

HIDDEN MEANINGS GIVEN TO OLD AGE AND AGING IN THE CONTEXT OF ANALYSIS OF CHOSEN VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

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The main problem of this work are hidden meanings given to old age and aging, encoded in selected verbal and non-verbal messages observed in the contemporary world. Whereas the main aim of the work is for the respondents to search for, decode and give “own meanings” to such messages; the expression “own meaning” is crucial here because it draws attention to the intersubjective nature of any existing meanings and their manifold entanglements that go far beyond individually created meanings or opinions. At the same time, the problem of giving meanings is closely linked with the interpretation that shows the way something is recognized and understood by an individual, a group or society. Such an approach imposes particular requirements on the respondents and expects them to subject these discussed messages to multilevel analysis research (the messages are tested not only in terms of the respondents’ own, individual experiences, but also in the prospect of various social and cultural entanglements). Very important are hidden meanings (that is the meanings containing concealed/hidden motives, transactions, etc.) inspired by a series of concepts and theories that the authors of this research, as well as respondents make use of – such as the concept of overt and covert transactions by Eric Berne, the concept of hidden meanings by Mary Douglas, a sociological concept of “hidden meanings” by Roland Meighan, the concept of cultural reproduction by Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of social reproduction by Paul Willis, or the concept of Basil Bernstein, that focuses on the language which is a carrier of numerous hidden meanings.

Keywords: Hidden meanings, Old age, Aging, Messages.

Introduction

The main problem of the work are *hidden meanings given to old age and aging*, encoded in selected verbal and non-verbal messages observed in the surrounding world.

It is worth emphasizing that such messages usually use not only words or *images, but also cultural symbols, metaphors*, various kinds of signs, *colors, shapes, sounds, and others*.

Very important here is the concept of *‘hidden meanings’* (not only meanings containing hidden motives, intentions, transactions, but also meanings unread, meanings encoded by specific culture (consciously or unconsciously; intentionally or unintentionally, etc.).

The idea to use them has been inspired by a number of concepts and theories used before, such as concepts of: Umberto Eco, Eric Berne, Mary Douglas, Roland Meighan, Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Willis, Basil Bernstein, Edward Hall, etc, compare: Eco (1996, 1999), Berne (1998), Douglas (2007).

At the same time, the main aim of decoding in this work is not to discover the intentions of the authors (*that is investigating what the author had in mind*), nor the objective truth which in such context does not exist. The main aim of the work is to search for specific messages in the surrounding world (their multidimensional decoding which is precisely associated with the interpretation) and to give them 'own meanings' (where respondents give their 'own meanings' to the chosen messages and, at the same time, to the issue of *old age and aging in their context*). The expression of "giving meanings" is closely associated with the *interpretation* which shows and illustrates different ways of understanding (individual, group, social, cultural understanding, etc.). It means that the message should be considered by students in the prospect of various social and cultural involvements and various contexts - but not only in the prospect of their own individual experiences and knowledge.

We believe that such an approach not only improves students' skills of interpretation, but also prepares them to solve multiple problems (understood very widely) in a better way.

The Issue of Old Age and Aging in the Context of Wider Project

It is worth noting that the presented issue: Hidden meanings given to old age and aging in the surrounding world in the context of analysis of chosen verbal and non-verbal messages, is just a small part of a much wider project realized at the University of Gdansk with students from the Faculty of Social Sciences. The project is titled *Recognition of "hidden messages" in surrounding world and dealing with them*. It is an alternative form to the traditional model of education. It is worth emphasizing that both teacher and students play specific roles here, completely different than in traditional model of education (in which a teacher primarily transmits knowledge to students, and students' activity is limited by certain expectations, by existing programs, by exam requirements, etc).

It means that students play very active role here – the role of active researchers who independently investigate the surrounding world according to the issue/problem: (first, they look for specific messages in the surrounding world - they study and observe various messages according to the issue/problem and choose some examples that are representative and interesting for them – they decide about chosen examples; then they give them their "own" meanings (their first meanings); next, such meanings are subjected to the overall discussion during the academic activities (where students present chosen examples and interpret them; among such examples are: taken pictures or videos/movies, advertisements, articles, or other visual and verbal messages); And finally, students prepare their 'final' interpretations – where the word: 'final' is taken in quotation marks, because in this context 'final' interpretation doesn't exist.

