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APPROACHING "THE END": METAPHORS OF *OLD AGE* IN THE LITERARY DISCOURSE

Snizhana Holyk

State University "Uzhhorod National University", Uzhhorod, Ukraine

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine metaphorical conceptualisation of OLD AGE in the literary discourse. Adopting the interdisciplinary research perspective, the study reveals literary discursive models of OLD AGE conceptualization, providing the description of the new reality of old age not only as a biological phenomenon, but also as a social construct. Moreover, the paper characterizes the most common conceptual metaphors of OLD AGE.

Key words: concept, conceptual metaphor, metonymy, metaphorical conceptualization, literary discourse, gerontology, OLD AGE.

1. Introduction

The issue of population ageing has received much attention in recent academic studies, such as psychology (Abrams et al. 2006; Lamont et al. 2015), sociology (Stončikaite 2019), anthropology, and cultural gerontology (Baltes & Smith 2003; Twigg & Martin 2015), etc. The topicality of such works is quite obvious, since with the increase in life expectancy over the last fifty years, old age is said to have obtained new interpretations from different perspectives (e.g., New definition for old age 2013). However, how we approach old age is also greatly influenced by cultural and individual perceptions. This feature predetermines the need for the interdisciplinary analysis of old age and the ageing self.

As a socio-cultural product, language is influenced by two dominant discourses of ageing. Firstly, old age has become medicalized and the metaphor of decline has had a strong impact on society (see, e.g., Abrams et al. 2006; Lamont et al. 2015). The youth-centered approach with its anti-ageing stories has been creating a growing pressure on older adults continually with the purpose to induce elderly people to adjust to societal demands (e.g., Gullette 2018). Secondly, the idealistic notion of "successful ageing" is also getting habitual, which is observed in a trendsetting tendency to ignore the physical dimensions and focus on preserving vitality, energy, youthfulness, and social involvement of the elderly (Stončikaite 2019). As a result, a positive view of old age translates to transformation and continued self-realisation, rather than decline.

This research **aims** at revealing what old age is, and how ageing is conceptualized. The focus is made on the important aspects and changes in social and cultural values that shape age perception and age identity through altering the experience of chronological age in the Anglophone society. In this paper, I outline two approaches to define old age "from within", as approached by the ageing self, as well as "from the outside", i.e. as construed by young people. The paper addresses the abovementioned issues from the perspective of sociolinguistic ageism and stereotypical prejudices as encoded in the linguistic units that are used to portray not only an elderly person, but also the attitude to later life in society.

Further, conceptual metaphors of OLD AGE are analysed in Section 2. Materials and methods. These metaphors represent complex culturally embedded conceptual structures, such as systems of values, stereotypes, and perceptions of people. Metaphors of aging prove to be determined by generally established knowledge and perceptual experience. As to the theoretical tenets, this research draws on pioneering works in Conceptual metaphor theory (hereinafter referred to as CMT) (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980; 1999; Lakoff & Turner 1989), as well as more recent studies into the problems of figurative ways of conceptualisation, such as metaphor and metonymy (e.g., Benczes 2002; Gibbs et al. 2010; Kövecses 2010; 2018; 2020).

As defined by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 10), metaphor as a cognitive process "allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept", the target domain (hereinafter referred to as TD), "in terms of another", the source domain (hereinafter referred to as SD). Gibbs et al. claim that "Metaphor, far from being an ornamental aspect of language, is integral to the way people speak and think about a wide variety of human events and abstract concepts" (2010: 680). Conceptual metaphor (hereinafter referred to as CM) is also interpreted "as a major enabler and perpetuator of socio-political reasoning, beliefs, plans, actions, attitudes, etc." (Tinceva 2020: 153). Hence, the focus of attention in the present paper is on the metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE interpreted according to the CMT theory capable of providing an adequate and reliable explanation for the phenomenon of "old age" as such. In line with Twigg and Martin, the conceptualization of "the subjectivity of older people, the width and depth of their lives" is placed at the forefront of analysis (2015: 2).

2. Material and methods

The paper aims to explore the conceptualization of OLD AGE in the literary discourse. The **material** for the analysis is selected from the novel by Diana Athill "Somewhere towards the end" (hereinafter referred to as STE), a winner of the 2009 National book critics circle award in autobiography and a New York Times bestseller. The book is about ageing and old age with its "illness and declining capabilities", as critics claim (Whitehorn 2008). Athill portrays the condition of being old: the losses and the gains that age brings, and the courage required to face death "and she seems to face up calmly to the fact that her own end can't be all that far off" (ibid). Drawing on the thesis about the interrelation between language and culture, I hypothesize that the concept OLD AGE is verbalized by a set of both culturally and individually loaded representations. This predetermines the need for the interdisciplinary analysis, integrating the **methods** of conceptual analysis and discourse analysis. Consequently, old age might be approached from multiple perspectives, not only as a biological phenomenon with psychological and social consequences, but also as a sociocultural and subjective phenomenon. More specifically, the paper considers OLD AGE through the notion of

metaphorical conceptualization. Accordingly, linguistic expressions tend to disclose how OLD AGE is constructed conceptually. In this research, I analyse the use of OLD AGE metaphors within the framework of CMT (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999) as its foundation and classify them into categories according to different SDs. The main focus is on the qualitative analysis of the example utterances, with quantitative measures used mostly to determine to what degree particular features may be considered significant.

The **methodology** employed for metaphors detection in texts is the metaphor identification procedure (Pragglejaz group 2007). The study focuses on the metaphorical SDs most frequently employed by the author. This is in line with the Pragglejaz group which suggests that "Metaphor scholars [...] may profitably use [...] the step associated with defining basic meaning, to identify the source and target domains underlying metaphorical words in context" (ibid., 34). It must be emphasized that this research does not account for all the OLD AGE CMs. Conversely, it aims to define the most common tendencies, to explore the metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE. As a result, underlying major themes and mappings are discussed that help to define some distinct tendencies towards the evolvement of negative, neutral, or positive connotations of the most frequently used SDs. Also, research results illustrate the ways in which the writer creatively reimagines conventional associations about old age. Contextual-interpretative analysis facilitates the interpretation of nominative units verbalizing the corresponding metaphorical conceptual models.

