You must cultivate your own garden.

M: mmm Yes. That’s right. ... Just look after your own business. Stop worrying about everybody doing everything wrong. [laughs] ... So I don’t know what will come out of all this — all this study. But er, so far I’ve certainly found that older people have er, no memory problem. I can’t detect any memory — I can’t detect any memory problem. ... It’s quite amazing you know.

C: The tendency is to forget perfectly ordinary words, I find. On the other hand, I go over and do the crossquiz every Saturday morning with an eighty-nine year old. She’ll be ninety in a couple of months. Um, who is physically — fairly immobile. But when we do the cross quiz together she can think of all sorts of things like ‘that’ [snaps her fingers as she says ‘that’] that I can’t.

M: Yeah, yeah, I do that too. I do the crossquiz with my mum.

C: mmm

M: I— I do think that the stereotype is um, ... it's planted from a perspective — you know how we tend to see things er, in relationships () like you don't have good — you can't understand good without bad — you can't understand bad without good — that things don't have meaning except in relationship to each other = =

C: = = Life and death. = =

M: = = That's right. And so the whole concept of age and all the attributes that go with it are seen in relationship to something else and poses this tension. It seems it's looked at as in opposition to youth. I think one of my points is that um, the people who set up this way of looking at things are the young people, so we're looking at — it's just that — going back a bit, and looking at how women have been perceived as different from men — men being the standard and women being different = =

C: = = mmm = =

M: = = from the standard, youth is the standard, youth is what is central and anything else — old age — is seen as being different from the standard. So I think that's um = =

C: = = And different so often means inferior.

M: It can be taken to mean inferior. Yeah, and, you know, I think that that's one of the things that I would probably be trying to put forward as being one objection — as age isn't a fact. And um what is it based on? Where does it come from? My — my thesis is that it would be coming from the ageism perspective of youth rather than based on any quality that is necessarily inferior. I mean you talk to any teenager — teenagers don't remember things. But who says that this is a problem that teenagers have, that should restrict them in any way from going about a normal life. But an older person starts to forget things and aha, suddenly they have to be secreted away from the regular pathways of life ... 'problem' is — 'problem' is a word that crops up quite a lot.

C: Oh yes, you're right there.

M: But, um, teenagers get away with it. They, they don't remember anything.

C: One sees why youth is the standard because ... I was thinking of the contrast.

M: I'm looking at, er, I've been looking at children's fiction lately. I've got some very interesting stuff on that = =

C: = = That's interesting. = =

M: = = on how writers portray older people and relationships between young and old people.

C: I remember a book the children had which was perfectly the perfect stereotype. I remember it was — oh a day in the life of this little girl. You know, lovely pictures, Um, daddy goes off to work of course.

M: Of course.

C: He's obviously middle class, um executive type you know, brief case, BMW type of thing. Er, mother — um, she helps mother — mummy with the housework and she er, um ... Mummy takes her to the park and she plays in the park and mummy, mummy talks with the other mummies. Er, a generation or two before it would have been a nurse, but.

M: Yes. Yeah.

C: English, of course. And then she um — she has to visit this little boy from next door and then daddy comes home. He's late, but you know he won't be too late to say goodnight before she's put to bed. And it was just so perfect as a stereotype. You know mummy spending her day doing these things and daddy going to work= =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = everyone perfectly happy = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = lovely. [laughs]

M: Yeah. Yeah.

C: But now I think they're very different, specially the teenage type of novels.

M: Yes they are in fact.

C: Oh yes. [laughs] It's so obvious isn't it? I mean the only way an individual can develop is by breaking free of the tribe or the family or the clan or whatever. So it has to happen to everyone doesn't it?

M: mmm

C: Hence the awful tensions between mother and daughter as you were growing up = =

M: = = That's right. That's right. Yeah well that happens. It happens. Normally things come back = =

C: = = Yeah = =

M: = = a few years later.

C: Yes they do. They do

M: But it appears that young people have to actually break away. One way of breaking away is this denial.

C: You might say Australia's going through it. We're breaking away from England = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = With the republic and all the rest of it. = =

M: = = Denial of everything that's good about it. [laughs].

C: [laughs]

M: But you can't actually say anything good about it anymore because people will jump and scream you know if you're in company and you say anything good about um, British heritage = =

C: = = Oh yes.= =

M: = = So there's bound to be someone in the company that will scream at you or = =

C: = = And usually on the basis of very little historical knowledge I notice.