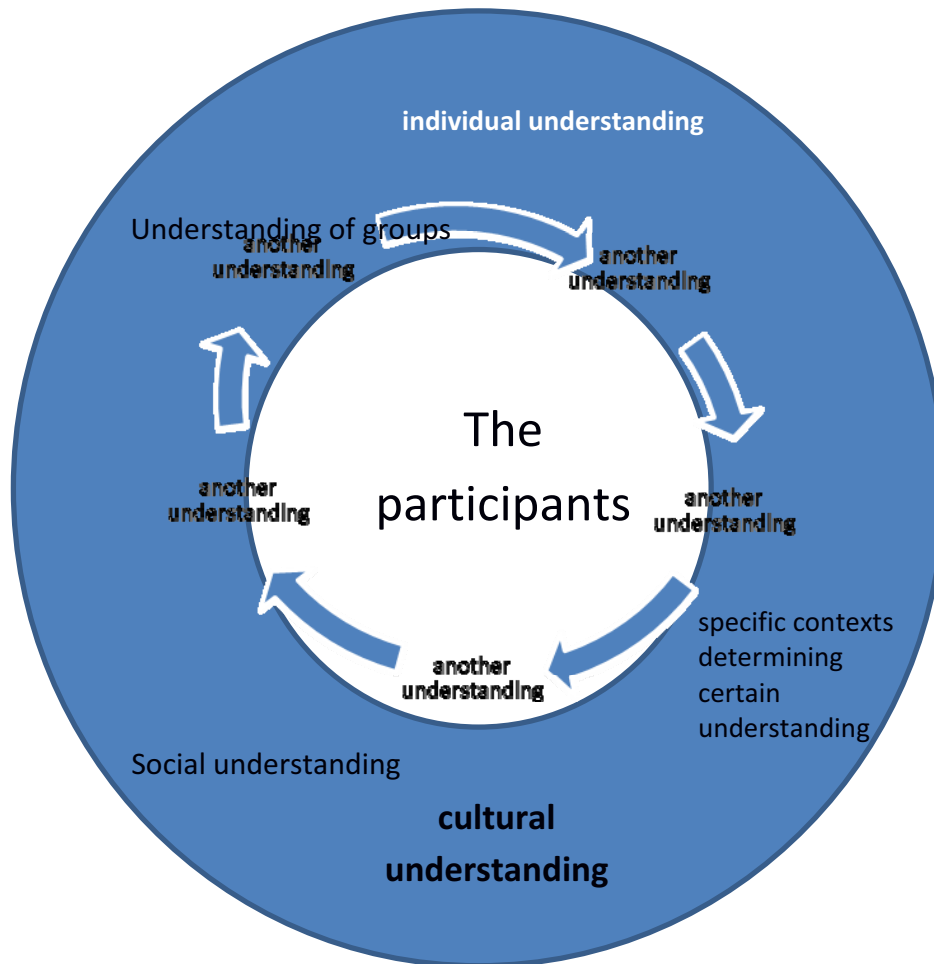
It is worth emphasizing that in this context, a teacher plays a completely different role than usual – in contrast to roles associated mainly with a transmission of knowledge. A teacher does not teach students (in a traditional understanding of this word), does not provide them with knowledge but becomes an animator, a coach, an inspirer, and at the same time a companion and a partner of a joint search for knowledge, who together with the students designs, organizes and creates a new educational quality, encourages them to actively observe and supports them.

It means that the teacher should be free of any scientific theories, concepts or all the knowledge that could block the creative and cognitive potential of the students (such an attitude is particularly important at the beginning of the work). In this project, the respondents' points of view are very significant, as well as their individual experiences and interpretations which are a kind of their very own discoveries.

Therefore, their interpretations which become a primary value of the research work, are in the center of interest. These individual findings may sometimes seem very naive, even simplified or not very significant– especially when they are considered from the prospect of existing scientific knowledge, theories or concepts. However, in the prospect of individual experiences, such learning, studying and individual discoveries are extremely valuable and priceless. That is why even the most seemingly naive interpretations are treated quite seriously – with full attention and respect. It means that the teacher should be free of scientific theories, concepts or all the knowledge that could block the creative and cognitive potential of the students, their initiative, ideas, as well as individual interpretations.

