

Associative-Verbal Networks of The Concept Old Age in The Linguistic Consciousness of Native Speakers of Russian

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Abstract: The article examines the associative-verbal networks of the concept OLD AGE in the linguistic consciousness of native Russian speakers. Based on data from associative dictionaries, primarily the Russian Associative Dictionary by S. A. Sharov, as well as the principles of cognitive linguistics and cultural studies, the study analyzes the structure of associative reactions, their topology, emotional-evaluative range, and cognitive mechanisms. It is established that the concept OLD AGE is organized as a complex network of interconnected imagistic, social, temporal, physiological, and axiological elements that reflect the ambivalent perception of late age in Russian culture. The associative networks form a multilayered system of meanings including the biological and physiological aspects of aging, the social status of elderly people, emotional responses, and cultural stereotypes. The study demonstrates that the concept has a high density of associative links and represents a cultural constant of the national worldview.

Keywords: Concept, associative networks, old age, linguistic consciousness, associative dictionary, cognitive linguistics, axiology, Russian linguistic worldview.

Introduction: The associative-verbal networks of the concept of OLD AGE reflect deep structures of linguistic consciousness that shape the perception of later life in Russian linguoculture. Associative reactions reveal not only direct lexical connections, but also latent cognitive mechanisms, including culturally entrenched stereotypes, emotional attitudes, evaluative patterns, and socially significant сценарии of interpretation. In this sense, the analysis of reactions to the stimuli old age, old, to grow old, old woman, and pension makes it possible to reconstruct an integral associative field within which old age is conceptualized and experienced by native speakers of Russian.

Within cognitive linguistics, such fields are treated as one of the key forms through which concepts are materialized in linguistic consciousness. They make visible the internal organization of meaning, its nuclear and peripheral zones, as well as the direction of

evaluative and semantic links. The concept of OLD AGE is especially revealing in this respect, because it combines biological, social, emotional, temporal, and axiological components. It is not limited to the idea of physical decline; it also includes social role transformation, family positioning, accumulated life experience, and cultural reflection on the final stage of human life.

The Russian linguistic worldview encodes old age as a culturally dense and value-laden phenomenon. It is associated not only with bodily weakness, illness, wrinkles, and grey hair, but also with wisdom, memory, family continuity, retirement, loneliness, and the symbolic nearness of life's conclusion. Therefore, the associative-verbal network of OLD AGE is not a random set of lexical reactions, but a structured cognitive formation that reflects how speakers interpret aging as a human and cultural condition.

METHODS

The material for this study includes data from the Russian associative tradition, explanatory dictionaries, and works in cognitive and linguocultural linguistics devoted to the structure of concepts and their representation in language. The analysis relies on associative responses linked to the lexical stimuli old age, old, to grow old, old woman, and pension, as well as on lexicographic and conceptual descriptions that clarify the semantic and cultural dimensions of later life.

The methodological framework combines several approaches. First, componential analysis is used to identify the main semantic features involved in the structure of the concept OLD AGE. Second, cognitive-interpretative analysis makes it possible to reveal how these semantic components are organized in the speaker's consciousness. Third, associative analysis is employed to detect the most stable reactions, nodal clusters, and recurrent semantic links that form the topology of the associative field. Elements of quantitative interpretation help distinguish the nuclear and peripheral zones of the concept. Finally, the descriptive-analytical method is applied in order to interpret the data in the broader context of the Russian linguistic picture of the world.

Such a combination of methods ensures a complex reconstruction of the associative-verbal network of OLD AGE and allows us to demonstrate systematic links among its biological, social, emotional, and temporal dimensions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the associative-verbal networks of the concept OLD AGE makes it possible to identify several important results that clarify its structure and demonstrate the specificity of its functioning in the linguistic consciousness of Russian speakers.

First, the associative field of the concept is highly structured. It does not function as a loose or chaotic accumulation of meanings. On the contrary, it contains stable nodal centers, semantically interconnected sub-networks, and recurring cognitive scenarios through which later life is interpreted. Old age appears not as a linear lexical meaning, but as a network complex in which different semantic layers overlap and support one another.

One of the most prominent findings is the clearly expressed biophysiological core of the concept. High-frequency reactions such as weakness, illness, wrinkles, grey hair, and frailty form a dense central zone of the associative network. These reactions frame old age primarily as a period of physical decline and inevitable age-related change. This part of the network is especially resistant and stereotypically fixed. The body becomes the first interpretative filter through which old age is recognized. In this respect, the associative data confirm that the perception of aging in Russian linguistic consciousness is strongly anthropocentric and grounded in the bodily experience of vulnerability.

At the same time, the concept is not exhausted by its physiological core. A second important layer is formed by the social-status sub-network, which includes reactions such as pension, grandfather, grandmother, the elderly, nursing home, and grandchildren. These units reflect the institutional and social coding of later life. Old age is represented not merely as biological aging, but as a socially marked life stage associated with retirement, loss of professional centrality, transformation of family roles, and dependence on state or family support systems.

