



GERONTOPHOBIA IN “THE COMING OF AGE” BY SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

Iryna Soroka¹

¹Associate professor, Jindal Institute of Behavioural Sciences, O.P. Jindal Global University, India

Abstract

This research aims to analyse “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir, classify the word associations with the phenomenon of ageing and identify the changes in the perception of ageing by the population. The scientific methods used in this research are determined by the objectives and the research questions: methods of empirical research (survey, observation, semantic analysis, method of free-associative experiment). Text analysis was performed with the help of Voyant Tools (quantitative confirmation of patterns in the text, identifying key words and phrases within a large corpus). The semantic analysis of the text made it possible to distinguish three main connotations used by Simone de Beauvoir to describe old age: existential, romantic, pejorative and it was proved that “The Coming of Age” belongs to “sad” texts using V. Belyanin’s (2000) classification. The results of the associative experiment conducted with 340 participants showed that 45% of associations with the word ageing carry an existential connotation; 40% – pejorative; 10% – romantic and 5% of the associations have a connotation that cannot be included in the three main categories. The results of the text analysis showed that the content and the language of “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir directly collate with the author’s personality. Moreover, modern society demonstrates similar stereotypes, phobias, and discrimination to those depicted in the literary work more than fifty years ago. The results open the gate to further research on gerontophobia and authors’ personality.

Keywords

Gerontophobia, Magnum Opus, “Sad” texts, Connotation, Existential Intelligence

Introduction

Psycholinguistics is closely related to text linguistics, where the text is considered statically, as a finished product of writing and speaking. In psycholinguistics, the text is considered a product of speech activity. The subject of psycholinguistics is the relationship of personality with the structure and functions of speech activity, on the one hand, and language as the main “forming” image of the human world, on the other, as stated by Leontiev (1997, p.13). It has been scientifically proved that a mental state of a person directly influences the product of a speech act (Vasyliuk, 2019). The average length of sentences is measured to receive information about the emotional state and verbal intelligence of the speaker at the moment when the text was created.

Psycholinguistics studies the correlation of linguistic categories with psychological ones. In Belyanin’s research (2000), linguistic categories (primarily semantic) are correlated with psychiatric ones, and psycholinguistic typology of texts according to the emotional and semantic dominant. His work was carried out in line with the Russian (Gannushkin) and German (Kretschmer) psychotherapeutic schools and is the application of psychiatric knowledge to the language material.

The description of the texts is given in their correlation with the accentuated consciousness of their authors. V. Belyanin (2000) introduces and describes the following types of texts: “cheerful”, which is correlated with hyperthymia; “sad”, correlated with depression; “light” – with paranoia, “dark” – with epileptoidness, “beautiful” – with hysteria. It is considered that readers are similar to authors. One of the parameters of typology is the time of writing the text (the literature of the Middle Ages, for instance, differs from modern literature in terms of its linguistic and stylistic characteristics). The researcher states that the author’s national and cultural affiliation is essential for a literary text, which determines the language and, in many aspects, the speech system of the figurative means of the text.

We hypothesize that “The Coming of Age” belongs to a “sad” type of text. Psycholinguistic analysis has shown that each type of text corresponds to a certain thematic set of objects of description (themes) and certain plot

constructions. Within each type of text, one can single out a semantically limited list of predicates that characterize the selected objects of the material, social, mental and emotional world of a person. In turn, these predicates correspond to sets of lexical elements that appear most often in texts of a particular type.

According to V. Belyanin (2000) in “sad” texts, the hero is young, full of hope, but dies, or he is old and poor and is recollecting his youth. The main idea expressed in the “sad” text is to cherish every passing day, to love life, even though it is hard and exhausting. Death is shown as deliverance from suffering. For a hero of the “sad” text, everything is gone. A lot of mistakes were made in the past and therefore there is suffering in old age. An author of the “sad” text, through the whole content of the work, seems to ask to have pity and sympathy for a hero.

Literature review

V. Belyanin (2000) introduced the following principles in psycholinguistic diagnostics:

1. Each linguistic element is determined not only by linguistic but also by psychological patterns.
2. A variety of psychological types of people generates a variety of cognitive structures.
3. The structures of a literary text correlate with the structures of an accentuated consciousness. A literary text in some cases is the result of the generation of an accentuated (or psychopathic) conscience.
4. The organizing center of a literary text is its emotional and semantic dominance. Being the core of the text generation model, the emotional-semantic dominant organizes the semantics, morphology, syntax and style of a literary text.
5. The text is an element of the whole system “reality – consciousness – model of the world – language – author – text – reader – projection”.
6. The reader has the right to his own interpretation of the meaning of the literary text. This interpretation depends not only upon the text but also on the psychological characteristics of the reader. The reader interprets adequately those texts which are created based on psychological structures close to him/her.

In the work by V. Belyanin (2000) the literary text is described in connection with the accentuated worldview underlying it. It is written in the paradigm of psycholinguistics, considering research in the field of hermeneutics and psychopoetics. The author suggests a different look at literary creativity and works of art.

