

Ageing and Cognitive Linguistics:

What naming practices can reveal about underlying cultural conceptualisations

Réka Benczes,¹ Kate Burridge,² Farzad Sharifian,² Keith Allan²
¹Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest & ²Monash University, Melbourne

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“The Cultural Model of Ageing in Australian English”

Structure of the talk

1. Introduction
2. Main hypotheses of research
3. Novel conceptual categories
4. Category extension
5. Novel metaphors
6. Conclusions

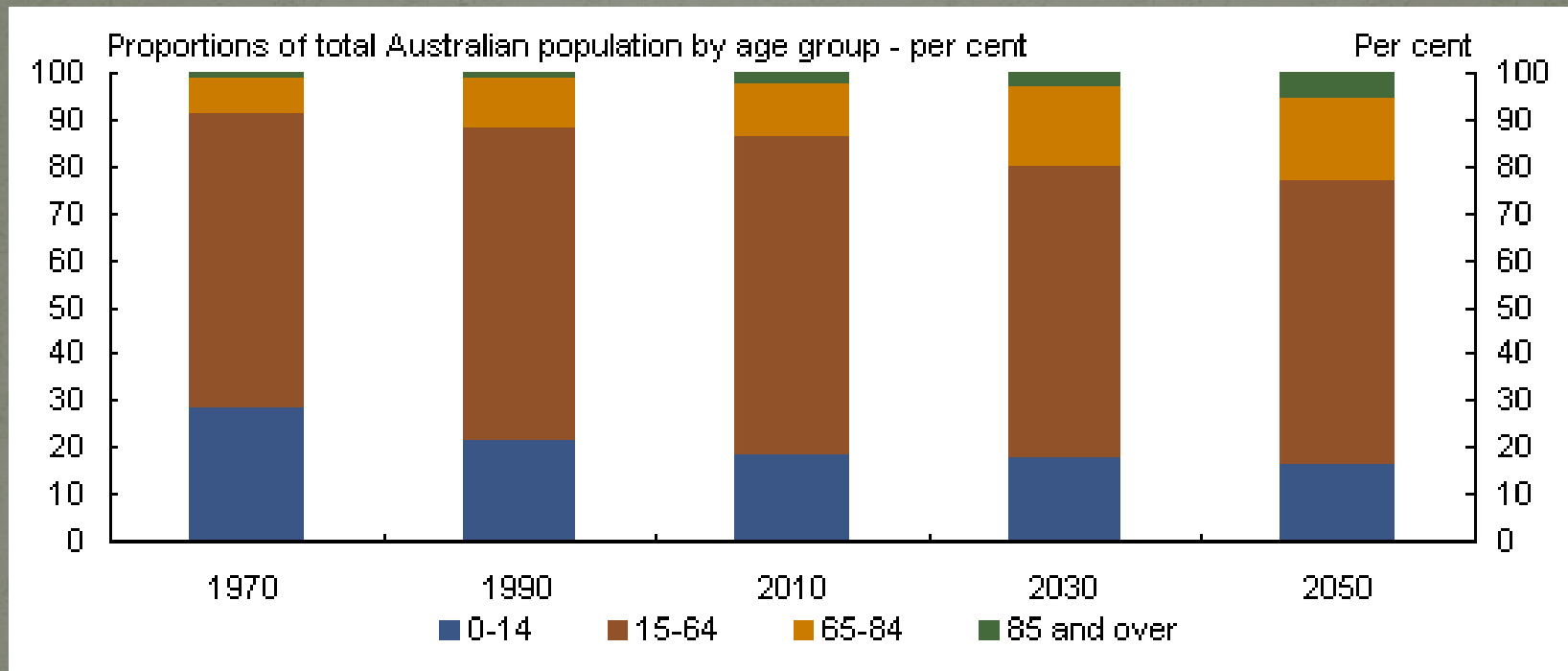
Introduction: Old Age and Euphemisms

- Ageing: a sensitive subject
 - Use of euphemisms
 - BUT: semantic perjury
 - *Senile*: “belonging to old age”
 - Samuel Johnson’s dictionary: “a senile maturity of judgment”
 - “euphemistic treadmill” (Pinker 2002)
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- Pinker, Steven. 2002. *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin.

Introduction: An Old Age Revolution?

- Median age of Australian population: 33.4 years (June 1994) to 37.3 years (June 2014)
- 1994–2014: proportion of 65+ increased from 11.8% to 14.7%; 85+ from 1.0% to 1.9%
- Next 40 years: 65+ around 25%

Introduction: An Old Age Revolution?



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics
<http://archive.treasury.gov.au>; accessed: 30 June 2015

Introduction: An Old Age Revolution?

