

OLD AGE IN THE MIRROR OF METAPHOR

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Abstract. The paper gives an analysis of the metaphors of old age that are well-established in German culture. The aim of the study is an empirical analysis of how old age is represented in the German language, reflecting the attitudes of society to old age. The material for the study was a selection of aphoristic and proverbial text fragments that include the lexeme Alter (hohes Alter).

The methodological basis of the study is the cognitive theory of metaphor of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, who argue that metaphors are not limited to the sphere of language and that the processes of human thinking themselves are metaphorical.

The study also relies on metaphorical modeling, a theory which makes it possible to identify a system of metaphorical models in the discourse of old age, reflecting the attitude of members of society towards this discourse and its participants, forming a linguistic picture of the world.

The analysis identified several metaphorical models; the most popular is the time cycle model (daily cycle, annual cycle), which represent old age as the evening or autumn of life – the time to prepare for the end of the cycle: winter/night is the time of death, when all life in nature freezes, “falls asleep”.

Old age is personified as an evil tyrant, robbing an elderly person of external beauty, energy, sometimes even clarity of thoughts.

The natural metaphorical model proclaims the physical and mental functionality and attractiveness of old age: an old person is compared with natural phenomena (gray hair – foam after a big storm at sea).

The architectural model represents old age as a building (a prison with the semantics of involuntary alienation from life, limiting the possibilities of movement and communication) or as its element (a balcony, which makes it possible to see wide surroundings and to evaluate what is happening).

The semantics of metaphors include an emotional assessment of old age. The high degree of influence of the considered metaphors on the opinions and beliefs of society necessitate further study of the metaphors themselves and the discourses of their functioning.

Keywords: old age, metaphor, metaphorical model, discourse of old age, cultural values

Introduction

Old age is a significant socio-biological phenomenon, it is a universal of human development, all survivors in the struggle for life are aging, nobody succeeds in avoiding old age. Therefore, old age is certainly important for research by biologists, physicians and psychologists. Old age is also interesting for linguists who consider the discourses and the language of old age, pragmatic conditions for the elderly to communicate with each other and with representatives of the younger generations.

This article is an attempt to engage in a linguistic empirical research of “old age” concept reflecting attitudes of society towards it.

Objectives of the study

The study is aimed at studying the metaphorical content of the “old age” concept in the German language picture of the world and intends to identify the specificity of the “old age” concept in German language and culture.

The material for the study are text fragments including the lexeme *Alter* (*hohes Alter*) identified by continuous sampling of dictionaries and the aphoristic texts on Internet sites (143 samples).

Methodology

The methodological basis of this study is the cognitive theory of metaphor of G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (Lakoff G., Johnson M., 1980; Lakoff G., 1993), who argue that the metaphor is not limited only to the scope of the language; the processes of human thinking themselves are metaphorical. Therefore our ordinary conceptual system within which we think and act is also metaphorical. In other words, a metaphor is not so much a means of describing reality as it is a way of understanding it through known things.

We rely also on the theory of metaphorical modeling, which is a further development of the theory of conceptual metaphor and is based on the methodological principles of the cognitive-discursive research paradigm (Baranov A.N., Karaulov Yu.N., 1991; Baranov A.N., Karaulov Yu.N., 1994; Chudinov A.P., 2001; Chudinov A.P., 2003; Chilton P., 1996; Zinken J., 2002). In this paradigm, the research is aimed at determining the connection of a linguistic phenomenon with the activity of human consciousness (a metaphor as a mental phenomenon) and the specificity of the use of this linguistic phenomenon in communication (the relationship between metaphors and factors of their relevance). The system of metaphorical models in the discourse of old age is an indicator of the state of public consciousness, it reflects the worldview of society, its attitude to this discourse and its participants.

Metaphorical models not only form an idea of the object, but also determine the way and style of thinking about it (Arutyunova N.D., 1990: 14). Consequently, the problem of metaphorical transfer modeling turns out to be related to the problem of the formation and functioning of the linguistic picture of the world (Iomdin B.L., 2006).