Fundamental for the psycholinguistic analysis of the perception of a literary text is the provision on the similarity of intellects: the text is perceived most adequately by that reader, following Henneken & Rubakin’s hypothesis, whose psychological features are closest to the author’s (Rubakin, 1977; Belyanin, 1988).

Along with the indicated approaches, psychological, psychoanalytic and psychiatric approaches to the literary text, its characters and its author seem to be productive. In modern science, a “subjective” approach to works of art and literature is quite widespread, in which elements of a literary text are correlated with the author’s psyche. Accordingly, the text is interpreted as the realization of the author’s subconsciousness in verbal creativity. Considering the concept of the writer’s language and its difference from the “language of literary works” Vinokur (1991) believed that it may be applicable to reveal the writer’s psychology, his “inner world”, his “soul”. This possibility is based on the fact that in language the speaker or writer not only conveys the content but also shows how he experiences what is being communicated. (Vinokur, 1991, p. 44).

D. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovsky (1989, p. 435) identified two types of creativity: objective (which he called observational and non-egocentric) and subjective (experimental or egocentric). Objective creativity is mainly aimed at reproducing types, natures, characters, minds, etc., more or less alien or even opposite to the personality of the artist. Subjective creativity on the contrary is aimed at reproducing types, natures, characters, minds close, related or even identical to the personality of the artist himself.

The author of this paper is studying Simone de Beauvoir’s book, the English version entitled “The Coming of Age”, 1972, which was first published in French in 1970 (“La Vieillesse”). According to S. Katz (2018, p. 217) it has been neglected by feminists, humanists, gerontologists, historians, and philosophers alike. The reason was a negative portrayal of old age, an “unrelievedly pessimistic view of ageing” (Woodward, 1994, p. 32).

Beauvoir’s “The Coming of Age” is an accumulation of philosophical, artistic, literary, autobiographical, sociological, biological, anthropological, historical and economic matters. The writer approaches the subject of ageing from a variety of perspectives. This comprehensive work is a *magnum opus* – a great work, the greatest achievement of an artist or writer (Merriam-Webster, 2023). It is a large and important work of literature, which cannot be identified by a particular genre.

In this research both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics approaches are considered. Sociolinguistics is the study of social and cultural effects on language while psycholinguistics is the study of the comprehension and production of language in its spoken, written and signed forms. “Age is sociolinguistics’ under-developed social dimension...sociolinguistic research on age and ageing is rare” (Coupland, 2001, p.185). There is a *gap in research* on the theme of ageing in psycholinguistics as well.

The ignorance towards the theme of ageing can be proved by the following observation: while the feminist-philosophical work by Simone de Beauvoir “Second sex” (1949) was translated to 50 languages, her grand book “The Coming of Age” was neglected. There are many reasons for the absence of sustained interest in ageing. The relevant theoretical concept is gerontophobia. Since we all age, and fear its implications, repression is a predictable response (Becker, 1973).

According to a medical dictionary, *gerontophobia* is an irrational or disproportionate fear of old age, especially of growing old, a fear of, disdain for, or aversion to old people (Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary, 2012). “Semantics seems to show that in remote antiquity the notion of honour was attached to that of old age. *Gera*, *geron*: the words that mean *great age* also mean the privilege of age, the rights of seniority, representative position” (Beauvoir, 1972).

The research aims to perform the analysis of “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir, classify the word associations with the phenomenon of ageing and identify the changes (if any) of the perception of ageing by the population. The main *research questions* of this study are as follows:

- RQ1. What is the semantic evidence in the literary text to identify its type?
- RQ2. What associations with the word “*ageing*” do the participants of the study have?
- RQ3. How far does this literary text collate with the author’s personality?
- RQ4. Has the perception of ageing changed since the publication of the opus magnum?

Methods and procedures of the research

Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics – sciences that emerged at the intersection of different disciplines (linguistics and psychology, linguistics and sociology). The methods used in our study can be divided into three groups: methods of collecting material, methods of processing and presentation of the results, and analysis of the written sources. The scientific methods used were determined by the objectives and the research questions: theoretical (generalization, systematization, classification); methods of empirical research (survey, observation, semantic analysis, method of free associative experiment). Text analysis was performed with the help of Voyant Tools (quantitative confirmation of patterns in the text, identifying key words and phrases within a large corpus). The analysis of dictionary definitions was used to identify the meaning of the key phenomenon.

The research consisted of 2 stages. During the *first stage* (October 2021 – June 2022) a comprehensive literature review was done, and a study of the documentation and semantic analysis of Beauvoir’s “The Coming of Age” was performed. The objective of the first stage was to find the answers to the following research questions: What is the semantic evidence in the literary text to identify its type? How far does this literary text collate with the author’s personality?

During the *second stage* (August – December 2022) a survey and a free-associative experiment were conducted. The method of free-associative experiment has been determined under the research question: What associations with the word “*ageing*” do the participants of the study have?

An associative experiment is a technique aimed at identifying the associations that have developed in an individual in his (her) previous experience. In a free-associative experiment, it is necessary to respond as quickly as possible with the first-word reaction to the presented word stimulus (Evseeva, 2009). This method is used more often in linguistic research at present, especially in the study of cognitive, linguistic, cultural and psycholinguistic problems (Goroshko, 2005). It is believed that the associations obtained in the free experiment are influenced by two factors: linguistic, i.e., certain characteristics of the stimulus word itself, and pragmatic, i.e., the influence of the personality of the subject.