3. Conceptual metaphors: Some theoretical considerations

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3), our conceptual systems are structured by CMs, we tend to think and act metaphorically. Indeed, metaphors are conceptual in nature. Kövecses claims that "we conceive of certain things in metaphorical ways, [...] our conceptual system governs how we act in the world, therefore we often act metaphorically" (2018: 127). As emphasised by the author, "most linguistic metaphors prove to be part of native speakers' mental lexicon" (ibid.).

CM is seen as a fundamental mechanism of human mind. Linguistic manifestation of CMs is based on a set of similarities and can also employ similes using connectors like, as, etc. (see, e.g., Lakoff & Turner 1989). Such metaphors are believed to be "inseparable from the circumstances in which they are uttered, and thus they are always inflected by discursive conventions and ideological commitments" (Eubanks 1999: 422).

Lakoff and Turner assume that CMs are "central to thought, and therefore to language" (1980: 59), which means that metaphors structure both thinking and knowledge. They believe that people typically conceptualise the "nonphysical" in terms of "physical" (ibid.). As a matter of fact, CMs are said to be drawn from collective cultural understanding, they have eventually become linguistic conventions (Nordquist 2019). Clarifying the difference between linguistic metaphors, on the one hand, i.e. linguistic expressions used metaphorically, and CMs, on the other, Kövecses proves that the latter refer to certain conceptual patterns we rely on in our daily living, certain kinds of "reality construction" (2018: 127). As suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), linguistic metaphors serve as evidence of the embodied nature of our conceptual organization. Metaphorical associations are based on particular features shared by two entities: the source and the target.

Furthermore, Kövecses highlights the standard definition of CMs as a "systematic set of correspondences, or mappings, between two domains of experience" (2018: 125). The researcher also defines metaphorization as a cognitive process by which "a set of mappings" is established between source and target conceptual-semantic domains, where the SD is "typically more concrete or physical and more clearly delineated" (Kövecses 2010: 15), while the TD is "more abstract and diffuse and lacks clear delineation" (ibid., 20). According to Morozova, conceptual metaphorization is not only the process, but also the result, when "conceptual structures of the source domain are mapped onto conceptual structures of the target domain, bringing with them a range of entailed attributes" (2017: 261). The target and source of metaphor can also be

explained in terms of image schemas, i.e. abstract, preconceptual structures that emerge from our recurrent experiences of the world (see, e.g., in Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987) that have different degrees of complexity and are abstracted by the human mind through interaction with the experiential world. As proved by cognitive theorists (e.g., Eubanks 1999), image schemas can either engage in mapping as indivisible wholes or lend to mapping their particular features and components. Developing these ideas, Grady (2007) assumes that the schema of the source is simpler, less abstract and more clearly structured than that of the target. Similarly, Kövecses claims that image-schemas "can serve as the basis of other concepts", highlighting that "the motion schema underlies the concept of a journey" (2010: 37-38). The motion schema has parts (initial point, movement, and end) which correspond to the point of departure, the travel, and the destination in journeys. In this way, most apparently non-image-schematic concepts (such as JOURNEY) seem to have an image-schematic basis. The TDs of many structural metaphors can then be seen as image-schematically structured by their source (such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY). Moreover, Kövecses regards the mappings as systematic since they "capture a coherent view" of SD that is mapped onto TD (2018: 126). Such mappings are supposed to bring into correspondence the elements and the relations between the SD with elements and the relations in the TD, creating a particular conception of TD relative to the view of SD (ibid.).

Since metaphorization is based on diverse associative connections in the human mind, metaphors usually vary due to different social, cultural, and individual factors. Moreover, target concepts often prove to be rather complex, which makes it necessary to apply different source concepts. Such sets of sources mapped onto one and the same target in a piece of discourse are defined as the range of metaphor (e.g., Kövecses 2010). In a more recent paper, Kövecses assumes that metaphorical conceptualization leads to creation of a certain metaphorical reality, which becomes especially evident when "two or more source domains are used to conceptualize a target domain" (2018: 127). Coll-Florit and Climent also claim that studying CMs can help "detect implicit ideas and assumptions about the concept in discourse", which might be hidden and not

explicitly expressed (2019: 44). Consequently, the use of different CMs to refer to a single domain may reveal different conceptualizations or ways of understanding the domain, as well as creative associations of the author. Also, Grady (2000) discerns gaps or hidden features, that seem to be irrelevant in the process of a particular metaphorical mapping.

It has become commonly accepted that a particular TD is seen in a different way whenever a new SD is applied to it (e.g., Kövecses 2010). This is based on the polysemy of words and several basic senses of words. Moreover, the CMT can help clarify the choice of certain vocabulary in certain contexts, and understand both conventional and figurative expressions (Kövecses 2018). Accordingly, the mappings are regarded as selective. This means that, depending on the context, a specific type of SD is selected to conceptualise a TD.

4. Results and discussion

Research results prove that old age as a complex notion has to be considered in relation to the socio-cultural context, its values, and individual perception. In this section the definitions of old age are considered in the interdisciplinary perspective with the focus on different discursive models of ageing conceptualisation, as well as metaphorical construal of the OLD AGE concept.

4.1 The challenges of (re)defining OLD AGE

As previously discussed in one of my earlier works, "definitions of old age are not consistent from the standpoints of biology, demography, employment, etc." (Holyk 2018b: 162). Gerontologists usually begin by defining population in terms of chronological age. In anthropological and gerontological studies, old age is commonly founded on the age index, i.e. the number of years lived by the person. However, it seems true that the definitions of old age are no longer based only on chronological age, but rather on social, economic, and personal criteria. Indeed, delimiting old age has become a highly debated issue. Baars highlights that "One of the main paradoxes

we are confronted with is that all human beings are constantly aging, but at a certain moment in life one is labelled aged or older (older than whom?) and life beyond that point is labelled aging" (2010: 4-6).