M: mmm

C: [laughs]

M: And that's coming less and less too that there's no British history = =

C: = = taught in schools.= =

M: == It's not taught in schools, that part of our heritage ==

C: == Not that there wasn't a need for it to be taught quite differently. But, um ... yes ...
[pause — 5 secs]

C: No they've given it away. They've thrown the baby out with the bath water.

M: They have. Yeah. Yeah. Set themselves free or set us free or something.

M: So, tell me some more about witches.

C: [laughs] Witches. Well, M's the one to give you all the dates and things. Um, the Scottish experience is interesting. But, um, of course it was a — it was a European wide thing. It didn't happen only in one country — Germany, Switzerland, France ... Italy, I think, but I know very little about Italy. Um, Scotland very much. So of course, so it's very easy to zero in on Scotland because you have James the Sixth of Scotland and then the First of England with his terror of witches. And, um, so he gave, you know, the top authority to persecution. But um ... there wasn't very much at all in the Middle Ages. It, it's only with the Renaissance that you get the real development of it. And that is of course, it's a time of great disturbance. Like all times of great transition they're, they're like pigs you know. All pigs are equal but some are more equal than others. Um, all times are transitional but some are much more transitional and the Renaissance was a time when the yeast of society is working frantically. And, um it was also a time when religious struggles were at their peak, so that you have a state being changed from Protestantism to Catholicism and back again depending on the whim of the ruler. And, um each side used the idea of witches to bolster their own situation. Um, people who are uncertain of themselves need some kind of, oh ... Ishmael, some sort of black sheep, some sort of persecution er, object.

M: mmm

C: Now the Jews have always stood for a useful object in this way. But it was tricky persecuting the Jews because very often owing to land laws and so on and so forth, they had great wealth in their hands. So it was easier to find another object of persecution which you could direct the populace's attention to. Things go wrong. Who do you blame? Right, you've got a ready-made blameworthy object — the witches. Um, and things were going very wrong all over the place. I mean, not only was it a time of great intellectual fervour, but, um, there was a counter Renaissance which, um, um, was the attempts of the monolithic Catholicism to fight back against the coming of Protestantism. And er, it's, it's so useful to have a body of people you can point a finger to and say ==

M: == mmm ==

C: == "It's their fault, get rid of them." The state is not as, as, er — successful isn't the word I want — see I've forgotten the word.

M: Effective?

C: That'll do. Yes. Er so we must eliminate what's causing it.

M: Sort of diverts the attention ==

C: == exactly ==

M: == from what the real wrongs are. Yes.

C: And er, and since it was er, mainly — I think the figures were about, oh, something like 90% to 10% women — you know there were male witches — but um ... or declared to be such — but um the vast majority of them were women. ==

M: == mmm ==

C: == Um, very often they were poor, they were old, they were um, women on their own, they didn't have a male protector. This, of course made them, you know, a terribly easy target. And once you'd introduced the idea that people could only save themselves by pointing to their neighbour, by incriminating people — a very good example is McCarthyism — it was the same sort of thing as McCarthyism in America. Er, there of course they just ruined people. They didn't just send them to the state. England, by the way, didn't er burn witches. They only hung them. [excuse me] Of course, it's very hard to get any figures, but um, it seems that although there were women who actually thought they were able to create harm um ... most of them were women who were wise women in the village — knew about herbs, um ... they were able to produce um, remedies for things, um ... there was very little medical treatment. After the monasteries went, there was a period in which there was no one to look after the ordinary peasants, and um, they had to rely on these women for any medical treatment they could get. Men were very suspicious and er, midwives were particularly fingered. They were believed to be um, given to killing babies at birth er, () because there was very little um birth control ==

M: == mmm ==

C: == in those days. Um, and the rumour put around was that midwives killed the babies and gave them to the witches for their er infernal infamous sabbaths and so on. There's no proof whatever they ever had sabbaths. That was um, a story put about by the um, Christian persecutors um ... what would happen would be um, some old woman would come begging perhaps or come and ask for the use of something from some household. Um, the house would turn it — turn her away. She, she'd mutter a curse and quite soon after ==