It is worth noting that such interpretations are usually subjected to a process of changes during the work (they are subjected to deeper reflection, consideration, examination in various contexts during the classes, small group discussions, during overall discussion). Respondents participate in a jointly built sense, and at the same time they experience a “miracle of understanding”. It draws attention to the enormous dynamics of knowledge and its discursive nature, where knowledge is constantly subjected to ongoing verification. In such a prospect, any new understanding or experience opens a new horizon of thinking/understanding but never completely closes it – because “full” understanding may never be reached. Such an approach is the consequence of using the concept of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic model of research and at the same time the ‘circular logic of the process of understanding’, compare, Gadamer (2000), which is reflected in the scheme below:

‘The circular logic of the understanding process’ used in the work



It is worth noticing that the research project based on ‘The circular logic of the understanding process’ requires the respondents to adopt an ‘interrogative’ attitude, in which they continue posing new questions and seeking various answers.

The Problem of Perceiving Old Age and Aging in the Culture of Youth in the Context of Chosen Examples

In the context of the presented issue, the following questions are especially important: *What messages and images of old age and aging attract the respondents’ attention? What images are they sensitive to? What do they mean to them in the context of their cultural, social, situational, historical experiences? What*

hidden meanings do the respondents notice in them? How do they interpret the form used in them? What hidden values do they notice in such messages? What do they learn from such messages?

It is worth emphasizing that respondents are aware both of positive and negative consequences posed by the culture of youth. First, they note that old people much more effectively take care of themselves. On the other hand, respondents are aware that culture of youth puts strong pressure on older people, raises impossible expectations (causing internal conflicts, withdrawal, giving up, evoking a sense of guilt in them, or leading to desperate acts to maintain youth at all costs, etc). Sometimes old age and aging are even perceived as a “stigma” in the culture of youth which is also shown in many messages cited by the respondents, compare, Goffman (2007).

Respondents very often pay their attention to the exclusion of the discourse of old age and aging in the surrounding world and to fictitious, pretended interest/concern and support for older people.

They also recognize existing conflict of interest and expectations which exists in the space of Youth and Old age (which is revealed in a number of verbal and nonverbal messages).

Moreover, they recognize strong trend to be forever young, beautiful and, most of all, efficient and useful. Such values are recognized in the contemporary, consumer world, and on their basis people form their own opinions, judgments, they interpret the world, and make certain decisions.

However, such a world exerts certain expectations on people, indicating that what is useless should be treated as superfluous ‘waste’ (such thinking is not only reflected in the world of objects, but also in people’s world). In the context of such logic, an obsolete and useless world, with its ‘overdue’ values, should be replaced with a new one since it merely becomes an archaic relic, which means that “every single thing that appears in the world is marked by the stigma of certain death”, Bauman (2004).

Therefore, everything that is associated with old age and aging should be ousted (become invisible), and it should disappear from the messages created nowadays. Instead, such messages should be supported that are desirable in the culture of consumption, that promote the illusion of eternal beauty and youth, as well as the illusion of unbridled consumerism.

In contrast, old age, aging and death should disappear from all fields of view, and at the same time they should no longer be part of human life, experience and destiny, Bauman (2004).

In this sense, all messages of the contemporary world should direct consumers’ attention to aesthetic and utilitarian values, and not ethical standards and norms which could destroy the ‘order’ of a consumer world. As noticed by Zygmunt Bauman: “ (...) *It is the aesthetics, not ethics, that is developed to integrate consumer society (...)*”, Bauman (2006).

Such messages usually draw consumers’ attention to the functional treatment of older people, which is also shown in the context of a number of examples chosen by students/respondents.

The Problem of ‘Discrimination of Old Age’ in the Context of Examples Chosen by the Students

Analysis of messages in the surrounding world, observed by the students/respondents, concerning a discussed issue, points to a clear exclusion of a series of inconvenient aspects that accompany the issue of old age and aging.

Respondents clearly indicate that the culture we live in and we grow up in turns out to be an important social context that shapes the perception and treatment of old age, and at the same time affects the intensity of phenomena connected with stigmatization and discrimination of issues related to old age and the elderly.