The textual material clearly displays two main approaches to defining the time when one becomes old. The first one, "from within", delimits old age as seen by the ageing self and sets the chronological beginning of it at 71, which means "*Being 'over seventy' is being old*":

(1) "*All through my sixties I felt I was still within hailing distance of middle age, not safe on its shores, perhaps, but navigating its coastal waters. My seventieth birthday failed to change this because I managed scarcely to notice it, but my seventy-first did change it. Being 'over seventy' is being old: suddenly I was aground on that fact and saw that the time had come to size it up*" (STE, p. 13).

As can be seen in example (1), the protagonist reflects on her ageing process and describes the fuzzy period between middle age and old age. She mentions the subtle changes, which she "*managed scarcely to notice*". However, the age of 71 is a special milestone when there comes an abrupt awareness that one can hardly avoid this state. This confession might serve as a relevant proof that older adults are commonly hesitant to think of themselves as "older" or admit the fact of ageing. Their chronological age fails to capture how old they actually feel as they mainly wish to preserve their "middle-aged" status. Demographically speaking, old age index 65+, commonly applied in the majority of the Western world, seems to have lost its validity in the society where people who are socially, intellectually, or economically active are no longer regarded as old.

An opposite tendency to ageing is seen "from the outside", when one is still rather young. An 18-year-old girl considers the onset of old age once you turn thirty. For her, ageing is perplexing and scary, it means failure, both physical and emotional, which is expressed by attributes *anxious* and *wrinkled*:

(2) *"It will be all right for quite a time; I thought. 'He will go on coming back to me while we are like we are now. But when I get old – when I'm thirty' – and I saw a flash of my own face, anxious and wrinkled under grey hair – 'then it will be dangerous, then he could fall in love with one of them" (ibid., 19).*

This context evidently conceptualizes one of the common prejudiced perceptions of elderhood at a young age. The age of thirty seems quite frightening for the protagonist, and the chronological limit is apprehended as the beginning of old age by a young girl, as she imagines her unattractive ageing self. In this fragment, old age is conceptualized in cosmetic markers, such as wrinkles and grey hair, yet it is also a period of emotional instability, and the age of anxiety. Ageing is viewed as a dangerous process, which can lead to unpredictable life consequences, to loneliness, and the betrayal of the dearest.

Another excerpt also portrays the perception of old age by a young girl (*I was eighteen or nineteen*) who is truly astonished to learn that the couple who are in their forties (*forty-nine* and *mid-forties*) get married and seem to be happy with this. She believes that they are too old to start a family. Thus, another age index used to conceptualize the coming of old age in the novel is forties (*forty-nine* or *mid-forties*):

(3) *"When I was eighteen or nineteen, we were all surprised to learn that a man who lived near us had got married. It had been assumed that he was a confirmed bachelor because he had reached the age of (I think) forty-nine [...]. People were pleased for him when they learnt that he had found a wife, a suitable woman in her mid-forties [...]. I watched them take to the floor together, two small, sandy-haired, plain but cheerful-looking old people – no, more than cheerful-looking, rapturously happy" (ibid., 85-86).*

Thus, the understanding of ageing proves to be greatly influenced by societal norms. The prevalence of negative social stereotypes makes old age "a frightening perspective", the period of weakening and depression, the state of decline, especially for the younger generation. However, as seen by the elderly themselves, old age is not

a purely biological phenomenon, it is characterised by the desire of infinite youth and longer life. Discursive conceptualisation of OLD AGE is no longer based on chronological markers only, rather on socio-cultural collective and individual experiences, and shared values of that generation.

4.2 Metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE: A case study

The metaphorical reality of the OLD AGE concept in the present paper is represented with a number of structural metaphors employing the SDs of PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATE, JOURNEY, DEATH, WAR/BATTLE, LOSS, ANIMAL, OTHER, FOOD, where the abstract concept of OLD AGE is embodied in terms of more concrete concepts. Also, the SDs of CONTAINER and BUILDING are seen to conceptualise OLD AGE as ontological metaphors to encode the understanding of old age with regard to entities. Finally, the orientational metaphor involving spatial relationships OLD AGE IS DOWN is observed to provide data concerning the conceptual structure of the socially, individually, and culturally significant notion of old age (see Table 1).

Table 1. Metaphorical reality of OLD AGE

	Source domains	The number of examples
Structural metaphors	JOURNEY	15
	WAR/BATTLE	9
	DEATH	10
	PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATE	82
	LOSS	14
	ANIMAL	2
	OTHER	3
	FOOD	1
Ontological metaphors	CONTAINER	4
	MATERIAL OBJECT	3
	BUILDING/STRUCTURE	2
Orientalional metaphor	DOWN	2

One of the most important source domains is the one constructing OLD AGE and AGEING as part of a JOURNEY. The reader can easily observe it from the very beginning, in the title of the novel "Somewhere towards the end". Represented with the help of the linguistic metaphor, it underlies the conceptual transfer with the particular emphasis on the resemblance-based associations of the author. This domain derives from the LIFE

IS A JOURNEY complex metaphor as its generic-level metaphor, being one of the best-studied metaphors (Grady et al. 1996; Lakoff & Johnson 1999). In this way, the research relies on the theoretical distinction between generic-level and specific-level metaphors (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 80-81). Generally speaking, the JOURNEY domain might be considered as neutral. However, in conceptualization of the ageing process, this domain's neutral semantics gradually acquires negative characterization:

(4) *"All through my sixties I felt I was still within hailing distance of middle age, not safe on its shores, perhaps, but navigating its coastal waters. Being 'over seventy' is being old: suddenly I was aground on that fact and saw that the time had come to size it up"* (STE, p. 13).

