

Language and Age

Identity and Language Variation

- Language variation allows us as speakers to locate ourselves in a multi-dimensional society.
- As hearers, language variation allows us to locate others in that society.
- Age (social not chronological) is one of the dimensions on which we construct identities for ourselves and others.

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Write down terms you use for people at these different life stages.

- 0 – 10 years
- 11 – 20 years
- 21 – 30 years
- 31 – 40 years
- 41 – 50 years
- 51 – 60 years
- 61 – 70 years
- 71 years and over

Which age is unmarked?

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Language and Age

- Consider three life stages and how people construct an age identity for themselves and others at those stages.
 - Young children
 - The teenage years
 - The elderly

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Young Children's Talk

And What Adults Say to Young Children

Young Children Talking

- 3 months 🗣️
- 6 months 🗣️
- 9 months 🗣️
- 12 months 🗣️
- 18 months 🗣️
- 24 months 🗣️
- 36 months 🗣️

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What Adults Say to Young Children

■ Talk about the "here and now"

- Build me a tower now.
- That's right, pick up the blocks.
- That's a puppy.
- He's very soft and furry.
- The puppy's in the basket.

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Baby talk

- A kitty-cat
- A doggie
- Mommy, daddy
- Wee-wee, night-night
- Peek-a-boo
- A choo-choo
- Uh-oh!

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French Baby Talk

En français enfantin	Vient de	In English Baby Talk	Normal
un bobo * avoir bobo - to have an owie, be hurt		owie, boo-boo	wound
le caca * faire caca - to go number 2	cacare (Latin)	poo poo	feces
le dodo dormir * faire dodo - to go to sleep, to be asleep * faire un gros/petit dodo - to take a long/short nap * Au dodo! - Go to bed!		beddy-by	go to sleep
le doudou	dormir	blankie	blanket

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Mother	Infant
Hello. Give me a smile then. <i>(gently pokes infant in ribs)</i>	<i>(yawns)</i>
Sleepy, are you? You woke up too early today.	<i>(opens fist)</i>
<i>(touches infant's hand)</i> What are you looking at. Can you see something?	<i>(grasps mother's finger)</i>
Oh, that's what you wanted. In a friendly mood then? Come on, give us a smile.	

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Brenda	Mother
fãe	
fãe	Hm?
ãe	Bathroom?
fanĩ	Fan! Yeah.
faĩ	Cool, yeah. Fan makes you cool.
khu	

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Expanding the child's utterance

Child	Adult
Dere rabbit.	The rabbit likes eating lettuce. Do you want to give him some?

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Expanding the child's utterance

Child	Adult
Lookit (pointing)	Uh-huh, it's a fly.
Fly.	What about the fly?
Eat.	What's he eating?
Flower.	Mmhmm, he's eating. Oh-oh, there he goes.
Oh-oh go.	

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What Adults Say to Young Children

Making corrections

Child: (*points*) Doggie.
Adult: No that's a HORSE.

Child: That's the animal farmhouse.
Adult: No that's the LIGHTHOUSE.

Child: (*points to a picture of a bird on a nest*) Bird house.
Adult: Yes, the bird's sitting on a NEST.

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The Teenage Years



Do You Speak American?

- Movies, California, and Prestige
 - Amy Heckerling, *Clueless*
 - Winnie Holzman, *My So-Called Life*
 - Teens and slang
- Valleygirl and Surferdude
 - Carmen Fought
 - Surferdude
 - George Plomarity
 - Surferdude of yesteryear
 - In the mainstream

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Teenage Talk

Valleygirl

Surferdude

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"Like"



The I.M.s of Romeo and Juliet

- Juliet: romeo u there
- Romeo: yo wassup
- Juliet: nothin, u?
- Romeo: school sucked 2day
- Juliet: heard wylander got mad at u
- Romeo: what a jerk I usedd purple ink on the sci test, he g5ot pissed he looks like jimminy cricket
- Juliet: lol
- Romeo: going to nicks party
- Juliet: cant im grounded

The I.M.s of Romeo and Juliet

- Romeo: y
- Juliet: cardoza called home, sez im failig spanish btw both my rents hate me
- Romeo: mine hate u 2
- Juliet: my dads coming gtg
- Romeo: k bye
- Juliet: xoxoxo bye see u tmw
- Romeo: xoxoxoxo bye
- Juliet: xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxgtg
- Romeo: k

I.M. Me

Let's meet at the same time
Same place
Send your jpeg, I wanna see your
face
Girlfriend, send an I.M.

TTYL
No time to spell
Oops, there goes that little bell
Bye, bye for now
BBFN

Hey, LOL, G2G
I gotta go, but baby watch for me
'cause
I'll be right back, BRB
So sign on, and I.M. me



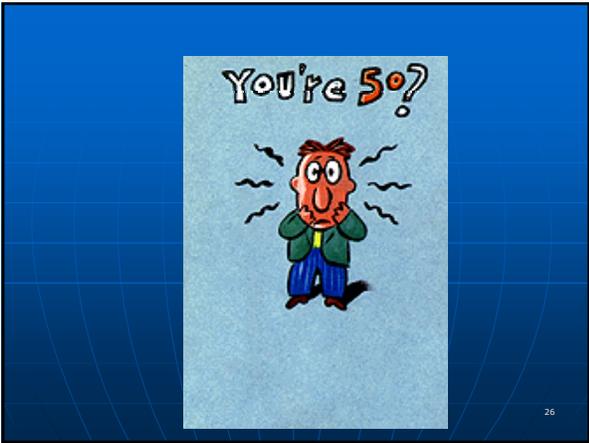
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Elderspeak



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Your eyesight's gone!