It is also shown in previously conducted studies which indicate that culture strongly determines different forms of the phenomenon of stigmatization. Dynamic social and cultural changes in the contemporary world (as a result of modernization and rapid development of new technologies), cause constant growth of depreciation and stigmatization of the elderly. It turns out that they can take various forms and can manifest themselves in different ways (from manifestation of language, through overt and covert forms of evasion, marginalization, exclusion of older, depreciation of their skills and abilities, up to mockery, ridicule and multiple acts of symbolic stigmatization of old age and the elderly, Zebrowitz, Montepare (2008).

At the same time, it is noted that the stigma (in this case related to age discrimination – being ‘too old’) turns out to take different forms in different cultures.

Following Erving Goffman, we can distinguish many different types of stigma. In this work, it is mainly associated with the stigma assigned to a specific social group (in this case – the elderly). However, in this context, there appear to be many other, such as: stigma related to the descriptions of carnality of older people (stigmatizing their imperfections, physical ugliness, wrinkles, scars and all the other signs of aging or physical deformities). There is also a stigma related to the mental side of a person, to his/her character (which is clearly seen when his/her psychological boundaries are violated, as well as free will, autonomy, the ability to self-determination, or when his/her value is questioned or depreciated, etc).

It is not difficult to notice that most figures from our culture (actors, celebrities, artists and models) are primarily young people. Therefore, it is not surprising that the vast majority of messages uses images of young people, which attracts more attention, since they promote only what is widely considered to be beautiful, aesthetic and captivating, that is desirable in a given culture.

Such an approach also reinforces certain perception of old age by people, strengthening their belief that old age is a subject that is mentioned reluctantly, being unpleasant, unaesthetic, inconvenient, undesirable, and even disgusting.

This carries consequences for mutual, interpersonal relations. It causes situations in which older people are pushed away, marginalized, excluded from specific social contacts/relations with other people (with other social groups – of people who are young and desired in the culture). Some other times, seniors withdraw from life and from various activities. In both cases, there appears and strengthens an inter-generational wall that hinders a mutual communication and understanding. One of the varieties of this kind of stigma is an example evoked by the students/respondents, also illustrating a certain form of discrimination of old age:

‘Discrimination of old age’



The photo taken by: Agnieszka Kullas
Gdańsk, Matejki Street

Antiques; Renovation

The presented visual message is a mural, which was observed by one of the students while she was walking down Mateyki Street in Gdansk – she has decided to take this photo and present it to the group.

She felt a cognitive dissonance then and was very intrigued by the unusual form of the message and unusual place (the mural was painted on the block of flats).

This message has been subjected to a broader, multilevel group analysis, during which both verbal and nonverbal aspects were discussed. Respondents considered it in the context of many different prospects and approaches of research (paying particular attention to the cultural context, which in their opinion determined the form of the message). They appealed to various concepts, approaches and sources (such as Rosenberg's concept, dictionaries, websites, etc), which is reflected in the following statements:

"(...)First look at such message may arouse curiosity (a colorful picture on the gray wall of an ordinary residential building). However, the combination of verbal and nonverbal content of the message (that is, on the one hand, a face painted on the wall, resembling an old photograph, on the other – a verbal content) causes a dissonance, ambivalent feelings, and even evokes anger and indignation(...) A pensive face of an older woman raises a number of questions: where is mankind heading? What will my old age look like? What is my attitude to older people (including my own parents or grandparents)? Can they be associated with antiques? Is such a message a provocation, or rather discrimination of the elderly?, etc(...)' On the main wall of the building, someone has painted an older woman. Her image attracts the main attention(...) She has a senile face, with visible wrinkles. It can be observed that she has gone through a lot in her life because she looks sad, tired, discouraged, withdrawn. Her eyes are directed somewhere ahead as if she was absent. We can see that she is well-groomed, her hair is well-arranged, her eyebrows are made-up, she's wearing vivid colors. Despite this, nothing can cover her senile look, lived experiences, tiredness and age. We might wonder why is it her that is painted on this particular wall. And right next on the wall, there is a hint, in the form of the inscription (written in capital letters): "ANTIQUES RESTORATION". It informs about restoration of antiques and gives a service phone number. It is not hard to figure out that this sign advertises a company that deals with the restoration of antiques. The inscription is on the right side of the wall, in the bottom corner(...)Attention is paid to both verbal and nonverbal message (a face of an older woman), and an accompanying inscription: "ANTIQUES RESTORATION" is quite controversial. According to a dictionary, a word 'antique' is mainly associated with such concepts as: ancient, obsolete, old-fashioned,. An antique is also a monument, an old valuable object (usually out-of-fashion, aged, worn, used, out-of-date, old). Moreover, antiques are most often associated with things, and not people(...)",compare, Szymczak (1978).