Being middle-aged feels rather comfortable for the protagonist, which is represented by means of the lexemes "*hailing*", i.e. welcoming, though "*not safe*". Life is portrayed as the sea, which, in its turn, leads to LIFE IS THE SEA metaphor. Accordingly, the process of human ageing is conceptualized by Athill as a sea journey, including sailing and reaching the shallow waters (i.e. *being aground*). Being middle-aged is still "*navigating*", i.e. moving, living your life to the full. However, being "*over seventy*" means reaching one's final destination. This correlates with the dictionary meaning of the lexeme "old age" as "*the last stage of the human life cycle*" (LDCE). Thus, the SD of JOURNEY gets negative characterisation, since this one is a journey to the inevitable "end".

A similar CM can be exemplified in the following passages with the help of linguistic metaphors describing the manner of travelling, such as *sail into one's eighties, move into one's seventies, go into advanced age, move on to some plane, reach one's birthday, moving through advanced old age*. As a result, ageing can be conceptualized as a journey by sea (*sail, navigate*), or by air (*move on to another plane*), overland journey (*downhill journey*), or even a journey along the river (*parts of the broad, many-coloured river*):

(5) *"Later I came to know a former lover of his, the Austrian painter Marie-Louise Motesiczky, a woman who sailed into her eighties gracefully [...]"* (STE, p. 6).

(6) *"[...] the most obvious thing about moving into my seventies was the disappearance of what used to be the most important thing in life[...]"* (ibid., 15).

(7) *"So here I go, into advanced old age, towards my inevitable and no longer distant end, without the 'support' of religion and having to face the prospect ahead in all its bald reality"* (ibid., 53).

(8) *"Of course, closely interwoven with what happened yesterday, being simply a continuation of the same process: only those old people afflicted with senile dementia move on to another plane"* (ibid., 59).

By applying the principles of CMT, it can be proved that the metaphor is grounded in our physical experience, in this case, it is the experience of taking a journey. Accordingly, ageing, similar to journey, has its beginning, when one has *long years ahead*, it also has its parts with unpredictable experiences – *parts of the broad, many-coloured river*, and, finally, death, which is also seen as a final part of this journey, its symbolic "end":

(9) *"Whereas if, flitting in and out of our awareness, there are people who are beginning, to whom the years ahead are long and full of who knows what, it is a reminder – indeed it enables us actually to feel again – that we are not just dots at the end of thin black lines projecting into nothingness, but are parts of the broad, many-coloured river teeming with beginnings, ripenings, decayings, new beginnings – are still parts of it, and our dying will be part of it just as these children's being young is, so while we still have the equipment to see this, let us not waste our time grizzling"* (ibid., 84). Also, such journeys can differ by the speed at which you are travelling:

(10) *"Because not everyone ages at the same rate [...]"* (ibid., 115).

Undeniably, OLD AGE is a concept that involves various activities, phenomena, and objects. Ageing is like a long path with many experiences on one's way. When people

have gone far enough (*over eighty-nine years*), they have a lot (*a landscape*) to recollect:

(11) "*It seems to me that anyone looking back over eighty-nine years ought to see a landscape pockmarked with regrets*" (ibid., 161).

Based on the shared structure, the JOURNEY domain functions as a SD for the OLD AGE domain. The author uses the language of journey when she describes her experience of ageing and perceptions of old age:

(12) "[...] you have moved on and stopped wanting what youth wants. And that was the end of that stage" (ibid., 24).

Hence, drawing on Kövecses (2018:126), the following sets of mappings in AGEING IS A JOURNEY metaphorical conceptualization can be identified:

the beginning of the journey → the beginning of old age

the end of the journey → the end of old age/life

the speed of the journey → the rate of ageing

the parts of the journey → the stages of ageing

the itinerary of the journey → the landscape of ageing

Another structural metaphor AGEING IS WAR/BATTLE can be related to the generic-level metaphor LIFE IS A STRUGGLE/WAR. War terms refer to the words or expressions used in military situations or conflicts, such as *wartime fling*, *frontier*, *attack*, *take refuge*, *go against*, *kill*, *force*, *push*, etc. Using the expressions from war terminology to talk about ageing is not accidental; it might be the result of the conceptual network of BATTLE, which is commonly projected against the LIFE domain and characterizes the concept of HUMAN LIFE in general, and OLD AGE as its particular stage, especially in terms of mental conflicts. Such mappings are usually based on individual experience and knowledge:

(13) "*I was his wartime fling, or folly [...], while she was his good and blameless wife who had just become the mother of their first child [...]*" (STE, p. 24).

(14) "*The last man in my life as a sexual being, who accompanied me over the frontier between late middle-age and being old, was Sam*" (ibid., 27).

(15) "[...] *since the old age and death of my closest friend has taught me how much it costs to employ skilled home nursing, or to take refuge in a 'home' with staff as kind and understanding as they are efficient*" (ibid., 53).

(16) "*but she had a daughter to help her through it at home and that daughter was able to report that the attack which finally killed her was a good deal less disagreeable than some of those that she survived*" (ibid., 71).

(17) "[...] *he was finally forced to recognize that his appetite had gone and that he was feeling dreadfully cold*" (ibid., 72).

(18) "*It was ridiculous to have known nothing about her until now, but what a wonderful discovery to be pushed, or led, into in one's eighty-ninth year!*" (ibid., 133).

In terms of war, we generally imply the existence of at least two opposing parties who fight with each other for the territory, wealth, power, etc. The objective of war in the process of ageing is not only to confront the rest of people around you, usually younger, but also yourself, your ageing body, which becomes your own enemy:

(19) "*I know, the body does go against things. You can't do anything about that*" (ibid., 34).

Ageing, thus, turns to be a violent battle with yourself, with the inevitability of the "end":

(20) "*My second object lesson was the Bulgarian-born, Nobel-Prize-winning writer, Elias Canetti, whose defiance of death was more foolish than Jean's dismay*" (ibid., 6).