The free-associative experiment is popular and one of the most reliable. The written form is considered as prepared speech and the verbal as spontaneous and natural. In the verbal format, a participant responds spontaneously, giving reactions immediately, without thinking. When writing, the subject has more time, and he works at a comfortable pace (Bochkareva, 2002, p. 155). However, one of the necessary components of this experiment may disappear – the spontaneity of the reaction. In our research, both forms were used as the participants were surveyed via different means: by SMS, social messengers (WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook), and in face-to-face interviews.

Participants. 340 participants were surveyed. They had to provide the first 3 associations for the word *ageing*. Those were adults aged 17–83 (mean 39.6; standard deviation σ : 17.39) from India, Ukraine, Italy, Germany, Hungary, Morocco, Nigeria and Korea. There were housewives, pensionaries, teachers, professors, students, Ph.D. candidates, programmers, architects, bank managers, journalists, photographers, psychologists, social workers, and translators among them. Convenience sampling was used.

After gathering the data, the researcher analyzed them, scored based on the frequency of answers, and grouped semantically depending on the connotation of the associations. The conclusion was drawn on whether the perception of the word “*ageing*” changed since the publication of the opus magnum.

Results

In “The Coming of Age” French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir seeks an understanding of the perception of elderly people. The book contains 2 parts in which the author writes about biological changes in old age, analyses ethnological data, and discusses old age in historical and contemporary societies. The first half of the book examines the way society and its citizens view old age, and how families treat their older members; introduces the views of the philosophers through centuries. The second part of the book is a look at life with the eyes of senior citizens, from poor to wealthy, from famous to unknown, de Beauvoir examines the myths and realities of the life of elderly people. In her opus magnum, Simone depicts the life and ageing of world-famous personalities: Whitman, Sartre, Voltaire, Goethe, Tolstoy, Renoir, Michelangelo, Shaw, Picasso, Yeats, Woolf, Flaubert, Verdi. Her masterpiece spans from the romance of Hugo, the values of Gandhi, who was politically active till his late 70s to nightmares of Andersen, the despair of Hemingway (who according to the writer committed suicide because he couldn’t cope with ageing) and Swift (who became mentally and physically broken with age).

Having analyzed the text with Voyant Tools, the following results were obtained: This corpus has 1 document with 259,740 total words and 19,136 unique word forms. Vocabulary Density: 0.074; Readability Index: 10.151; Average Words Per Sentence: 22.7. Most frequent words in the corpus: old (2296); age (1419); man (768); life (737); people (566).

As mentioned above the hypothesis is that “The Coming of Age” belongs to a “sad” type of text. According to Belyanin (2000) in the structure of the emotional-semantic dominant of “sad” texts, the following semantic complexes play a key role: *age, wealth/poverty, joy/sadness, life/death, regret, heaviness, breath, and smell*. To answer the first research question in the study: “What is the semantic evidence in the literary text to identify its type?” a semantic text analysis was conducted.

Chandra Sekhar Rao (2017) emphasizes that it is a common practice among writers to deviate from the literal meanings of words to create novel ideas and images, using figures of speech or figurative language. While denotation is a literal or dictionary meaning of a word, connotation is an idea that is associated with a word. In literature, connotation is expressed by using such figures of speech as metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification, etc. The connotation of a word or term adds elements of emotion, attitude, or colour. M. Abrams (1999, p. 46) suggests a definition: “in a widespread literary usage, the denotation of a word is its primary signification or reference; its connotation is the range of secondary or associated significations and feelings which it commonly suggests or implies”.

The thorough study of the text made it possible to distinguish three main connotations used by Simone de Beauvoir to describe old age or the process of ageing: existential or philosophical; romantic or idealistic; pejorative or insulting. Examples from her work are provided in Table 1.

Connotation	Examples from “The Coming of Age”
Existential/ philosophical	Eternity, experience, memory, wisdom, age’s cruel knife, transformation, perceptual defense, irreversibility, disillusionment
Idealistic/ romantic	Green old age, magical powers, harmonious, idyllic nature, comfortable, positive gerontocracy, respect and awe, privilege, honoured, cherish, fully ripe, (short) voyage, admiration, winter, peaceful harbour, time of enjoyment, twilight, a mixture of sympathy and irony, melancholy, grace, merry, exuberance, the crown of a life
Pejorative/ insulting	Unhappiness, calamity, physical decline, walking corpses, exhaustive, decrepit, atrophy, wear and decay, hateful, living skeletons, humiliating, burnt, burden, panic-stricken, senile, mock, old sack, half-dead, victims, ghost, parasite, despise, misfortune, gloomy, wretched, detest, ugly, ruin, totter, disgusted, tedious, laughing-stock, flabby limbs, creep, witch, ridiculous, misery, absurdity, rotten, insanity, a tomb that moves, bewildered despair, normal abnormality, shudder, clumsiness, hideous, disguise, scarecrow, shipwreck, funeral mask, despair, morbid, shadow, ashamed, degradation, stupidity, horrible culmination, dirty old swine