"(...) Old age has been inappropriately identified with antiques, it has been strongly emphasized by: an old, tired, heavily wrinkled and sad face, used colors (e.g. faded yellow – as the old, yellowed photos), or juxtaposition of verbal and non-verbal messages. They clearly indicate that old people are treated as old, worn items (...) if you cannot renew them, you should throw them away – this is the hidden message – It's a very sad puenta of the old age (...) because people sometimes think of old furniture or appliances as completely useless, unnecessary, and they throw them away, replacing them with new, better and more modern ones. This is usually done in the world of consumerism. Unfortunately, you can see that the same thing is done with the elderly, by discriminating, pushing them away, or giving them away to the nursing homes, because they cannot be restored like objects (they cannot be given for renovation).

At the same time, the respondents discover another interpretative layer of the word ‘antiques’, and they notice that: “(...) *antiques are also something valuable, something you cannot buy in a regular shop (...) they are a very rare and precious commodity. Such an interpretation of the concept significantly changes its perception and use (...)*”, compare, Szymczak (1978).

But they notice at the same time that the first interpretation and the first connotation seem to be much more believable and accurate, because they indicate certain consolidation and fixation in the culture: “(...) *this is the picture of our education in the culture, the word ‘antiques’ has been filtered and passed through certain ‘cultural filters’. That is why we usually react negatively to this form of a message. Especially in the context of associating the inscription on the wall with an image of the woman (...) Language used in this message is a language of a jackal¹, since it discriminates and ridicules old age(...) Such an ironic and derisive attitude is also highlighted by applied colors which particularly attract attention(...) The yellow color has been used, and it brings to mind yellowed pages of an old book(...) There’s also orange, which is warm, optimistic, sending a spontaneous and friendly signals. The colors are contrasted with the gray wall of the building, Andrzejewska (2016).*”

In the respondents’ opinion, such form of a message violates certain values, rooted deeply in our culture, according to which old age has always been associated with: *respect, dignity, care, wisdom, family bonds, mutual support, etc.* Instead, ‘new’, negative cultural norms are promoted, and they rather encourage mutual alienation and strengthen a sense of otherness in people.

As a result, people (being part of culture they live and socialize in) naturally react to what is strange and unknown to them with anxiety, fear, hostility and resentment.

‘The Perverse Logic’ of the Messages in the Context of Examples Chosen by the Students

Another message which, according to the respondents, affects important cultural values is the following example, *showing* “(...) *a billboard located on the route Lniska-Gdańsk, advertising A Nursing Home, Goldentan Rehabilitation Center – a modern and comfortably equipped building 16 km from Gdańsk in a village Przyjaźń(...)*”.

A picture below has been taken by another student on the route Lniska – Gdańsk. It is the advertisement of a nursing home. Very important here is not only the presented message and its verbal and nonverbal content and meanings hidden in it, but also the respondents’ attitude to it, their research inquisitiveness. It is worth noting that participants have perceived this message as inconsistent and incomplete.

¹At this point, respondents refer to the concept of Marshall B. Rosenberg who promotes the idea of ‘*Nonviolent Communication*’. It should be noted that Rosenberg distinguished two basic styles of communication; one is described by means of the language of ‘a giraffe’, which is the essence of successful communication, understanding, mutual empathy (so called ‘giving from the heart’, which is the basis of dialogue, responsibility, cooperation, support); the second one is the ‘jackal’ language that blocks compassion, supersedes responsibility and focuses on violent, aggressive patterns of communication, which assess and depreciate other people, judge and ignore them, compare and classify them, burden them with responsibility, etc, compare: Rosenberg(2010).