Furthermore, other SDs employed for OLD AGE metaphoric conceptualization also carry negative connotations. This means that in different contexts the semantics of the lexeme "old age" is made up of elements from different conceptual domains. Thus, for example, a commonly observed structural CM OLD AGE IS DEATH is constructed by such

linguistic metaphors as *to approach death, to fall away, the sooner-rather-than-later inevitable event, the death is up, to be gone, to sign off*:

(21) "*The individual just has to be born, to develop to the point at which it can procreate, and then to fall away into death to make way for its successors, and humans are no exception whatever they may fancy*" (ibid., 9).

(22) "*I knew that this sooner-rather-than-later inevitable event would be the timely conclusion of a long and good life, not a tragedy*" (ibid., 58).

(23) "*Given the physical nature of the act of dying, one has to suppose that most of the pithy ones are apocryphal, but still one likes to imagine oneself signing off in a memorable way*" (ibid., 182).

Death is thus conceived as unavoidable for the elderly, it is regarded as logical and natural for people to die because of their age, simply because they are old. However, "death" is known to be a taboo word in many cultures. As Uberman claims, "the problem of the end of life, passing, and burying the dead, has always been a cultural taboo and the sacred in western civilizations" (2016: 172). The word "death" is replaced with euphemistic nominative units, used to conceal otherwise difficult, sad and unpleasant things, those that people are afraid of (e.g., *last words; the occasion on which I have to say it; signing off*). The linguistic manifestation of OLD AGE IS DEATH CM employs euphemistic units, such as *this sooner-rather-than-later inevitable event, the end* or the act of dying is verbalized with metaphoric expressions *to sign off* or *to be gone*.

One of the most significant SDs employed in the process of metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE is that of PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATE. This group is mainly represented explicitly (e.g., *feel, look*, etc.):

(24) "*I might not look, or even feel, all that old*" (STE, p. 15).

As shown by the data in Table 1, the reference to the psycho-emotional state of the ageing individual is the most common and observed in 82 fragments. This complex domain is specified with a number of correlates (see Fig. 1).

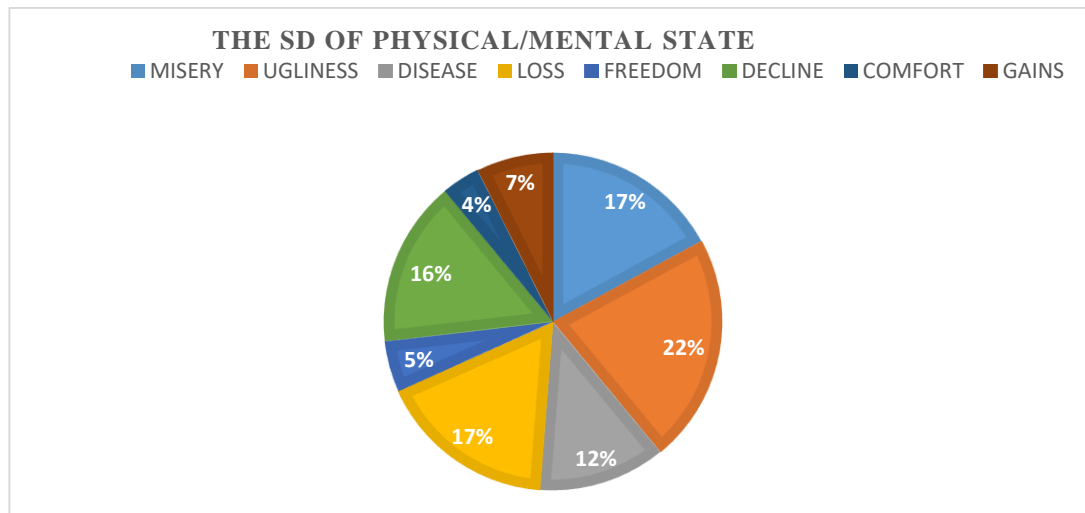


Figure 1. The correlates in the SD of PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATE

For example, the specificational metaphor OLD AGE IS MISERY is used in 17% of textual fragments to conceptualize such cognitive features of OLD AGE concept as the prevalence of negative emotions and feelings (depression, misery, resentment, sadness, grief, fear, hatred, etc.). The elderly experience these feelings because of their lost opportunities, past youth, a sense of mortality:

(25) "*She never in fact said 'I was a bit sad, well 'very' about being old, but no doubt she would have done if she had not hated and feared it too much to speak of it'* (ibid., 4-5).

(26) "*What filled him as death approached was not fear of whatever physical battering he would have to endure (in fact there was not, at the end, any of that), but grief at having to say goodbye to what he could never have enough of* (ibid., 74).

(27) "*Those last miserable weeks or months (may it not be years!) when you are unable to look after yourself are so disagreeable anyway that it hardly matters how they are spent*" (ibid., 75-76).

(28) "*It's not surprising, perhaps, that we easily slide into a general pessimism about life, but it is very boring and it makes dreary last years even drearier*" (ibid., 83-84).

(29) "When you begin discussing old age you come up against reluctance to depress either others or yourself, so you tend to focus on the more agreeable aspects of it: coming to terms with death, the continuing presence of young people, the discovery of new pursuits and so on" (ibid., 115).

These emotions appear as a reaction of an individual who has witnessed the death of a family member or a close friend, or they might result from an abrupt change in social roles, such as retirement, or loss of autonomy, inability to take care of oneself, etc. Social scientists (e.g., Erickson 1997) believe that the sense of mortality precipitates the final life crisis. That might be explained by a number of reasons, but, as agreed on by many gerontologists, the most evident of them is that the attitudes towards old age and the aged are predominantly negative, because "successful ageing means not ageing and not being old" (Calasanti & King 2005: 7). Accordingly, the feeling of fear is believed to always accompany the process of ageing, making it a frightening prospect:

(30) "[...] there's nothing like a whiff of death in the air to intensify desire, the essence of life [...]" (STE, p. 20).