- Low fertility rates
- Medical breakthroughs
- **Baby boomers**
- Kalache (2012), former Director of the WHO's Health of the Elderly program: "Never before have we seen a cohort hitting the age of 65 who are so well informed, so wealthy and in such good health ... [we] are ... *redefining what it means to age*. We are witnessing the emergence of a 'gerontolescence,' a new period of transition" (emphasis added)
- Kalache, Alexander. 2012. "How the Baby Boomers Are Reinventing Old Age." *The Huffington Post*. 4 April 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com> (accessed 15 July 2015).

Main Hypotheses of Research

- Ageing: undergoing major **reconceptualization** in Australian English
- Best analysed within a cognitive/cultural linguistic framework of euphemistic (figurative) language
- Reconceptualization of ageing manifested in:
 1. the emergence of novel conceptual categories;
 2. category extension; and
 3. novel conceptual metaphors

Novel Conceptual Categories

- Rowe and Kahn (1987): “successful ageing”
 - absence of physical and cognitive disabilities, social and productive engagement
 - emotional well-being and social and community involvement (e.g., Depp and Jeste 2009)
 - own respondents: *both* objective and subjective qualities are deemed significant: *healthy, positive, happy, involved*
 - successful ageing: at odds with negative outlook of old age
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- Depp, Colin A. and Dilip V. Jeste. 2009. Definitions and Predictors of Successful Aging: A Comprehensive Review of Larger Quantitative Studies. *FOCUS* 7(1): 137–50.
 - Rowe, J. W. and R. L. Kahn. 1987. “Human Aging: Usual and Successful.” *Science* 237: 143–49.

Novel Conceptual Categories

- *successful ageing*: subordinate-level category of *ageing*
- Ageing not a general process any longer that affects everybody similarly
- COMPETITION frame
- *successful agers* vs. “losers” who “didn’t try hard enough” (Horin 2012)
- Less entrenched in AusE vs. *healthy ageing*
- 1987–2014: yearly average frequency of 1.9 (first appearance in 1993)
- 1987–2014: yearly average frequency of 8.8 (first appearance in 1993)
- Horin, Adele. “Ageing disgracefully: Get real”. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 2012.

Novel Conceptual Categories

- American myth of success (Weiss 1969): every American has the right to “mold his own life” (p. 1)
 - self-improvement: originating in Puritan notion of calling (McGee 2005)
 - Australia: success as a less central schema?
 - *healthy ageing*: pro-active attitude to ageing via cause-for-effect metonymy
 - But less direct individual responsibility
 - Australian welfare state
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- McGee, Micki. 2005. *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Weiss, Richard. 1969. *The American Myth of Success: From Horatio Alger to Norman Vincent Peale*. New York: Basic Books.

Category extension

- *older Australians* vs. *seniors* (50+)
- <http://www.seniors.gov.au> vs. Council on the Ageing's (COTA) website <http://www.cota.org.au>
- Media: higher token frequency of *seniors* between 1987–2014
- But: average annual growth rate of *seniors* is 17% ⇔ *older Australians* 41%
- Overgeneralization via metonymy: *older Australians* blurs entry age of “senior citizenship” by whole-for-part metonymy ⇒ ageing as a scale ⇒ category of “old Australians” included in more general and larger category of “older Australians”

Category extension

- scale open on both ends!
- no strict boundaries between middle agers and *older Australians* –latter increasingly similar to former

Category extension



grey nomads: “someone who is 55 or older and is taking a long term camping trip around Australia”

Source: Google Images

Novel metaphors

- Benczes and Burridge (to appear, 2015): naming practices of aged care facilities in Melbourne, 1987 vs. 2013
- 2013 sample: greater degree of euphemistic usage by using wider array and larger proportion of appealing names
- 1987 sample: vast majority of facilities (82%) were *nursing homes* \Rightarrow evoked HOSPITAL frame
- 2013 sample: FAMILY frame \Rightarrow conceptualized facility as upper-class family home (Trinity Manor, Broughton Hall, Kew Gardens)
- VACATION frame \Rightarrow conceptualized facility as holiday resort (Edwards Lodge, Princeton View, Villa Franca; Casa Serena, Embracia)
- FAMILY frame: community and permanence \Leftrightarrow VACATION frame: individuality and transience
- Benczes, Réka and Kate Burridge. 2015, to appear. Current attitudes to ageing as reflected in the names of Australian aged care facilities. *Names: Journal of Onomastics*.

Conclusions

- Change taking place in conceptualization of ageing in Australian English
 - Negative associations replaced by more positive concepts such as independence and personal fulfilment
 - current expressions and “euphemisms” not further by-products of the euphemistic treadmill
 - euphemistic usage \Rightarrow increasingly orthophemistic (Allan and Burridge 2006)
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- Allan, Keith and Kate Burridge. 2006. *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thank you!

ozageingproject@gmail.com
rbenczes@gmail.com



Source: Google Images