Table 1. Connotations in “The Coming of Age”

V. Belyanin (2000) introduces some keywords of “sad” text and their implementation: SAD: dreary, sorrow, sad, doubt. LONELY: alone, be silent, mute; sea, ocean, island, stars; eternity. OLD AGE: memories, cold, lonely; to be forgotten, unnecessary; need care; wish death. COLD: cool, autumn, winter, snow. DEATH: calmness, fatigue, breath, breathe, easy; to die, to fall asleep, to sleep (in the damp earth, in the grave); cemetery, stone, grave, corpse, cross; evening, night. In fictional texts with a “depressive” dominant, emotions and thoughts about death not only cause the death of heroes, but also structure the motives, goals, desires, and actions, giving them a *negative connotation of hopelessness*.

The semantic analysis helps us find the evidence in “The Coming of Age” to prove it belongs to “sad” texts. Out of two semantic analysis techniques: a text classification model (which assigns predefined categories to text) and a text extractor (which pulls out specific information from the text), we utilized the second one. To describe the ageing the author uses a variety of metaphors and *similes* – a figure of speech involving the

comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid (Merriam–Webster, 2023). Here are presented some examples from the opus magnum by Simone de Beauvoir. “The Schoolmen (Avicenna) loved comparing life to a flame that is fed by the oil in a lamp: it was a mystical image, for in the Middle Ages the soul was often represented by a flame” (Beauvoir, 1972, pp.18–19). “When a man is old, says Sophocles, the light of his reason goes out, action becomes useless, and he has unmeaning cares”. “Age is indeed a pond into which all the foul waters run and which has no outlet but death. Would you like to put a curse on anyone? Then say to him, “May you live to be old”.

Galen “looked upon old age as a kind of incurable disease” (ibid., p. 20). In her work Simone gave a lot of examples of attitudes towards elderly people in different cultures and centuries, some being just shocking: “In Bali it is said that once upon a time the people of a remote mountain village used to sacrifice and eat their old men” (ibid., p. 77).

“How hard and painful are the last days of an aged man! He grows weaker every day; his eyes become dim, his ears deaf; his strength fades; his heart knows peace no longer; his mouth falls *silent*, and he *speaks no word*. The power of his mind lessens and today he cannot remember what yesterday was like. All his bones hurt. Those things which not long ago were done with pleasure are painful now; and *taste vanishes*. Old age is the worst of misfortunes that can afflict a man. His nose is blocked, and *he can smell nothing* anymore” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 92).

“Physical decay, infirmity, mutilation: there is no compensation in this picture of the miseries of old age. Juvenal ends with an idea that no one had yet expressed: growing old means seeing the *death of those we love*; it means condemnation to mourning and sadness” (ibid., p. 122).

“Old age is an *autumn*, filled with ripe fruit: it is also a *barren winter*, and we hear of its *coldness, snow* and *frost*. It has the sweet gentleness of a lovely *evening*. But it is also associated with the dark sadness of twilight” (ibid., p. 211). In another example old age is compared to an autumn not of ripe fruitfulness but of sterility. “And indeed, it is old age, rather than death, that is to be contrasted with life. *Old age is life’s parody*, whereas death transforms life into a destiny...” (ibid., p. 539).

Belyanin (2000) mentions that semantic complex such as *smell* plays a key role in “sad” texts. We can find plenty of examples in Simone de Beauvoir’s work: “*smells* worse than a fuller’s pot, worse than an amphora spoilt by rotting brine” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 122). One young woman describes an old man in the following way: “He is half rotten. He coughs all night like a sick sheep. He never goes to sleep... His *breath stinks* worse than a dunghill... He smells of death a hundred miles off...” (ibid., p. 154).

Belyanin emphasizes the appearance of the semantic component “*heaviness*” in “sad” texts. Such an example can be found in the researched work: “Tolstoy’s eightieth birthday was celebrated with extraordinary enthusiasm; yet as he went to bed he said to his daughter: My soul is *heavy*” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 368). Simone criticizes Shakespeare who cast a cold eye upon the old: in *Romeo and Juliet*, he said that many old men looked already dead, pale, slow, *heavy* and *as dull as lead*.

Here is how the author of “The Coming of Age” writes about death: Andersen while “seriously ill and morbidly drowsy, all he longed for was death. “If I must die, let death come soon; I cannot wait, I cannot lie here crumbling to pieces *like a dead leaf*” (ibid., p. 371).

Simone mentions Voltaire’s words “It is eighty-one years now that I have suffered and that I have seen so much *suffering and death* around me...The heart does not grow old, but it is sad to dwell among ruins... I undergo all the calamities connected with decrepitude” (ibid., p. 303). On the same page, we can read the following: “It is a torment to preserve one’s intellectual being intact, imprisoned in a worn-out physical shell” wrote Chateaubriand about his experience. In Simone de Beauvoir’s work, we can also find the following metaphor: “What is an old man in this world? A *tomb* that moves”.