The frequent association between old age and pension is particularly telling. It demonstrates that in Russian linguoculture later life is perceived as an administratively and socially formalized period. The link with grandfather and grandmother also reveals that old age is interpreted through the prism of intergenerational relations. It is imagined not only as decline, but also as a position within family hierarchy, as a source of memory, continuity, care, and moral authority. In this sense, the concept preserves traces of the traditional image of the elder as a wise senior figure.

A third important result is the emotional and evaluative ambivalence of the concept. Negative associations such as fear, loneliness, pain, death, loss, and pity coexist with positive reactions such as wisdom, experience, peace, home, family, and grandchildren. This coexistence shows that the concept OLD AGE is not unipolar. It contains both negatively marked meanings related to bodily limitation, social exclusion, poverty, and psychological vulnerability, and positively marked meanings connected with maturity, calmness, spiritual depth, and the authority of lived experience.

This ambivalence is particularly significant from a linguocultural perspective. In Russian cultural consciousness, old age is often perceived as contradictory: it is feared as a stage of weakening and dependency, yet respected as a stage of knowledge, endurance, and existential completeness. The semantic tension between decline and dignity forms one of the central axes of the concept.

The analysis also reveals a distinct temporal sub-network, represented by reactions such as past, long ago, life, time, end, and result. These associations indicate that old age is conceptualized as the final and retrospective stage of the life cycle. It is linked with recollection, summing up one's life, and a reduction of future-oriented perspective. In this way, the concept is deeply tied to temporality: old age is interpreted not only as a state of the body or a social status, but also as a mode of existing in time.

This temporal aspect is reinforced by the emotional coloring of the field. The emphasis on past and life suggests that old age in Russian linguistic consciousness is often connected with memory and personal biography. It is the stage at which the lived past becomes semantically more salient than the anticipated future. This explains why old age is frequently associated with reflection, recollection, and symbolic closure.

Another important layer of the associative field is the socio-economic dimension. Peripheral reactions such as poverty, pills, hospital, boredom, and loneliness reveal the perception of old age as a socially risky condition. These reactions reflect not abstract cultural symbolism, but concrete everyday realities of later life. The appearance of such associations indicates that speakers often perceive old age through the lens of insecurity, reduced mobility, medication dependence, and limited participation in active social life.

For example, the association chain old age – pension – poverty points to the fragility of economic existence in old age. The sequence old age – illness – pills – hospital foregrounds the medicalization of later life. Another cluster, old age – loneliness – boredom – silence, reveals the social and psychological isolation that may accompany aging. Yet against this background, the cluster old age – family – grandchildren – home restores a positive and emotionally warm perspective

in which later life is associated with kinship, continuity, and domestic stability.

Thus, the associative-verbal network of OLD AGE includes several interrelated semantic domains:

- the physiological domain: weakness, illness, wrinkles, grey hair, frailty;
- the social domain: pension, retirement, elderly people, nursing home;
- the family domain: grandmother, grandfather, grandchildren, home;
- the emotional domain: fear, loneliness, pain, pity, peace, warmth;
- the temporal domain: past, life, time, end, result;
- the axiological domain: wisdom, experience, dignity, calmness.

These domains do not function independently. They intersect and create a dense cognitive configuration in which old age is perceived simultaneously as bodily decline, social transition, emotional challenge, temporal culmination, and cultural value.

An especially noteworthy feature of the concept is its multi-level organization. Its nuclear zone is dominated by physiological characteristics and the most stereotypical social markers. The near periphery contains family and institutional meanings. The far periphery includes emotionally colored, philosophical, and culturally symbolic interpretations. Such an organization corresponds to the field model of conceptual structure widely discussed in cognitive linguistics.

Therefore, the concept OLD AGE in the Russian linguistic worldview should be regarded as a culturally significant and semantically dense construct. Its associative-verbal network records both collective stereotypes and deeper value orientations. It reflects not only what speakers know about old age, but also how they feel about it, fear it, justify it, and integrate it into broader models of human existence.

CONCLUSION

The structural analysis of the associative-verbal network of the concept OLD AGE allows us to distinguish several interrelated sub-networks: physiological, social, family-related, emotional,

temporal, and axiological. Together they form a dense cognitive complex in which central reactions create stable nodes, while less frequent reactions connect separate semantic blocks and broaden the interpretative field.

The concept is characterized by a pronounced ambivalence. On the one hand, it is associated with weakness, illness, loneliness, poverty, and the nearness of death. On the other hand, it includes meanings of wisdom, experience, calmness, home, and intergenerational continuity. This duality demonstrates that old age in Russian linguistic consciousness is interpreted as both loss and significance, vulnerability and authority, decline and completion.

In this way, the associative-verbal network of OLD AGE reveals a multilayered cultural structure that reflects deep attitudes toward later life in the Russian linguistic worldview. The concept appears as a value-loaded cultural constant whose semantic organization is determined by the interaction of bodily experience, social reality, emotional evaluation, and temporal reflection.

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