

## AGE IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC THEORY

Age will be presented as a multifaceted variable of major significance for the study of language use. So far sociolinguistics has mostly referred to age as a relatively simple dimension describing speaker's life stage as number of years from birth. The variationist paradigm, aiming primarily at explaining the processes of language change, has not quite disambiguated the relationship between age grading and real change in language over time, which is necessary to legitimise the apparent time methodology. Additionally, apparent time studies assume stability of language use patterns throughout adulthood, which is contrary to speakers' intuitions and experience, and requires systematic research. Most importantly, people's conscious decisions to project their age identities are implemented through linguistic and discursive strategies. Sociolinguistics needs a theory which would take into account lifelong development (not just socialisation) and conceptualise age as a flexible socio-psychological dimension. Ultimately, sociolinguistic research must also address the problem of ageism, for the benefit of all generations of speakers.