Findings

The analysis allowed us to distinguish several metaphorical models. The first of them is a time cycle model: daily or annual. In

the first case, old age is presented as the evening of a long day (*Lebensabend*), full of affairs and troubles, events, joys and sorrows. The evening at the end of this day is old age, a time of rest and preparation for sleep – the departure from life. During this period, all the details of the world and relations in it are perceived unambiguously, without unnecessary embellishment: *Das Leben ist gegen Abend, wie die Träume gegen Morgen, immer klarer* (K.J. Weber: GZ)

The annual time cycle model represents old age as the autumn of life (*Herbst des Lebens*). The metaphorical transfer is based on comparing life with the passage of time in nature, where the seasons change: life is born and blooms in spring, summer is the period of maturity, and autumn is the time to prepare for the completion of the cycle, accompanied by certain external and internal changes (... *dass wir im Herbst und Winter des Lebens starrer und schroffer werden ...* (J.W. Goethe: ZA)).

Autumn is the time to harvest – the period that a person goes towards the whole life (*Das Alter ist Erntezeit, das ganze Leben ist Vorbereitung auf das Alter*), this is the time to take stock of life and to prepare to leave this cycle when winter comes – the time of death, when everything living in nature freezes, “falls asleep”.

These two metaphorical images – evening and autumn of life – are calmly sad, stating inevitability rather than protesting against it. The metaphors for the association of old age with an incurable disease (*Das Alter ist an sich eine Krankheit* (Sprichwort: ZTA)), misfortune (*Das Alter ist das Übel höchstens ...* (G. Leopoldi: GZ)), a catastrophe comparable to the wreck of a ship, after which no one can survive (*Das Alter ist ein Schiffbruch* (Ch. de Gaulle: GZ)) sound completely different. The semantics of these metaphors include a sharply negative assessment of the changes occurring in a person.

Old age is personified. The personified image of old age as a two-faced Janus has two representations. One of them is the aggressive old age, a villain imperceptibly creeping up on a person, destroying their beauty (*Das Alter ... kommt mit lautlosem Schritt*), destroying

the beauty of a person with his bony hands (*Das Alter streckt aus die Hand, die Schönheit zerstört ...*).

Old age is a tyrant, taking away strength, energy and beauty, all the joys of life, giving in return only pain and suffering (*Das Greisenalter ist ein Tyrann, der alte Freuden der Jugend bei Todesstrafe verbietet* (F. de La Rochefoucauld: GZ); *Das Alter ... beraubt den Menschen aller Genüsse, lässt ihm aber das Verlangen daran und bringt alle Leiden mit sich* (G. Leopoldi: ZTA)).

Old age “digs” the face and consciousness with wrinkles (*Das Alter gräbt uns mehr Falten in den Geist als ins Gesicht* (M.E. de Montaigne: GZ)), surrounds a person with an armor of misunderstanding (*Das Alter umgibt einen wie ein Panzerschrank* (H. Kesten: GZ)). An evil old age puts a person who fell into her hands as a laughing stock, but deprives him/her of the ability to understand this (*Das Alter, das den Menschen der Lächerlichkeit aussetzt, nimmt ihm zugleich das Gefühl dieser Lächerlichkeit* (S. Prudhomme: ZA)).

When summarizing these metaphors an image of an evil bony dwarf demiurge arises, which at some point in time gains power over people's lives and, by virtue of his cunning, makes fun of them, taking away power, external beauty, sometimes even intellect. And only when the victim bores him, he terminates their existence.

The second personified image is the image of detachment from the excitement of life, a more subtle emotional mood (a metaphor for tuning a musical instrument), a transition to emotional half-tones: *Das aber ist des Alters Schöne, / Dass es die Saiten reiner stimmt, / Dass es der Lust die grellen Töne, / dem Schmerz den herbsten Stachel nimmt* (F. von Saat: GZ).