M: == Curse? Swearing? ==

C: == Yes, like that — “Oh damn it” — um soon after that, a cow would die or a child would get ill or something of that sort would happen. Consequently, — one has to remember that it was a time in which cause and effect were seen slightly differently or very differently from the way they are now. Now you look for scientific reasons for things. If a child gets ill we think there must be germs or there must be some kind of virus or there must be — we have some idea of what causes it. In those days you looked for a cause and the cause was either God's um, punishment for your own ill-doing or it was um, someone else ill-wishing you or the malevolence of you know, some distant um, authority. It was um — you had to find a reason for things. But you found it differently from the reasons of nowadays. That meant that, um ... there were black and white witches — white witches who did nothing but good,

er, and black ones who definitely did create some mischief, they thought. But of course, after awhile it was all lumped together. ()

M: Still, it was the power they weren't allowed to have.

C: So, in er, let me see, 1548 — I've forgotten the date — the really dreadful, infamous um, *Maleficus malfiecarum* — er, *Malleus Maleficarum* — the, 'the hammer of the witches', was published. It went into a vast number of editions. Of course, the printing press helped all this. Um, so things could be spread in print. Um, it was produced by two — um, two men who actually had been part of the, er, inquisition. Um and um, that was a kind of text book — How to recognise witches. How to — What questions to ask then what to do with them. And it was used as a textbook. It was used as a ... textbook for many years. Um and the questions you asked were carefully designed to get people to incriminate themselves. There were numeral confessions which were brought about a), by torture which was um, of course, always used. And um, b) by um ... verbal entrapment. And of course, one thing you always did was to get your victim to er, point the finger at someone else. In some cases whole villages = =

M: = = Taking part in it.

C: Yes. In some cases, whole villages um, were destroyed or depopulated as far as women were concerned because they gradually became all, all involved. If um anyone showed me thumbscrews or, you know, anything like that, I would instantly produce any series of lies to get out of it, being a physical coward of extreme = =

M: = = I don't think pain is one of my favourite = =

C: = = No. [laughs]

M: = = past-times. No. No. No. And specially, you know, if you've got a neighbour you don't care for too much.

C: And the descriptions of torture are hideous and horrible ... They overreached themselves in the sense that um — the famous one is Matthew Hopkins, the witch finder in England. Er it was with him the whole thing came to a sort of peak. You know, there were great floods of accusations and trials and hangings and all the rest of it and then it died down after that. And it's as interesting to ask why it died down as to ask why it started. And I think um, if you look at the times in which it begins to die down, in the late 17th century, you discover that people are getting more rational, more scientific, you could say. Um, things are settling down as far as religion goes. Er, things are settling down as far as commerce and um. ... people's thoughts are directed outwards to um, um, exploration. New markets are opening up you know, new, new countries are being discovered. It's er — people are more philosophical. So that you arrive at the calm of the 18th century, or so it seems. Looking back, it wasn't, of course, a calm time at all for anyone living in it. But looking back, it looks so much calmer = =

M: = = relatively = =

C: = = and so much more rational = =

M: == mmm ==

C: == than what had gone before.

M: mmm
[pause — 5 secs]

C: Horrible business.

M: But it was picked up again in the United States. Wasn't it a bit later?

C: Yes um, in Maine and um, New England. Um, that marvellous play, *The Crucible*, which of course is about McCarthyism, but you know is set back then, gives you a very good picture of it. ... I er ... I just feel so lucky to have been born when I was.

M: And where. [laughs]

C: And where. Specially 'and where'. [laughs]

M: ()

C: And in Australia. South Australia seems to me to be the best place. But then again I'm biased.

M: Yeah. Well we probably are biased. We've found a comfortable niche. But when you look around, it's about as far away from anywhere terrible that you'd ever want to be.

C: Thank goodness. ()

M: yeah. Yeah. We're getting Wagner.

C: Yeah.

M: Yeah Yeah. Plenty of good things going on. No bad things. Not too many. Amazing.

C: [laughs] ()

M: mmm Yes. Funny business. But when you say that um, that you know that the play *The Crucible*, of course was written about something but used as an analogy. Isn't it interesting how this kind of thing is done everywhere and the government of the time — that's being pinpointed — they don't always recognise ==

C: == No. ==

M: == what's being — I mean what's being described. That to me is amazing because um people can pick up a book and read it and say "Oh you know this is actually the parallel — this is the mirror — this is what's going on at the moment". But governments don't necessarily understand that or they don't er, necessarily do anything about it.