The photo taken by: Weronika Blawat

“This billboard is located in the visible spot, in the middle of a field – a large area of land designated for the cultivation of plants. There is a verbal message on the billboard: “...because I love my grandmother and grandfather SENIOR HOME”, the graphics in the form of an arrow and contact details(...) A billboard is quite large and has a rectangular shape. Letters are very clear and are written with a large print. The first part of the text “...because I love my grandmother and my grandfather” is written in small white letters. It starts with an ellipsis, meaning the omission of some part of the text. The second part “SENIOR HOME” is written in capital orange letters, while the contact details are written in the smallest letters of the whole text, and they are orange. Next to the inscription “SENIOR HOME”, there is an orange arrow, most likely indicating the direction to the building. The entire inscription is put against a navy blue background, framed in orange (...) Colors of the billboard are distinct, sharp, they stand out, because the billboard is placed in the gray square, that is why the advertisement attracts particular attention. The symbolism of colors placed in the billboard is probably not accidental. There’s orange which seems to be a joyful color, sending signals about spontaneity, liveliness and friendly attitude. And the main meaning of the navy blue is: I want to control my surrounding, I am responsible and I know best how and what to do, trust me and let me lead you. White color symbolizes purity, innocence. Thus, the colors appearing on the billboard are deliberately chosen to arouse nice feelings and friendly attitude, as well as purity of intentions, in the spirit of responsibility (...)”.

Since this message turned out to be very controversial and caused a stormy and lively discussion, it was subjected to a broader analysis which took the entire length of one classes. At the same time very intriguing questions appeared during the discussion, such as: *What kind of meanings are hidden behind dots in the following statement? –(...because I love my grandma and grandpa) – What words are missing at the beginning of the statement? What do these dots represent? What does such verbal message mean to*

you? What does such nonverbal message mean to you? What do they mean in a wider context (e.g. cultural context)? How do you perceive such form of the message?, etc.

The first reactions of the participants turned out to be very emotional (were based primarily on positive or negative valuation, usually evoking opposing, binary associations), which can be seen in two following statements, extremely different from each other:

"(...)The phrase "I love my grandma and grandpa" evokes mainly positive associations and emotions, such as: gratitude, love, respect, affection (...) They are identified with care, willingness to help grandparents, provide them with specialist help and better life (...); we should assume that children or grandchildren give grandparents away to Senior Home because of the necessary specialist care; because they don't have conditions and means to provide them with such care, they are guided by love and willingness to ensure decent old age for the grandparents".

"(...)Good intentions are only seemingly here(...); the other side is to get rid of the problem and trouble which is caused by grandparents' infirmity (...). Such message usually covers up for ignorance, selfishness and ingratitude of people who give away the elderly. Moreover, very unclear seems the question of who really stands behind this statement. In our country, it is usually the children who make decision to give parents away to senior homes, and not grandchildren(...)".

In next stages of the discussion, other opinions and interpretations appear, and they make two previous opinions more complicated, which is reflected in the following statement:

"(...) In message formulated in such a way "...because I love my grandma and grandpa" we can see a moral dilemma that the close ones have to face: that is children, grandparents and other relatives and carers of the elderly. They often face a dramatic decision: What to do? Should we give our grandparents away to the senior home? They are sometimes deprived of any choice, especially when they have no support and help. Then, they look for different solutions to the problem. They go to different specialists or authorities to seek for advice, or they try to find their own way to escape this troublesome situation (...). Such a message can hide various emotions and attitudes, both positive and negative, often difficult to define, ambiguous, for example: compassion, sense of guilt, helplessness, powerlessness, anger, resentment, laziness, carelessness, avoidance of inconvenience. Until we know the real reasons and motifs, we shouldn't judge anyone. It is worth noting that this particular senior home is considered to be quite exclusive, so that not all families can afford it (and not all seniors). Only few can make such a choice. On the other hand, there are some doubts: since I love my grandparents, and I can afford such an expensive place, why won't I hire a caregiver? (...)".

At the same time, further discussion revealed another 'discoveries' of respondents, they emerged successively in the course of analysis. They paid attention to the 'defective' solutions for the care of the elderly (lack of support for the families, poor health care, etc.), which often contribute to dramatic, 'unwanted' decisions, which often applies to *"(...) the problem of giving away parents, grandparents, to different nursing homes or institutions(...)*. At the same time, the act of 'giving' them away often evokes negative emotions and reactions in our culture *"(...) because our culture clearly says that if you love, don't give away(...)"*. An interesting element of respondents' interpretations was the analysis of verbal message at a denotative level², during which they considered its literal content (studying the semantic layer of a verbal messages).