The ageing process is rather painful, since old age comes with physical decline and bodily changes, which not only present psychological suffering for the individuals themselves, but provoke a negative attitude in the rest of society. However, ageing proves to be even more painful for women. This results in metaphorization of OLD AGE through the SD of UGLINESS, which involves bodily decline accompanying old age and carries strong negative connotations:

(31) "Until quite recently they could be a danger, because women who had always worn a lot of make-up tended to continue to do so, blind to the unfortunate effect it could have on an inelastic and creepy skin" (ibid., 14).

(32) "Judging by the skimpiness of my own hair in old age, which comes from her side of the family, she had good reason for adhering to that particular fashion" (ibid.).

(33) "It is unlikely that anyone else will notice that the nose on an old face is red and shiny or the broken veins on its cheeks are visible [...]" (ibid., 15).

(34) "*Luckily today's cosmetics are much better made and more subtle in effect, so that an ancient face that would look absurd if visibly painted can be gently coaxed into looking quite naturally better than it really is*" (ibid., 14).

Examples 33 and 34 demonstrate metonymic conceptualization of OLD AGE, namely OLD (ANCIENT) FACE IS OLDER PERSON, i.e. PART OF HUMAN BODY STANDS FOR A HUMAN. Such conceptualizations are more emotionally coloured and appeal to the psycho-emotional sphere of the readers, thus contributing to a negative portrayal of OLD AGE.

Critical examination of some of the metaphors associated with OLD AGE has demonstrated that in her discursive practices Athill associates later life with disease and physical decline. The components UGLINESS, DISEASE, DECLINE prove to be the most representative and are observed in the majority of textual fragments (22%, 12%, 16% respectively (see Fig. 1). The assumptions for such metaphorizations are explicit, they are based on general images of old age and draw on the prevailing bio-medical approach to ageing (discussed in my earlier works, e.g., Holyk 2018a: 10). This might involve battle-mentalities to address ageing (e.g., AGEING IS A BATTLE metaphor), when it is seen as a disease that has to be prevented, treated, remedied, yet tends to be incurable. In such cases, OLD AGE IS DECLINE, OLD AGE IS A DISEASE, OLD AGE IS PHYSICAL/MENTAL HARM metaphors are used to map the literal meanings, such as *deaf, blind, rheumatic hand, feebleness, painful feet, ailments of old age, unwieldy body, the flesh is weak, dementia, incurable, dwindling energy, bedridden feebleness, remedy*, etc.:

(35) "*By the time she was ninety-two, [...] she was deaf, blind in one eye and depending on a contact lens for sight in the other, so arthritic in her hips that she could hardly walk, and in her right arm that it was almost useless*" (STE, p. 54).

(36) "*My maternal grandmother had to endure several months of distressing bedridden feebleness owing to prolonged heart failure [...]*" (ibid., 71).

(37) "*but its owner certainly will, and will equally certainly feel a lift in her spirits when this depressing sight is remedied*" (ibid., 15).

(38) "Dwindling energy is one of the most boring things about being old" (ibid., 132).

(39) "He was eighty-five. He knew death was coming because, having stubbornly refused to pay attention to various ailments of old age [...]" (ibid., 72).

Example 39 serves as an illustration of the metonymic conceptualization AILMENTS STAND FOR OLD AGE. The image it seems to evoke is the one of an elderly individual, physically and mentally challenged. Thus, OLD AGE is conceptualized as a stage in life marked with serious illnesses. Also, another metonymic conceptualization LONG-SIGHTEDNESS IS OLD AGE represents old age as a stage with age-related long-sightedness seen as a normal part of ageing:

(40) "I had been short-sighted all my life, and suddenly I could see like a hawk and no longer needed glasses, except for the readers that the 'long sight' of old age necessitates" (ibid., 107).

Although, as can be seen from the data in Figure 1, the preference for the negative portrayal of OLD AGE in the novel is noticeable, one may also observe the domains constructing the target positively as GAINS, FREEDOM, COMFORT. For instance, the GAINS domain (7%), contrary to that of LOSSES, can be illustrated with the examples, specifying the achievements in the later life, such as *keeping their wits about them, no longer suffered from shyness*, etc.:

(41) "Most of the women on both sides of my family live into their nineties, keeping their wits about them" (ibid., 107).

(42) "The third gain was related to the second: I no longer suffered from shyness" (ibid., 155).

Seen in the positive light, OLD AGE is quite often described in terms of FREEDOM (5%), the emerging reality for elderly women in recent decades. In philosophy, the idea of liberation is not new; it originates from the works by Plato, where he develops the concept of freedom. Ageing is thus "assumed to free the person from their previous worries and concerns" (Holyk 2019: 32). Such conceptualization of OLD AGE is

manifested in the examples comprising the linguistic expressions, such as *freedom of choice, liberating potential*, etc.:

(43) "[...] *In my eighties that couldn't happen, no event could be crucial to my self-esteem in quite that way any more, and that was strangely liberating*" (STE, p. 155).

Projected against the SD of COMFORT, OLD AGE is conceptualized as providing warmth, joy, pleasure, appreciation, fun, yet these feelings are not common among the elderly, women particular, and are represented by the smallest number of examples (4%):

(44) "*Now, however, having become pleased with myself in other ways, I recognize the return of the comfortable warmth I knew in early youth*" (ibid., 179).

(45) "[...] *it allowed experiences to be enjoyable in an uncomplicated way – to be simply fun. At no other time in my life did I enjoy myself so comfortably [...]*" (ibid., 155).

(46) "*When you are older you think, you remember, you care and you appreciate. You are thankful for everything*" (ibid., 173).