... but you look so natural and lifelike!

Answers to the Aging Quiz

1. The majority of older adults will become senile (defective memory, disoriented, demented) during old age.
■ Answer: False
2. Most older adults have no desire or capacity for sexual relations. In other words, most older adults are asexual.
■ Answer: False
3. Chronological age is the most important determinant of age.
■ Answer: False
4. Most older adults have difficulty adapting to change; they are set in their ways.
■ Answer: False

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Answers to the Aging Quiz

5. Physical handicaps are the primary factors limiting the activities of older adults.
■ Answer: False
6. Declines in all five senses normally occur in old age.
■ Answer: Mostly True
7. Older adults are incapable of learning new information; you can't teach an old dog new tricks.
■ Answer: False
8. Physical strength tends to decline in old age.
■ Answer: True

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Answers to the Aging Quiz

9. Intelligence declines with old age.
■ Answer: Mostly False
10. The majority of older adults say that they are happy most of the time.
■ Answer: True
11. The vast majority of older adults will at some point end up in a nursing home.
■ Answer: False
12. About 80% of older people say they are healthy enough to carry out their normal daily activities independently.
■ Answer: True

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Answers to the Aging Quiz

- 13. Most older adults are rejected by their children.
■ Answer: False
- 14. In general, most older adults tend to be pretty much alike.
■ Answer: False
- 15. The majority of older adults say that they are lonely.
■ Answer: False
- 16. Old age can be best characterized as a second childhood.
■ Answer: False

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Answers to the Aging Quiz

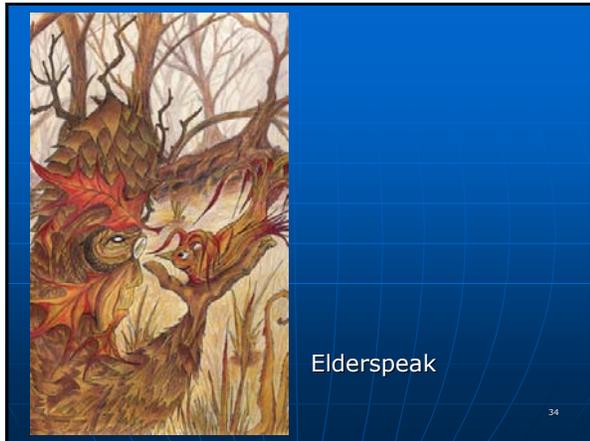
- 17. Over 12% of the population of the United States is over the age of 65.
■ Answer: True
- 18. Most older adults tend to be preoccupied with death.
■ Answer: False
- 19. Most older adults have incomes well below the poverty level.
■ Answer: False
- 20. Older people tend to become more religious as they age; as they deal with their own mortality.
■ Answer: False

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Answers to the Aging Quiz

- 21. Retirement is detrimental to an individual's health; six months ago he retired and now he's dead, retirement killed him.
■ Answer: False
- 22. Pain is a natural part of the aging process.
■ Answer: False
- 23. The majority of older adults say that they feel irritated or angry most of the time.
■ Answer: False
- 24. Rarely does someone over the age of 65 produce a great work of art, science, or scholarship.
■ Answer: False
- 25. With age comes wisdom.
■ Answer: Mostly False

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What is Elderspeak?

- Adjustments a person may make when addressing an elder ...
 - Using a singsong voice, changing pitch and tone, exaggerating words
 - Simplifying the length and complexity of sentences
 - Speaking louder and more slowly
 - Using limited vocabulary
 - Repeating or paraphrasing what has just been said
 - Using terms like "honey" or "dear"
 - Using statements that sound like questions

How Common is Elderspeak?

- Elderspeak is common in nursing homes, hospitals and other settings where frail elders are found. It appears to be a speech pattern based on stereotypes not actual behavior because we also hear it used in situations where older adults are clearly functioning well – such as banks and grocery stores.

Is Elderspeak Harmful?

- Elderspeak implies that an older person is not competent. Miscommunication is occurring and it is his/her fault. There is a bizarre discrepancy between a flawless performance by seniors and their reports of confusion. Over and over again, older adults successfully find the location on a map as instructed, but at the same time, they report concerns that they misunderstood their younger partners in the test. Elderspeak affects an older person's evaluation of his or her abilities. It may reinforce negative stereotypes about aging and erode older adults' self-esteem.

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What is Helpful?

- Seniors will have better comprehension if you ...
 - Repeat and paraphrase what you are saying.
 - Simplify – but remember to be explicit. For example, instead of saying: "The lunch, which was served late yesterday, made my stomach upset and I had to miss the class that I enjoy so much." Try saying it this way: "Lunch was served late yesterday. My stomach was upset so I had to miss my class. I really enjoy that class."

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What is Helpful?

- Seniors will have better comprehension if you:
 - Repeat and paraphrase
 - Make explicit simplifications
- These two kinds of accommodations are very different from the singsong form of elderspeak we hear most often in nursing homes.

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Learning Activity

- Make a collection of current slang words used by children and teenagers. Ask people of different ages to give you definitions for those words. Why do people of different age groups have different perceptions of what words mean and how they are used?

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