Personified old age is endowed with specific internal characteristics – it is talkative and fearful: *Das Alter ist feigherzig und geschwätzig* (A. Schwarzer: GZ), it is ascetic (*Das Alter liebt das Wenig ...* (Sprichwort: GZ)). Old age has some skills that, however, can hardly be useful in its condition: *Was hilft es, seinen*

Wagen besser zu lenken, wenn man am Ende der Fahrt ist (J.-J. Rousseau: GZ). The metaphor of driving a car in the above sentence describes the ability of a personified old age to “manage” life situations, to be careful “driving” relationships – to avoid conflicts, not to rush in. The second metaphor – *Ende der Fahrt* – is based on comparing life with the road, which eventually ends, leaving practically no time left to show the qualities of a good “driver”.

The above metaphorical models clearly show a traditionally negative attitude towards the old age, which is closely connected in the European mentality with thoughts about the inevitability of close departure. They are represented, as a rule, in the utterances of the representatives of this social group themselves, who know all the emotional and physical characteristics of old age from their own experience.

There is another category of metaphors that deny solitary old age and proclaim its physical and mental functionality and attractiveness. This image has been realized in a wide anti-age discourse for over a century in various texts about good (active, healthy, productive) old age. A positive metaphorical image of old age is built on the basis of several more models.

One of them is a natural metaphor when old people are compared with elements of nature, natural phenomena: *Weißer Haare sind die Schaumspitzen, die das Meer nach dem Sturm bedecken* (C. Sylva: GZ). Gray hair in this sentence is compared to foam after a major storm at sea. The storm metaphorically denotes a life full of events, ups and downs, fortunes and ruins.

Another marine metaphor compares old age with a sea wave, which you just need to trust, and then it will allow you to stay afloat for a long time: *Das Alter ist wie Woge im Meer. Wer sich von ihr tragen lässt, treibt obenauf* (G. von le Fort: GZ).

Marine metaphors are interesting for the romanticization of age: the source sphere has such authority and popularity, that even just referring to it causes a positive evaluation effect. Using the maritime sphere as a source of metaphorization again gives access

to an integral gestalt of rest / respite after a strong storm, but here the focus is not on the catastrophe, the distress of a shipwreck that will inevitably bring death, but on the fact that the storm is over, the sailor did not die, but gained valuable experience struggling with the waves and adjusting to their rhythm. The conceptual metaphor of life as sailing in the stormy sea (the person being the ship in this metaphor) acquires a clear sound in these statements. Often, metaphors are built according to the architectural model, old age is represented by a building with different architectural features. For example, in the statement *Das Alter ist für mich kein Kerker, sondern ein Balkon, von dem man zugleich weiter und genauer sieht* (G.R. Weekherlin: ZA), old age is compared to a balcony, which makes it possible to see wide surroundings. The balcony is a metaphor for psychological detachment, distance from one's impulses and emotions. From the height of the balcony you can calmly evaluate others and what is happening, this is a kind of "look from afar on close things".

The balcony in the above statement is opposed to a building with another functional purpose – a prison. The prison metaphor very succinctly describes the fact of being sentenced to punishment and, as a result, the state of forced (involuntary) estrangement from life, limitation of the possibilities of movement and communication. M. Foucault, who wrote about the prison metaphor, pointed to the fact of the punitive effect of the prison (old age) on the body and soul, described the forms and patterns of prison coercion (emanating from the overseer-physical weakness in our case): solitary contemplation, silence, regular (scheduled) compulsory movements (Foucault M., 2019: 20). The use of the prison metaphor in relation to old age differs from how it functions in other discourses in that in old age there can be no mercy or at least leniency for good behavior, the sentence is in any case carried out.

Conclusion

The listed metaphorical models do not exhaust the entire pool of metaphors, many of them are still awaiting consideration. But even this small empirical review clearly proves the idea that the

metaphor has an important pragmatic function, influencing the opinions of society. The nature of the metaphor, its semantic and social orientation reflect like a mirror the mentality of society itself. The semantics of metaphors of old age include an emotional assessment (neutral (40%) or negative (60%)), which is “woven” into the conceptual system of world reflection and “imposes” a specific view on this phenomenon on speakers. The productivity of a particular sphere as a source of metaphorization is associated with the characteristics of human thinking and the life of a society during the birth of a metaphor. Therefore, the study of the main sources of metaphorization of old age is significant in terms of solving not only cognitive, but also sociolinguistic problems of language science.

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