Simone explains the symbolic meaning of blindness: “There was a mythic link between old age and blindness in the Middle Ages, just as there had been in the ancient world. Blindness symbolized the exile to which their over-long life condemned the aged: they were cut off from the rest of mankind. This loneliness increased them in stature and made them spiritually clear-sighted. What is more, the myth had firm roots in reality: no one then knew how to operate for cataract and many old men were blind in fact” (ibid., p.144).

The author uses a simile to express the negative (pejorative) connotation in the attitude of one of her characters: “There is nothing yet that warns me of the number of my years, and so I am sometimes surprised by my health; I have got over innumerable little troubles that used to plague me; not only do I go forward *as slowly as a tortoise*, but I am almost ready to believe that I advance backwards *like a crayfish*; however, I try hard not to be taken in by these deceitful appearances” (ibid., p. 295).

Our first task of the study was to collect the semantic evidence in the literary text to identify its type. *The plenty of examples presented above prove it belongs to the “sad” type of texts.*

The results of the survey and a free-associative experiment conducted during the period August – December 2022 answered the research question: “What associations with the word “*ageing*” do the participants of the study have?” The outcome is introduced in Table 2.

Connotation	Associations (survey)
Existential/philosophical	wisdom, maturity (matured), power, adjustment, generation, death, astonishment, experienced, conservative, sudden, unexpected, learn, move, revise, finish, conclusion, experience
Idealistic/romantic	travelling, supportive, rose, calm, quiet, happy, beautiful, burgundy, sympathetic, humorous, musing, rest, relax, care, stroll
Pejorative/insulting	ruthlessness, limitations, limited, powerless, infirm, silent, joyless, fierce, scary, fear, survive, decrepit, helpless, miserable, needy, poor, devastated, ugly
Other	conservative, grandchildren, disease, pension, weak, tired, sad, loneliness, help, sick, fatigue

Table 2. Associations with the word ageing

The results of the associative experiment showed that 45% of associations with the word “ageing” carry existential/philosophical connotation; 40% – pejorative/insulting; 10% – romantic/idealistic, and 5% of the associations have a connotation that cannot be included in the three main categories illustrated in Table 2.

The comparison of the epithets, similes and metaphors from the analysis of “The coming of age” and the associations experiment make it possible to conclude that the perception of ageing has not dramatically changed. Similar words or synonyms can be found in both Table 1. and Table 2., for instance: wisdom and experience (the existential connotation); travelling – voyage, calm/quiet – peaceful, humorous – irony/ merry (romantic); scary – panic-stricken, miserable – misery, devastated – ruin, infirm – flabby, decrepit (pejorative connotation).

Additional study of various documents, literary texts and scientific papers was performed to answer the following research questions: “How far does this literary text collate with the author’s personality?” and “Has the perception of the ageing changed since the publication of the opus magnum?” The results showed that the content and the language of “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir directly collate with the author’s personality. As for the question of whether the perception of the ageing changed since the publication of the researched work, we can draw a conclusion that our modern society demonstrates similar stereotypes, phobias, and discrimination to those analyzed in “The Coming of Age” more than fifty years ago. These results will be discussed in more detail in the following part of the paper.

Discussions

The results of the semantic analysis of “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir showed that it belongs to “sad” texts. V. Belyanin (2000) who applied psychiatric knowledge to the language material, described the types of texts in their correlation with the accentuated consciousness of their authors. According to V. Belyanin “sad” texts are correlated with depression. In his monograph Belyanin (1988), analyzing the works of other researchers, comes to the conclusion that a personality of an author manifests itself in a literary text in many ways: in language, plot, characters and themes.

Keeping in mind these ideas we are moving to the discussion of our third research question: “How far does this literary text collate with the author’s personality?” To start with, Simone de Beauvoir was an existentialist philosopher. She had a significant influence on feminist existentialism as well as feminist theory. The questions that existentialism considers are the meaning of life, existence, freedom, and death. All of Beauvoir’s novels incorporate existential themes and problems.

Describing the notion of existential intelligence and adding it to his primary types of intelligence Gardner wrote that this phenomenon provides sensitivity and capacity to tackle deep questions about human existence, such as the meaning of life and why we die (1999). Moreover, Gardner (2000) states that intelligence is largely inborn and therefore difficult to alter.

Mayer emphasized that the development of self-reflection, self-consciousness and existential reflection can play a key role in searching for the meaning of life (Mayer, 2000). In recent research (Skrzypińska, 2021) we can also find proof that existential intelligence develops a need and perspective for the search for existential meaning.

Simone de Beauvoir was also known for her free relationship with the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who no doubt influenced her personality. Therefore, the choice of the topic of ageing and ultimate death is not surprising. Simone was 62 when she wrote her grand work “The Coming of Age” which means that the problem of getting old bothered her in a direct sense.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote novels, essays, biographies, and monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues. N. Mambrol (2019) analyzing the works of Simone emphasizes the absence of positive heroines. In her numerous compositions, Simone de Beauvoir wrote about murder and jealousy, love triangle and death, nervous breakdown, existential crisis, depression, and suicide. Count Fosca, the hero of the novel “All Men Are Mortal” admits that only death gives life meaning. All de Beauvoir’s novels examine the relationship between the self and the other which is the core of existentialist philosophy as concluded by N. Mambrol.