C: The whole principle of government and who's involved I find extraordinarily difficult to comprehend. Er ... I mean, presumably they are individuals and um, well, intelligent. [laughs] Um, they um, — some of them must be able to see the kind of things that we as individuals can see. But why don't they see them the way we see them, I ask myself.

M: mmm

C: For instance, they seem unable to look ahead in a way that we can.

M: They seem unable to listen and look at um — yeah to see consequences of their actions.

C: And they obviously despise electorates because they don't seem to realise that we notice they break their promises.

M: They continually do.

C: Yes. [laughs]

M: But they always find justification for it. And er haven't yet noticed that people don't like that.

C: No. No. [laughs] It's a mystery.

M: Something to do with the fact that before you become elected um, you're one kind of person. Once you've been elected = =

C: = = you're another = =

M: = = um you become another for whatever reason.

C: Oh, when Lord Acton said "Power corrupts and absolute power" — no "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt [coughs] absolutely" — people tend to leave out the 'tend'. = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = Um, he was obviously saying that sort of thing, wasn't he?

M: Yeah.

C: You know — well er by extension — you can follow it — the possession of power changes you.

M: Give someone the power, they're no longer the person they were before they had the power.

C: Exactly.
[pause — 5 secs]

M: So they're continually doing things though there's a big hue and cry and protest about it, whatever small thing it might be — closing down railway stations or whatever it might be. It happens. And um.

C: mmm
[pause — 5 secs]

M: I guess it gets back to what you were talking about before ().

C: Yes, I read a lot of murder mysteries and I have just read a very interesting one in which an old physicist — friends of a physicist [coughs] attempt to kill a much younger physicist because he sees where the younger one's discoveries are leading. They're worse and worse in the destructive capability of what he has. ... He doesn't succeed. Someone else does. But um, the explanation of, of why he does it — is extremely interesting. He says, "I know that the research will go on. I'm not really preventing it. All I can do is try and hold it back for a little while. = =

M: mmm = =

C: = = It's going to lead to, you know, worse destruction than the atom bomb ever created. But if I can delay it a little and perhaps that gives time will give it a chance for better understanding to come about." = =

M: = = mmm = =

C: = = "People will refrain from making these discoveries."

M: mmm

C: Some hope.

M: [laughs] Yeah. Or, put it in the hand of somebody else who's not so gung ho or something.
==

C: == mmm ==

M: == But, no, you can't hold back the tide. I'm afraid. ... It looks to me as though you can't hold back the tide. You can stop, stop — I use the analogy of the rat. You can stop up the hole, you can stop up another hole. You can stop up the other hole, but the rat is still there.
[laughs]

C: [laughs]

M: You've got to go for the rat. You can't ==

C: == It's no good tampering with the holes.

M: No.

C: I was just thinking about my twenty years in one place and the changes I saw were not for — were not for the better. And I thought I wonder how much of my feeling can be attributed to the fact that I'm getting older and I just feel resisting change for its own sake. ... But, um, now I no longer can sit back and see things clearly. I don't know. ...

M: But then I admire people who can. I think how can you see things so clearly. Nothing is black and white. ... Things are these continual shades of grey. [laughs] Very grey.

C: It's difficult enough to think about doing something ==

M: == let alone being so convinced about the rightness of something.

C: Isn't it extraordinary.

M: I'm afraid I can't — I can't do that any more.

C: I'm sorry.

M: There is no right. [laughs]

C: Join the club.

M: mmm
[pause — 5 secs]

M: mmm Have to admire people who can be convinced.
[pause — 4 secs]

M: How long have you been um, giving lectures at U3A?

C: Oh eight and a half years now — no, more like nine. Er, we're having our tenth anniversary in Adelaide next year and um.

M: That's for the whole of U3A, is it?

C: Yes. And er, for, for South Australia, that is. Victoria had their tenth anniversary earlier this year. The others are even a lot younger. Of course it's been going much longer in England. Of course it's world wide now. Spreading even in China and um, I suppose France, where it started.
[pause — 4 secs]

C: When I went to Cambridge last, er and um, met some U3A people there, I discovered that it has become largely a sort of upper middle club. Er, of course Cambridge is full of marvellous people — retired, to give lectures. But um, it's not quite the um, democratic institution either. They charge considerably more — for one thing, they were charging twenty-five pounds.