Thus, they have perceived the dots used at the beginning of the statement as a form of hiding something, as a sign of lacking courage to say certain things.

²Denotative level refers to the literal content describing the meanings of the words used in a given verbal message, compare, McKay, Davis, Fanning (2001).

On the other hand, they have associated the dots with the following phrase (marked in red on the billboard): 'I give them away to nursing home'; 'because I love my grandma and grandpa.

In the further reflection they have discovered that something was wrong in such a phrase:

"(...) Such a phrase emphasizes instrumental treatment of old people. The decision about their fate is probably made behind their backs. And such a decision should be mutual. 'Grandparents' were somehow excluded from the possibility of a decision making process – they were treated objectively, as someone not able to make a decision (...) This advert is not directed to the right people, that is people who are involved, who should be in the center of interest – as those who make a final call (...). Moreover, the phrase is inadequate – because – "you can give away things but not people (...)". However, such a thought appeared a bit later. After second thought, most respondents noticed that there is something wrong with such a way of thinking "(...) a human is treated as an object- it's not okay(...)". "(...) The word 'give away' itself usually refers to giving away an object that we don't need any more (...)". They also noticed conflict between these two existing phrases: First: I give them away (such form of expression reveals some cultural imperfections); And the second: 'because I love my grandma and grandpa. Such statement was interpreted by the students as a kind of perverse logic: "(...)Usually, we care for someone we love and we do not give them away(...)"

The Problem of Different Presentations of Old Age and Aging in the Context of Gender Differences

Respondents also note an unequal treatment of woman's and man's aging. In case of a man, old age and aging are mainly associated with the loss of attributes of masculinity, such as: *power, dominance, the ethos of the warrior, winner, conqueror, high status, high sexual activity, etc.*

While in the case of women, old age and aging are most frequently associated with the loss of physical attractiveness (beauty, physical grace, charm, sex appeal, ability to seduce men, physical attractiveness, etc).

In spite of the fact that such schematic respondents' observations seem to be strongly simplified, such images are still strongly represented in the surrounding world (in surrounding culture) and they are often manifested in various forms of messages.

At the same time, as noted by respondents, they illustrate the specific expectations addressed to particular gender which are also reflected in the following messages, chosen by them:

The average image of man aging - 'Old but solid gold...' in the context of messages chosen by students:



obtained from: <https://www.google.pl/search?q=stary+ale+jary&biw=1348&bih=594&source=lnms&tbn>

Some attributes strengthening sense of masculinity - 'power and possession' in old age:



obtained from: <https://www.google.pl/search?q=atrybuty+męskości&biw=1348&bih=594&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=>

Very popular are such comparisons & juxtaposition

before - now

young face - old face

flowering-menopause

wake up to life – dying

attractiveness - lack of attractiveness

'You cannot stop time, nor turn it back'.

In the context of the proverb: 'Old but solid gold' (which is well known and used in Poland) and accompanying images, respondents present male version of old age and aging.

In contrast to woman's exposure, male aging is very often presented in the context of their sexual potency, which reveals male libido (male energy), which moreover can be increased, strengthened by appropriate medications or supplements.

At the same time, students notice that the emphasis is put on completely different aspects in case of women and men, which is also reflected in the following examples:

The average image of woman's aging in the context of messages chosen by students



obtained from: <https://www.google.pl/search?q=starzenie+się+kobiety&biw>
<https://www.google.pl/search?q=kobieta+po+60+roku+zycia&biw=1348&bih=>



“(...)Such messages primarily expose the external signs of old age and aging. When such images are placed close together, they give contrasting and even shocking effect. The basic question: who or what do they serve? (...)”.

Some typical attributes strengthening sense of femininity in old age



obtained from: <https://www.google.pl/search?q=atrybuty+kobiecości;>
<https://www.google.pl/search?q=kobieta+po+60+roku+zycia&biw=><https://www.google.pl/search?q=figura+po+60>

We can see that chosen messages concerning female aging, first of all emphasize their body, physical, biological features. They very often ignore woman’s spirituality, personality and at the same time their human dimension. Students notice that the emphasis is put on completely different aspects, which is reflected in the following statements:

“(...) such messages frequently use specific techniques of manipulations, such as: contrasting old age and youth, beauty, freshness with ugliness, etc. Such comparisons are a kind of evaluation - woman is being accounted for each wrinkle on her face and passing time. Sometimes it is very painful (...)”.