M. Buyanov (1994) mentioned that on the one hand, creative people differ from each other by various personal characteristics but on the other hand most of them have one common feature – they are all sad, anxious and have rather gloomy view of the world. Gannushkin (1984) described people prone to depression in the following way: life seems meaningless to them, they look for gloomy sides in everything, and they are born

pessimists. So, softness, calmness, friendliness, sensitivity and a kind attitude towards people are their features on the one hand and pessimism, self-doubt, a tendency to the feeling of guilt – on the other. This is the basis of the ambivalent attitude of the personality with depressive accentuation.

Taking into consideration all aforementioned arguments we may conclude that a personality of an author manifests itself in a literary text in language, through a plot, characters and themes. Therefore “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir directly collates with her personality.

Finally, we are moving to the discussion of the fourth research question: “Has the perception of the ageing changed since the publication of the “The Coming of Age”? 52 years have passed since Simone wrote her comprehensive work on ageing. But how much has changed since then? The free associations experiment conducted with 340 participants of various demographics (age, nationality, social background) showed that the perception of ageing has not dramatically changed. The majority of the responses carry negative (insulting) connotations as well as existential/ philosophical ones.

The authors of the article (Guest et al., 2021) state that recognizing the pervasiveness of negative societal attitudes toward ageing and older adults is critical, as research indicates the way older adults are perceived influences how they are treated. The Gerontological Literacy Network (GLN) is a multi-university collaboration established to address gerontophobia. Researchers applied a data-gathering protocol that uses drawing as a foundation to assess the gerontological literacy of college students. The protocol included drawing what ageing means, writing a paragraph describing the drawing, indicating the age at which someone is “old” and writing words associated with “old person” and “grandma/grandpa”. *The results from 1,609 protocols confirmed that college students have negative views of ageing as depicted in drawings of negative emotional states, illness, physical decline, and death* (Guest et al., 2021).

Moreover, in the book “Shaping Ageing” published in 2022, we can find the following opinion:

“We live in a society that to a large extent valorizes youth and the youthful and that simultaneously devalues old age and the old. Until now, the growing number of persons reaching an advanced age, as well as their potential of representing a huge marketing segment did not prevent the Western world from increasingly turning into a society in which *old age is regarded as a problem and a burden for the individual and the society*” (Jacobsen & Teodorescu, 2022).

Similar ideas were expressed half a century ago in “The Coming of Age”. Another research suggests that personality is associated with mortality in old age (Wilson et al., 2004). One more factor that affects the situation of elderly people in society is socioeconomic status. Persons of lower socioeconomic status tend to have more negative emotions than persons of higher socioeconomic status (Gallo & Mathews, 2003). Low socioeconomic status is also an established risk factor for mortality as stated by House, Kessler & Herzog (1990).

Simone also mentioned how income, and education influence the position and the role of an older generation in society: “It is perfectly evident that an old person has a greater chance of survival in wealthy societies than in poor...” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 79). And “Society cares about the individual only in so far as he is profitable” (ibid., p. 543).

Barrett (2021) emphasizes that both young and older people often experience a range of concerns in the twenty-first century. “Despite being at opposite ends of the age spectrum, they can be subject to stereotyping, experiences of discrimination and barriers to affordable housing and employment”.

A big part of Simone’s book is devoted to age discrimination in employment. In the year 1970 (a French version) she wrote that “ninety-seven percent of the advertisements in American papers set forty as the limit. Another inquiry states that eighty-eight percent of the advertisements in France require the applicant to be under forty; and in Belgium, the same is found in eighty percent. This discrimination is almost universally observed, even in times of full employment... Elderly women suffer even more from this discrimination than men, although their expectation of life is greater”.

We are still facing similar issues. According to the findings of the research conducted by The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), as the number of older Americans in the labour force grows in the coming decades, the impact of age discrimination will also increase. By 2050, the U.S. could miss out on nearly \$4 trillion of economic contributions from the 50-plus population due to age discrimination (2020).

Based on the information obtained from the experts of seniorliving.org the most common forms of age discrimination among workers over age 40 are the following: being passed up for raises, promotions, or other opportunities, followed by ageist jokes or bullying.

Age discrimination in hiring has also been widely studied. The evidence from the job advertisements suggests that discrimination against older workers occurs for different reasons in different occupations. Ageist stereotypes as reflected in the language used in job ads were studied and the researchers found compelling evidence of age discrimination, especially against older women (Burn et al., 2019).

Raman et al. (2008) investigated cross-cultural media portrayals of older adults and other age groups across the lifespan through a content analysis of U.S. and Indian magazine advertisements. They found out that

mentioning of ageing was more common in U.S. advertisements, as were overall associations between ill health and older adulthood.

Substance abuse, loneliness and suicide are some more problems that elderly people experienced half a century ago and they are still facing these issues nowadays. In her opus magnum, the author wrote: “by the way in which a society behaves towards its old people it uncovers the naked, and often carefully hidden, the truth about its real principles and aims” (Beauvoir, 1972). What solution did the writer suggest?