However, it is also widely accepted that old age could be conceived in terms of a "crisis of capacity" (see, e.g., Charise 2012). This means that as a person ages, he or she increasingly experiences various losses, such as near relations or independence. Thus, OLD AGE is projected against the abstract domain of LOSSES (17%). Chronological years are seen as leading to the accumulation of "wealth", such as experience, wisdom, recollections, i.e. "gain perspectives" of old age (Baltes & Smith 2003: 124). However, the researchers admit that "the scientific news about prospects of survival into very old age is shifting from a focus on aspects of gain to aspects of loss" (ibid.). This claim is clearly proved by the portrayal of ageing in literature where authors dramatize this state "from the inside", conveying the irreducible complexities of subjectivity as they project the private crisis onto the pages of their novels. The words and expressions, such as *disappearance, ceased to be, to lack the energy, the loss of, no longer have, will never have, no lessons, no solutions, no discoveries, find oneself left with nothing* are used to conceptualise the SD of LOSSES:

(47) "*The most obvious thing about moving into my seventies was the disappearance*

of what used to be the most important thing in life: I might not look, or even feel, all that old, but I had ceased be to a sexual being, a condition which had gone through several stages and had not always been a happy one, but which had always seemed central to my existence" (STE, p. 15).

(48) "*What I mourned during that painful night was not the loss of my loving old friend who was still there, and still is, but the loss of youth: 'What she has, god rot her, I no longer have and will never, never have again.'*" (ibid., 175).

(49) "*There are no lessons to be learnt, no discoveries to be made, no solutions to offer. I find myself left with nothing but a few random thoughts*" (ibid., 177).

(50) "*We are becoming less able to do things we would like to do, can hear less, see less, eat less, hurt more, our friends die, we know that we ourselves will soon be dead [...]" (ibid., 83-84).*

OLD AGE as a concept is also profiled against the conceptual domain of an ANIMAL. This construal carries only strong negative connotations. For example, the prejudiced negative attitude towards elderly women is conceptualized with the metaphorical simile "look like a vampire-bat":

(51) "*[...] she slapped on a lot of scarlet lipstick, it would soon come off on her teeth and begin to run into the little wrinkles round the edge of her lips, making her look like a vampire bat disturbed in mid-dinner*" (ibid., 75).

The example above portrays the feeling of disgust often experienced by younger members of society when they observe desperate, often unfortunate efforts of older women to beautify themselves, similar to what they used to do when they were still young. The choice of VAMPIRE BAT as a SD encodes the societal negative attitude to the elderly women who are seen as dreadful (according to encyclopedic references, the food source of this species of bat is blood). Thus, this metaphorical unit clearly provides negative evaluation and conceptualizes the prejudiced perception of the elderly woman in ageist society.

There is also an image of the trout, taken as a SD for the negative construal of elderly women. This unit, stylistically marked as rude or informal (LDCE), is assumed to conceptualize older people who are unpleasant, annoying, and bad-tempered. This expression has been used as a pejorative, often offensive term for an elderly woman since the 19th century. In fact, as Sayers states, it "is still with us, although used with a degree of archness, an affectation of the linguistic practices of an earlier time" (2009: 191):

(52) "*Supposing I submitted something to Ian and he turned it down, I would feel that there was a sensible reason for his doing so, not just that he thought me a boring old trout [...]*" (STE, p. 152).

Old age is often associated with the image of "Other". "Othering" is a term that is used to refer to expressions of prejudice on the basis of group identities. However, it might reveal a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality. According to Kövecses (2020), one of the common social stereotypes is that "we" group is associated with positive (or neutral) features, while the "other" with negative features, which leads to stigmatization. There is a norm or standard in each case, as well as positive and negative versions of deviations from the norm. The in-group always occupies the place of the norm. Thus, in the OLD AGE domain, "we" represents middle-aged adults, while "others" obviously portrays the elderly. Moreover, researchers from various academic fields believe (see e.g., Hogan 2001 cited in Kövecses 2020) that wise elders are positive others, while senile decadents are treated as negative others. In line with this claim, Athill depicts "*graceful, extraordinary, sweet elderly woman*", "*a lively man in his late sixties*", i.e. positive elders who are attributed with positive features, as well as "*[...] a curmudgeon (miser, skinflint, scraper, codger, chuff) [...]*", i.e. the stereotypical conceptualization of the elderly others who are ill-reputed for their miserliness, greed, bad temper. The structural CM OLDER PERSON IS THE OTHER is realized with the help of lingual means, such as *a different kind of person, great changes in being old*, etc.:

(53) "*[...]so in my youth old women were still announcing by their appearance that*

they had become a different kind of person" (STE, p. 177).

There seems to be enough evidence that many aspects of social and cultural life are often experienced in terms of food. Thus, Korthals believes that "Food is an engine and source of metaphorical meanings that permeates our life" (2008: 77). Food can serve as a metaphor for various TDs, such as thought, family, social habits, etc. Similarly, OLD AGE is also projected onto the SD of FOOD:

(54) "[...] *there are, I think, three reasons why being old makes it not just gratifying, but also absolutely delicious*" (STE, p. 153).

Normally, we eat food, which is pleasant to taste, which gives enjoyable experience. Such metaphorization leads to the positive ageing portrayal, and OLD AGE is conceptualized as pleasant, *absolutely delicious*, i.e. *appealing to one of the bodily senses especially of taste or smell; affording great pleasure* (MWD), and this experience is satisfying for the protagonist.

Research results show that OLD AGE metaphors are also observed in examples featuring the classical generic-level orientational metaphors LIFE IS UP, DEATH IS DOWN (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 15), which derive from human physical and cultural experience, in which old age and diseases, accompanying it, force people to lie down physically. The evidence of the similarities-grounded basis of metaphoric construal of OLD AGE is that the human life cycle is first seen as moving up (middle age/adulthood), and once you are up, you start moving down (growing old). The specificational-level metaphor is OLD AGE IS DOWN, as in the following examples:

(55) "*One of them is that from up here I can look back and see that although a human life is less than the blink of an eyelid in terms of the universe, within its own framework it is amazingly capacious so that it can contain many opposites*" (STE, p. 177).

(56) "*And comfort one does need, because there's no denying that moving through advanced old age is a downhill journey*" (ibid., 179).