“(...)The problem of female and male aging is presented in a different way. The form and dynamics of such presentation are completely different: messages illustrating women’s aging are more static, while messages illustrating men’s aging are more dynamic. We can observe such a phenomenon even in the context of the attributes strengthening sense of femininity and masculinity in old age. In case of women they are constantly the same: clothes, shoes, cosmetics, slim silhouette, pretty hairstyle, etc. However, there are no medications supporting women’s libido, there are various diet supplements instead (...)”.

“(...) Messages connected with woman’s aging (especially the visual ones) seem to be much more literal than in case of men. They expose the smallest details of aging body, they highlight deficiencies of beauty, and mercilessly passing time. Images of femininity are most often connected with the sphere of physicality and attractiveness, as if beyond them there was nothing else. A form of messages referring to aging women is very often ruthless (...)”.

Visual representations shown above are typical examples of such messages. They introduce the recipients into rather gloomy and melancholic mood: of transience and dimming. As noted by the respondents: *“(...) It is inexorably intensified by visible signs of aging: wrinkles, tired faces, withering skin, old, weary hands. There was also a juxtaposition of youth with old age, beauty, freshness with rottenness, ugliness. Such comparisons are a kind of merciless assessment of women, accounting them of every wrinkles, reproaching them with passing years and age. We can see that women in the pictures have withered like flowers held by a little, young and very fresh hand – they are received by an old and tired hand, reminding us that these beautiful flowers will also wilt. This begs a question at this point – why do we so much focus on the outer shell, and forget about a human being as a whole – as if we assumed that the cover of the book contains the whole content. Such messages are unfriendly to women and carry very doubtful values. And despite the fact that ‘you can neither stop the world nor turn back*

time', it is not worth succumbing to negative thinking and concentrating on something that we have no influence on (...)"

Aging of men is illustrated in a completely different way, 'with a grain of salt', with distance. In such messages, usually quite different emphases are put, as pointed out by the respondents:

"(...)Physicality of men and their aging body is usually not exposed but it is located in the second plan, and sometimes it is even a kind of blurred background. In the worst case, it is shown in a funny, humorous way. Therefore, aging of men does not hurt so much as aging of women (...) It is not difficult to note that in the messages concerning aging men, the foreground constitutes exposing various attributes of masculinity which are probably supposed to divert attention from the physical symptoms of aging, and thereby soften the meaning of such messages(...) In contrast to women, male aging is often referred to sexual potency, male libido (male energy), which you can additionally support and strengthen by means of appropriate medications and supplements which give men 'warranty of masculinity'. What's more, aging masculinity can be strengthened by other male attributes (such as a car or expensive watch which are meant to emphasize power and domination (...))"

This interpretation may be explained in the context of (stereo)typical gender discourse, which is dominant in our culture.

Its essence is that men 'act' and women 'look'. In the indicated interpretation, this thesis has been widely analyzed in the context of old age.

Summary

Messages cited above, and their interpretations, are only a small part extracted from a much larger representation of collected research material.

They illustrate the processual nature of interpretations made by the students/respondents, as well as processuality of meanings and senses created in its course.

They also show that senses/meanings extracted by students/respondents are subject to constant changes and transformations during their collision with other meanings, and as a result they cannot be definitely closed, or clearly defined (which is, at the same time, a consequence of the adopted logic of work, based on *Hans Georg Gadamer's circular logic of the process of understanding*). Thanks to it, senses and meanings created in the process of interpretation undergo profound transformation.

Thanks to the '*circular logic of the process of understanding*' the interpretations are released from schematic and stereotypical frames and from their literal understanding, which clearly marks its presence in the first stage of the research and which, most often, turns out to be highly simplified. Instead, more and more complicated senses and meanings arise, and at the same time they complicate students/respondents' interpretations.

In this context, it is difficult to talk about specific meanings as the product of interpretation.

We should rather talk about processuality and subsequent overlapping interpretations which cause creation of deeper and more and more complex meanings.

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