“Old age exposes the failure of our entire civilization. *It is the whole man that must be remade*, it is the whole relationship between man and man that must be recast if we wish the old person’s state to be acceptable”. “Once we have understood what the state of the aged really is, we cannot satisfy ourselves with calling for a more generous “old-age policy”, higher pensions, decent housing and organized leisure. It is the whole system that is at issue and our claim cannot be otherwise than radical – *change life itself*” (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 43).

The implementation of this solution deserves specific attention that goes beyond this article’s main argument.

Conclusions

Returning to the concerns that this article began with, we should conclude by emphasizing the findings. By performing the semantic analysis of the text “The Coming of Age” we justified referring it to a “sad” type using the classification developed by V. Belyanin hereby answering our first stated research question. The wide range of epithets, metaphors and similes used by Simone de Beauvoir to depict ageing were examined and three main connotations were distinguished: existential or philosophical; romantic or idealistic; pejorative or insulting.

The results of the associative experiment which was conducted to answer the second research question showed that 45% of associations with the word *ageing* carry existential/ philosophical connotation; 40% – pejorative/ insulting; 10% – romantic/ idealistic, and 5% of the associations have a connotation which cannot be included in the three main categories. These are the same three types found in the literary work by Simone de Beauvoir, which makes it possible to conclude that the perception of ageing has not dramatically changed since the year 1972 when “The Coming of Age” was published.

The content, major problems and language of “The Coming of Age” by Simone de Beauvoir directly collate with the author’s personality which was concluded after studying various literary texts and scientific papers. Sense of life, death, ageing are the key themes in existential philosophy. Simone de Beauvoir being a feminist existentialist revealed those topics in her literary work. As for the question whether the perception of the ageing changed since the publication of the opus magnum, we can draw a conclusion that our modern society, unfortunately, demonstrates similar stereotypes, phobias, and discrimination to those depicted in “The Coming of Age”.

The results open the gate to further research studies on gerontophobia as well as the implementation of various programs at different levels to help dispel the stereotypes and prejudices against elderly people. More research can also be conducted to indicate how a personality of an author is revealed in a literary text, in its language, scenarios, characters and themes.

Works Citation

- Abrams, M. (1999). *Connotation and Denotation. A Glossary of Literary Terms*. (7th edition). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Barrett, C. et al. (2021). Ageism. In: V. Hutton, S. Sisko (Eds.), *Multicultural Responsiveness in Counselling and Psychology*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55427-9_7
- Beauvoir, S. (1972). *The Coming of Age* (transl. Patrick O'Brian). New York: G.P. Putnam's sons.
- Becker, E. (1973). *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free press.
- Belyanin, V. P. (2000). *Osnovi psikholingvisticheskoi diagnostiki. (Modeli mira v literature) [Fundamentals of psycholinguistic diagnostics. (Models of the world in literature)]*. Moscow: Trivola.
- Belyanin, V. P. (1988). *Psikholingvisticheskie aspekti khudozhestvennogo teksta [Psycholinguistic aspects of literary text]*. Moscow: Izd-vo Mosk. un-ta.
- Bochkareva, E.V. (2002). *Dinamika assotsiativnykh svyazey s oporoi na udarnii glasnoi u detei-podrostkov [Dynamics of associative connections based on the stressed vowel in adolescent children]*. Murzinskii chteniya: Dinamika yazika v sinkhronii i diakhronii., pp. 154–157. Perm: Perm. gos. un-t.
- Burn, I., Button, P., Corella, L.F. & Neumark, D. (2019). Older Workers Need Not Apply? Ageist Language in Job Ads and Age Discrimination in Hiring. Working Paper 26552. NATIONAL BUREAU OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH, Cambridge. URL:https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26552/w26552.pdf
- Buyanov, M.I. (1994). *Liki velikikh, ili znamenitie bezumtsei [Faces of the great, or famous madmen]*. Moscow: Ros. obshch-vo medikov-literatorov.
- Coupland, N. (2001). Age in social and sociolinguistic theory. In N. Coupland, S. Sarangi & C.N. Candlin (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Social Theory* (pp.185–211). Pearson Education Limited.
- Evseeva, O.V. (2009). *Assotsiativnyi eksperiment kak issledovatel'skaya protsedura v psikholingvistike [Associative experiment as a research procedure in psycholinguistics]*. Ceriya «Lingvistika». Vestnik YuUrGU 8(2), 82–84. URL:<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/assotsiativnyy-eksperiment-kak-issledovatel'skaya-protsedura-v-psiholingvistike>
- Gallo, L.C., & Mathews, K.A. (2003). Understanding the association between socioeconomic status and physical health: Do negative emotions play a role? *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 10–51.
- Gannushkin, P.B. (1984). *Osobennosti emotsionalno-volevoi sferi pri psikhopatiyakh*. In V.K. Vilyunas i Yu.B. Gippenreiter (Eds.). *Psikhologiya emotsii. [Features of the emotional-volitional sphere in psychopathy. Psychology of emotions]* (pp. 252-279). Moscow: Izd-vo MGU.
- Gannushkin, P.B. (1998). *Klinika psikhopatii. Ikh statika, dinamika i sistematika [Clinic of psychopathy, their statics, dynamics, systematics]*. N.Novgorod: Izd-vo NGMD.
- Gardner, H. (2000). A case against spiritual intelligence. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 10(1), 27–34.
- Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gerontophobia. (n.d.) *Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary* (2012). Retrieved January 5, 2023, from <https://medical.dictionnaire.thefreedictionary.com/gerontophobia>
- Goroshko, E. I. (2005). *Problemi provedeniya svobodnogo assotsiativnogo eksperimenta [Problems of conducting a free associative experiment]*. 3, (pp. 53–61). Izvestiya Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta.
- Guest, M.A., Nikzad-Terhune, K., Kruger, T.M. & Rowles, G.D. (2021) Exploring college students' attitudes toward older adults: A description of methods used by the gerontological literacy network, *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 42:4, 578-588, DOI: 10.1080/02701960.2019.1638257
- House, J. S., Kessler, R. C. & Herzog, A. R. (1990). Age, socioeconomic status, and health. *Milbank Quarterly*, 68, 383–411.
- Jacobsen, M.H., Teodorescu, A. (2022). Gerontophobia. The cultural roots of the old-age anxiety in contemporary society. In A. Teodorescu & D. Chiribucă (Eds.), *Shaping Ageing: Social Transformations and Enduring Meanings*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003046790>
- Katz, S. (2018). Simone De Beauvoir's The Coming of Age: The Humanities and Gerontology's Diagram of Science. *Age, Culture, Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 3, pp. 217–226, doi:10.7146/ageculturehumanities.v3i.130163.
- Kretschmer, E. (1982). *Stroenie tela i kharakter. Psikhologiya individualnykh razlichii [Body structure and character. Psychology of individual differences]* (pp. 219–247). Moscow: Izd-vo MGU.
- Leontiev, A.A.(1997). *Osnovi psiholingvistiki [Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics]*. NPF «Smysl» (Psikhologiya dlya studenta).
- “Magnum opus.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/magnum%20opus>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2023.
- Mambrol, N. (2019, April 1). Analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's Novels. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. URL: <https://literariness.org/2019/04/01/analysis-of-simone-de-beauvoirs-novels/>