Cognitive reality of OLD AGE is also represented with ontological metaphors, which view abstract concepts (e.g., ideas, emotions, activities, etc.) as being entities or substances. In cognitive linguistics, container metaphors are viewed as a special type of ontological metaphors. As Benczes claims, people often "conceive of their experiences in terms of unspecified objects, substances, containers" (2002: 24). Similarly, research results demonstrate that OLD AGE is conceptualized as A CONTAINER into which one can carry something or be in it (e.g., *carry into the beginning of my old age, be in old age*). This conceptualization is further elaborated by a more specific metaphor OLD AGE IS A MATERIAL OBJECT. Accordingly, OLD AGE is conceptualized as PHYSICAL/MATERIAL OBJECT, that can "crash", "flatten", and "damage" the human body, cause "failures" in it, and this body needs to be "repaired" or "restored". This metaphor is represented in the following examples:

(57) "It took my mother two days to die, the first of them cruel as her body, ninety-five years old, crashed beyond repair" (STE, p. 65).

(58) "The doctor saw no possibility of repair to the damage, but found him physically strong, which was alarming" (ibid., 72).

(59) "[...] and a life-story that might well have flattened her. She deserves more than passing attention" (ibid., 6).

Within the domain of MATERIAL OBJECT, another conceptualization of OLD AGE is understood in terms of A STRUCTURE, which consists of parts or A BUILDING one can be led into. The examples below (60, 61) illustrate this conceptualization:

(60) "[...] but easily the best part of my old age has been, and still is, a little less ordinary" (ibid., 145).

(61) "It was ridiculous to have known nothing about her until now, but what a wonderful discovery to be pushed, or led, into in one's eighty-ninth year!" (ibid., 133).

All things considered, metaphorical construal of OLD AGE in the novel produces an alarmist negative ageist view of older adults because old age is seen as a period of deterioration and decline. This perspective may lead to undertreatment of older adults,

especially women. However, this statement is challenged by Athill who invites us to consider an alternative to this imperative and portrays old age as the age of freedom and comfort.

5. Conclusions

The analysis conducted within this research proves that old age is a complex phenomenon. Social, psychological, and literary perceptions of ageing and ageing individuals depend on the attitudinal factor and are represented within the two main paradigms, successful ageing oriented at development, and that of decline, focusing on the physical harm and contributing to negative stereotypes.

The textual material clearly displays two main approaches to defining the time when one becomes old, i.e. delimiting old age by the ageing self, as well as interpreting the onset of old age by the young people. In the paper, it is emphasized that such definitions are values-based and individually determined and correspond to common social stereotypes.

Furthermore, the paper highlights some distinct tendencies in the metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE. The contextual-interpretative analysis facilitates the interpretation of nominative units verbalizing the corresponding metaphorical conceptual models. Besides the frequently used SDs of JOURNEY, BATTLE, DEATH, and LOSSES, OLD AGE is also profiled against the domains of ANIMAL, OTHER, and FOOD. The SD of PHYSICAL/MENTAL STATE, most commonly employed in the process of metaphoric conceptualization of OLD AGE, is represented explicitly and specified with a number of correlates, such as MISERY, DECLINE, DISEASE, UGLINESS, COMFORT, GAINS, etc. Creative associations of the author in the metaphorical construal of OLD AGE are also featured in the classical orientational metaphor OLD AGE IS DOWN when the metaphorical meaning is elaborated by cognitive highlighting of the process of ageing as moving down, i.e. growing old. Moreover, OLD AGE is conceptualized as a CONTAINER or MATERIAL OBJECT with ontological metaphors.

To sum up, the majority of SDs employed for OLD AGE metaphorical conceptualization carry negative connotations. This means that in different contexts the semantics of the lexeme "old age" can be made up of elements from different conceptual domains, although, emotional instability and physical decline prove to be recurrent SDs in its representation. It has to be pointed out that the discussion of the conceptualization of OLD AGE presented in the paper is not exhaustive and might be addressed in further research.

List of abbreviations

CM – Conceptual metaphor

CMT – Conceptual metaphor theory

LDCE – Longman dictionary of contemporary English

MWD – Merriam Websters dictionary

SD – Source domain

STE – "Somewhere towards the end" (by Athill, D. (2009))

TD – Target domain

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Contact data

	<i>name:</i>	Snizhana Holyk
	<i>academic title / rank:</i>	CSc. (Philology) Associate Professor
	<i>department:</i>	Head of Department of English Philology
	<i>institution:</i>	State University "Uzhhorod National University"
	<i>e-mail:</i>	14, Universytetska St., Uzhhorod, 88000, Ukraine snizhana.holyk@uzhnu.edu.ua
	<i>fields of interest:</i>	Cognitive linguistics, concept studies, discourse studies, interdisciplinary research, gerontological studies

Résumé

The present paper examines the conceptualization of OLD AGE in the literary discourse. An attempt is made to challenge the chronological approach to defining old age with the focus on attitudes and perceptions of ageing and older adults. By applying the methods of conceptual and discourse analyses, OLD AGE in the research is approached not only as a biological phenomenon, but it also proves to be characterized by both culturally and individually loaded representations. Moreover, the paper gives insight into the metaphorical conceptualization of OLD AGE and creative associations of the author about this stage of life. Much attention is paid to the aspects of social and cultural changes in age perception, as well as subjective individual experience of ageing as encoded in nominative units. The analysis performed within the framework of CMT has demonstrated that OLD AGE is metaphorically conceptualized in a variety

of ways, encompassing structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors reflecting our everyday experience. Research findings strongly suggest the presence of negative source-domain preferences, when ageing is medicalized and associated with decline, pain, diseases, and bodily changes. Neutral representations of OLD AGE provide its temporal characterization as a stage or period in life. However, the tendency to ignore physical dimensions of ageing leads to positive conceptualization of OLD AGE, with the conceptual features of liberation, comfort, pleasure, preserved vitality and youthfulness, the period of gains and achievements, yet such examples are less common. Further research might contribute to deeper understanding of OLD AGE conceptualization in literary discourse.

Key words: concept, conceptual metaphor, metonymy, metaphorical conceptualization, literary discourse, gerontology, OLD AGE.

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