- Mayer, J. (2000). Spiritual intelligence or spiritual consciousness. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 10(1), 47–56.
- Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskii, D.N. (1989). *Literaturno-kriticheskie raboti [Literary-critical work]*. V 2-kh. t. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura.
- Raman, P., Harwood, J., Weis, D., Anderson, J. L., & Miller, G. (2008). Portrayals of older adults in US and Indian magazine advertisements: A cross-cultural comparison. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, 19(3), 221–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170802218214>
- Rao, C. (2017). A Brief Study of Words Used in Denotation and Connotation. *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching*. 1(1), 1–5. URL: <https://www.jrspelt.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Csrao-Denotations-n-Connotations>
- Rubakyn, N.A. (1977). *Psykhohyia chytatelia y knyhy. Kratkoe vvedeniye v byblyolohycheskuiu psykhohyiu [Psychology of the reader and books. A Brief Introduction to Bibliological Psychology]*. Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia knyzhnaia palata.
- “Simile.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simile>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2023.
- Sinclair, S. & Rockwell, G. (2022). Voyant Tools. URL: <https://voyant-tools.org/>
- Singh, A., Misra, N. (2009). Loneliness, Depression & Sociability in Old Age. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*. 18 (1): 51–55. doi: 10.4103/0972-6748.57861
- Skrzypińska, K. (2021). Does Spiritual Intelligence (SI) Exist? A Theoretical Investigation of a Tool Useful for Finding the Meaning of Life. *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, 500–516. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01005-8>
- The American Association of Retired Persons (2018). *The economic impact of age discrimination: How discriminating against older workers could cost the U.S. economy \$850 billion*. AARP. URL: https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/surveys_statistics/economy/2020/impact-of-age-discrimination.doi.10.26419-2Fint.00042.003.pdf
- The Seniorliving (2020). Workplace Age Discrimination Statistics. URL: <https://www.seniorliving.org/research/age-discrimination-statistics-facts/>
- Vasyliuk, V. (2019). Psycholinguistic text analysis for evaluation of person’s emotional state. In: *Abstracts of the 2nd International scientific and practical conference*. SPC “Sciconf.com.ua”, pp. 427–430, Lviv.
- Vinokur, G.O. (1991). *O yazike khudozhestvennoi literature [About the language of fiction]*. Moscow: Visshaya shkola.
- Wilson, R.S., Leon, C.F., Bienias, J.L., Evans, D.A. & Bennett, D.A. (2004). Personality and Mortality in Old Age. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences*, Vol. 59B (3), pp. 110–116.
- Woodward, K. (1994). “Simone de Beauvoir: Prospects for the Future of Older Women.” In D. Shenk & W. A. Achenbaum (Eds.), *Changing Perceptions of Aging and the Aged*, pp. 31–38. New York: Springer.